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"Hands up, ma'am, this is a robbery!" Interpretive reproduction in sociodramatic role playing experienced in preschool

"Mãos ao alto, madame, isso é um assalto!": a reprodução interpretativa em uma brincadeira sociodramática vivenciada na pré-escola

"¡Manos arriba, señora, esto es un asalto!": la reproducción interpretativa en un juego socio-dramático vivida en el preescolar

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Abstract

Based on the contributions of Childhood Social Studies, the article aims to discuss the process of interpretive reproduction emerging from a cultural routine of sociodramatic role playing experienced in the schoolyard by a group of preschool children. Methodologically, the study results from an ethnographic research with children, which used the following data generation strategies: observation, field diary, conversation circles, photographic records, and audio recordings. The study was conducted in a public school of Early Childhood Education, with 24 5-year-old children, over one school year. The focus of the analysis is the routine of a "beauty salon robbery" role play, due to its constant occurrence during the children's free activity moments and the large number of

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participants. From the analysis of the role playing routines, alliances between children, the definition of roles, interpretative reproduction, and the production of children's cultures in the schoolyard are highlighted. The research infers the need for children to have guaranteed free time to play and support from teachers concerning their demands in the role playing proposals.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Sociodramatic role playing. Peer culture. Interpretive reproduction.

Resumo

Com base nas contribuições dos Estudos Sociais da Infância, o artigo tem como objetivo discutir o processo de reprodução interpretativa emergente de uma rotina cultural de brincadeira sociodramática vivenciada no pátio da escola por um grupo de crianças da pré-escola. Metodologicamente, o estudo é decorrente de uma pesquisa etnográfica com crianças, a qual utiliza as seguintes estratégias de geração de dados: observação; diário de campo; rodas de conversas; registros fotográficos; gravações de áudio. A pesquisa foi realizada em uma escola pública de Educação Infantil, com 24 crianças de 5 anos de idade, no período de um ano letivo. O foco de análise do artigo é a rotina da brincadeira de "assalto ao salão de beleza", pela constância de sua ocorrência nos momentos de atividade livre das crianças e elevado número de participantes. A partir da análise das rotinas de brincadeiras, são evidenciadas as alianças entre as crianças, a definição de papeis, a reprodução interpretativa e a produção de culturas infantis no pátio escolar. Com a pesquisa, infere-se a necessidade de que as crianças tenham tempo livre garantido para brincar, assim como suporte dos docentes em relação às suas demandas nas propostas de brincadeira.

Palavras-chave: *Educação Infantil. Brincadeira sociodramática. Cultura de pares. Reprodução interpretativa.*

Resumen

Con base en las contribuciones de los Estudios Sociales de la Infancia, este artículo tiene el objetivo de discutir el proceso de reproducción interpretativa emergente de una rutina cultural de juego socio-dramático vivida en el patio de la escuela por un grupo de niños del preescolar. Metodológicamente, el estudio resulta de una investigación etnográfica con niños, que utiliza las siguientes estrategias de generación de datos: observación; diario de campo; círculos de conversación; registros fotográficos; grabaciones de audio. La investigación se realizó en una escuela pública de Educación Infantil, con 24 niños de 5 años de edad, durante un año escolar. El enfoque de análisis del artículo es la rutina del juego "asalto al salón de belleza", por ocurrir de modo constante en los momentos de actividad libre de los niños y con elevado número de participantes. A partir del análisis de las rutinas de juegos, se evidencian alianzas entre los niños, la definición de papeles, la reproducción interpretativa y la producción de culturas infantiles en el patio escolar. Con la investigación, se infiere la necesidad de que se garantice que los niños tengan tiempo libre para jugar, así como soporte de los docentes con relación a sus demandas en las propuestas de juegos.

Palabras clave*: Educación Infantil. Juego socio-dramático. Cultura de pares. Reproducción interpretativa.*

Initial considerations

> ***Children and the robbery game***
> As I cross the school hall, even at a distance from the schoolyard, **I hear the voices of the children, the sounds of them moving across the lawn**, stepping on branches and dry leaves, as well as the early autumn breeze marked by the aroma of the herb and spice garden. Such sound cues indicate that children are at **the most anticipated moment in their afternoon routine**: the moment of '**free' play in the school's outdoor area**. The moment I enter the schoolyard, I observe the scene of a **robbery game** involving a group of children. Otho, the boy who plays the thief, assertively announces to Bella: **'Hands up, ma'am, this is a robbery!'** Curious, I sit on the wall surrounding the sandbox, pick up my field diary, and, **attentively, begin to observe the game** (Field Diary, emphasis added).

Play is a legitimate way for children, through the production of peer cultures (Corsaro, 2011), to experience, attribute meanings to, and reinvent the social world in which they participate in Early Childhood Education institutions. In fact, "play is a crucial part of peer cultures' everyday life" (Köngäs; Määttä; Uusiautti, 2022, p. 1534) for children. This implies that, above all, play is a confrontation with culture (Brougère, 2010), through which children can form dense social relationships and give meaning to their experiences.

Corroborating the argument, Köngäs, Määttä, and Uusiautti (2022, p. 1535) state that "in the ECE centres' daily life, children participate in two microcultures: the one formed by themselves and the professional culture maintained by adults." In the interdependence of these microcultures, while playing, children relate to cultural content that they reproduce and transform, which they appropriate and give meaning to (Brougère, 2010). Therefore, children's social interaction, through the formation of peer groups, is enhanced by the occupation of spaces, the use of toys, artifacts, and available natural resources, which make Early Childhood Education institutions fruitful places for creating games, because, as Ogg Gomes (2015, p. 132, our translation) points out, "the Early Childhood Education School [...] is configured as a space for sociability, a space where children meet other children, play, talk, exchange information, and make friends."

Reiterating play as "[...] a dynamic place where children's sociocultural appropriations converge" (Spréa, 2010, p. 222, our translation) through social interactions, the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) (Brasil, 2009) and the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) (Brasil, 2017) affirm its importance as a structuring axis of pedagogical practices in Brazilian daycare centers and preschools, as well as children's right to learning and development – transversal to the fields of experience. However, although the Brazilian national curriculum guidance documents highlight the essential role of play in supporting teaching practices in Early Childhood Education, simultaneously, in many cities, there has been a reduction in the time allocated to children's play in preschool due to a disciplinary curriculum perspective – generally triggered using textbooks and teaching aid systems. According to Saracho (2020), this supports the mistaken assumption that to be relevant in the daily journey of Early Childhood Education, teachers need to justify play as *children's work*. Such conversion of play into work disregards that "play produces pleasure, a sense of freedom and co-construction of shared meanings" [...] (Köngäs; Määttä; Uusiautti, 2022, p. 1534) through sophisticated processes of interpretive reproduction developed by children in the production of peer culture.

Considering these concerns, the main objective of this article is to discuss, based on the contributions of Social Studies of Childhood (Corsaro, 2011; Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017; Keranen; Viljamaa; Uitoo, 2021; Donner; Lundström; Heikkilä, 2024), the process of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011) emerging from a cultural routine of *sociodramatic role play* (Corsaro, 2002) experienced by a group of 5-year-old preschool children in the daily moments destined for free activity in the schoolyard of a municipal school of Early Childhood Education located in a city in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. However, the article comes from a broader *ethnographic research with children* (Graue; Walsh, 2003; Köngäs; Määttä, 2023)

involving 24 participants aged 5, during a period of 11 months of daily fieldwork, in which the following data generation strategies were used: participant observation, field diary, conversation circles, photographic records, and audio recordings.

Based on the contributions of Corsaro (2011) and Morrissey, Scott and Rahimi (2017), as a result of field observations, narrative episodes were written that focused on the language used by children in their interactions, the positions they occupied in social relationships with their peers and their ways of participating in the cultural routines of *sociodramatic role play* (Corsaro, 2002), implied in processes of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011). In the research process, based on a close look at playing routines, it was considered that, "at the same time that children subjectively appropriate the social world, [they also] subjectively appropriate their own identity [...]" (Grigorowitschs, 2011, p. 80, our translation), through the plots they create, the agreements they make and the characters they play in social interactions with their peers. Corsaro's (1993, p. 65) definition of sociodramatic play helps to better understand this investigative proposal: "By sociodramatic play I mean play in which children collaboratively produce pretend activities that are related to experiences from their real lives (e.g., family and occupational routines)."

During observations of children's sociodramatic role plays in the schoolyard, I assumed the principle that "to act ethically is to act the way one acts toward people whom one respects" (Graue; Walsh, 1998, p. 55). From this perspective, the ethical guidelines for research with children included the following steps: 1) presentation of the research and collection of signatures on the consent form from the municipal school of Early Childhood Education; 2) authorization from the Research Ethics Committee to conduct the investigation; 3) collection of the signature of the Free and Informed Consent Form from those responsible for the children; 4) reactive entry into the field – for two months; 5) presentation of the research to the children and obtaining their consent by signing the Informed Assent Form in the form of a comic strip; 6) resumption of children's consent to observe games, record voices, and take photographs whenever necessary; 7) presentation of the research results to the children by showing them an album of images of their games; 8) presentation of the research results to the institution's managers, teachers and monitors and those responsible for the children, through a meeting.

During fieldwork with the children, the recurrence of the following sociodramatic role plays was observed: 1) *playing house*, 2) *playing bakery*, 3) *playing beauty salon*, 4) *playing beauty salon robbery*. Although all role plays listed were observed during the investigation, the focus of analysis in this article will be the role playing of robbing the beauty salon, as it was the most frequent event during the children's free-choice activities in the schoolyard. The analysis of the article, therefore, will focus on two analytical focuses: 1) the play routine in its *thematic and structural* (Grigorowitschs, 2011) character, which operates based on *negotiations between children* (Donner; Lundström; Heikkilä, 2024) in the assignment of roles and tasks, 2) the process of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011) at work in role play, through the *substitution of objects*, *imaginative transformations* and the *influence of the physical context* (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017) on the plot of the role play. Furthermore, by composing such an analytical discussion, *touch in interactions between peers* (Keranen; Viljamaa; Uitoo, 2021) will be highlighted, as well as children's gestures during role play.

In addition to these considerations, it is worth mentioning that the article is organized into five sections. Starting from this first introductory section, the second section presents the conceptual discussion, in which I focus on the processes of socialization of children through *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2002; 2011) in sociodramatic role plays. Next, in the third section, I address the cultural routine of the "beauty salon robbery" role play, and then, in the fourth section, the process of interpretive reproduction implied in this role play. Finally, in the last section, I share the final considerations of the article.

Socialization, interpretive reproduction, and peer cultures: conceptual discussion

There will be a thief, yes!
Bella: Today, Otho won't be able to wear the thief's hood.
Bella refers to the use of the black balaclava ninja hood brought by Otto the previous week to compose the robber's costume in the role play.
Mel: Otho's mother told him to stop playing the robbery game.
Otho: My mother kept my hood yesterday and wouldn't let me bring it.
Vitto: So, we're going to have to come up with another game today.
Otho: Let's not stop playing cops and robbers!
Vitto: What are we going to do then?
Bella: If Otho doesn't wear the hood, his mother lets him play.
Théo: So, there won't be any thieves?
Otho: There will be a thief, yes!
Mel: Otho doesn't need the hood, he just has to look mean.
Mel stands up, makes a face, and shows her colleagues what the thief's facial expression should look like.
Bia: A bad face is scary.
Caio: But it's just pretend!
Otho: And weapon?
Bia: The thief needs a weapon.
Gael: Let's get some branches from the yard to make the machine gun and the police officers' guns.
Otho: I'm going to choose a really big branch to be a machine gun. (Field Diary).

The functionalist perspective's concept of child socialization attributes to social institutions the preponderant role of transmitting values, norms, and behaviors expected of children. Given this, the child is positioned as a passive subject, shaped unidirectionally by the action of social institutions in their socialization process.

On the other hand, refuting this perspective, Social Studies of Childhood affirm the social action of children in the inter- and intragenerational social relations in which they participate as citizens. Because "[...] there is no culture to be instilled in children since they themselves are part of the process that constitutes it" (Pires, 2010, p. 152, our translation). In other words, child socialization, "[...] in the understanding of the Sociology of Childhood, is not a linear, unidirectional, or individual process, but rather [...] a process [...] in the form of an 'orb web'" (Evangelista; Marchi, 2022, p. 13, our translation), according to Corsaro's (2011) definition. According to the author, this orb web is composed of "fields that make up various social institutions (family, economic, cultural, educational, political, occupational, community, and religious)" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 25) whose center is the children's family of origin, from which they begin to move through different cultural institutions throughout their lives. In general terms, the orb web model demonstrates that "[...] children are always participating in and are part of two cultures - children's and adults' - and these cultures are intricately interwoven" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 27).

Corsaro (2005, p. 18) problematizes the "[...] individualistic doctrine that regards children's social development solely as the child's private internalization of adult skills and knowledge." Therefore, as Evangelista and Marchi (2022, p. 13, our translation) explain, "[...] children, even limited by social forces [...] think and act in the world around them and do so within the scope of their socialization processes."

The authors' argument is ratified by Spréa (2018) in his investigation with children aged 5 to 11 years old about the *prohibition of games* at school based on moral and sociocultural parameters emerging in school culture and naturalized by professionals responsible for accompanying children during recess. In his research, the author highlighted the social interactions of children that arise from resistance movements to imposed determinations, agreements between peers, and proposals to reinvent games prohibited during school recess. In short, the study corroborates the understanding that "[...] when interacting with adults,

children [within institutions] are not socialized, but socialize themselves" (Grigorowitschs, 2011, p. 121, our translation) through processes of social participation.

Regarding this discussion, Grigorowitschs (2011, p. 78, our translation, emphasis added) states that "[...] children participate in a *series of types of social interactions* that vary culturally and historically and that, in general, occur 'only' in childhood." About such types of social interactions, Grigorowitschs (2011, p. 79, our translation, emphasis added) lists "as fundamental the interactions *within the school institution* [...], the *interactions within family life* [...], and the *interactions through play*", which highlight how children attribute meanings to the issues that concern them. Because, as Grigorowitschs (2011, p. 80, our translation) asserts, "[...] interacting is what defines socializing" in people's lives.

From this perspective, it is worth mentioning the research by Machado and Carvalho (2020), Neitola, Ursin, and Pihlaja (2024), and Spréa (2010), which, respectively, discuss the socialization processes of children through school, family, and play interactions. As for children's interactions within the school of Early Childhood Education, the ethnographic research with 5-year-old children developed by Machado and Carvalho (2020) was dedicated to playful cultures in preschool. In this investigative itinerary, the authors highlighted the gestures, affective relationships, and musicalities expressed by children through social interactions that constitute playful cultures.

Focusing on children's social interactions within the family, Neitola, Ursin, and Pihlaja (2024) discuss in their research the relevance of parental social relationships in promoting young children's social interaction networks outside the school environment. The research contributions of these authors confirm Corsaro's (2011) argument when he states that the family, especially before children start school, is responsible for children's initial contact with their peers.

Specially concerning children's interactions through play, Spréa (2010) developed an ethnographic investigation with children aged 6 to 11 and demonstrated how they produce peer culture in their play during school recess through assimilation, adaptation, invention, and transmission of knowledge.

Based on the above, in this article, child socialization is understood "[...] as an innumerable series of processes through which children learn, share, create, and reproduce action, thought, and communication, which enable [...] the constitution of a world in which they come to inhabit" (Grigorowitschs, 2011, p. 80, our translation). From this point of view, "child socialization results from a communion of knowledge acquired from adults and other children" (Spréa, 2018, p. 271, our translation). This understanding of child socialization makes visible children's social interactions and their participation, in interdependence with adults, in the processes of attributing meaning to social life. This means "[...] that children recreate the world, but they do so based on a world that is presented to them, an adult world" (Pires, 2010, p. 152, our translation).

Within the scope of this discussion, Corsaro (1993, p. 65) coins the concept of *interpretive reproduction*, stating that "socialization is a reproductive rather than a linear process." According to Corsaro (1993, p. 65), the socialization process is reproductive because "[...] children do not merely individually internalize the external adult culture [...] [but] contribute to its reproduction, through their negotiations with adults and their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children."

Based on these assumptions, it is possible to understand that children, as competent social actors, participate in socialization processes through the *production of children's peer cultures* (Corsaro, 2011; Köngäs; Määttä; Uusiautti, 2022). According to Corsaro (1992, p. 162), children's peer culture refers to "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers." It is interesting to highlight that it is within the scope of games, especially those in which there is no direct interference from adults, that children can produce peer cultures through processes of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011).

Corroborating the argument, Köngäs, Määttä, and Uusiautti (2022, p. 1534) state that "when children are [playing] in the same space, they create their own culture with its special features and unspoken

rules". In this way, "conflict, cooperation, solidarity and sharing [...] [become] constitutive elements of the peer group and of play" (Borba, 2005, p. 263, our translation). Because "[...] play is a place of creative and continuous effort, where participants have to organize themselves collectively [...]" (Spréa, 2010, p. 224, our translation) through participation, sharing of power, and decision-making.

However, it is worth reaffirming that children, through the production of their peer cultures, do not constitute a world separate from adults, since it is through a process of interdependence with adults and their peers, in different institutions, that "children produce and participate in their peer cultures, and these productions are embedded in the web of experiences children weave with others throughout their live" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 25-26). From this perspective, the next section will address the routine of the sociodramatic role-play of "beauty salon robbery" performed by children in the schoolyard.

The routine of the sociodramatic role play of the beauty salon robbery

An institutional routine organized by adults guides the daily lives of children in Early Childhood Education. It has a series of collective activities that provide stability and predictability to the daily journey of those involved, such as "[...] the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group" (Corsaro; Molinari, 2005, p. 28). Children also produce cultural routines, especially in the planning and management of the games they engage in at school, through daily interaction with their peers at the institution.

In this context, play routines are "are understood as a general framework that provides children with a known playful structure, within which they can express and produce their cultural knowledge" (Borba, 2005, p. 124, our translation). The predictable nature "[...] of routines provides numerous possibilities for creative embellishment in which [...] [children] can interpret, produce, display, and extend a wide range of sociocultural knowledge" (Corsaro; Molinari, 2005, p. 28). Play routines, through their *repetition and predictability* (Borba, 2005), operate in the mobilization of children's *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011) processes. Thus, this ratifies Borba's (2005) argument that constancy is also a characteristic of children's play, alongside *dynamism* and *transformation*. This means that "some games [...] have a sequence of predictable behaviors, in addition to being preferred by relatively stable groups of children" (Borba, 2005, p. 124, our translation) who meet to play.

In view of the above, in this section the focus of discussion will be the *thematic and structural* aspect (Grigorowitschs, 2011) of the routine of the sociodramatic role play of "assault on the beauty salon" experienced repeatedly by the children in the research. Thematically, the observed role play was a *chase routine* (Borba, 2005; Corsaro, 2011; Spréa, 2018) consisting of the following characters: the robber, the employees and customers of a beauty salon, the "madam" (owner of the establishment), and the police officers. Structurally, the play routine was organized by the children based on a sequence of eight steps: 1) definition of the character assignment and discussion of the plot by the group of participants in the role play; 2) opening scene in which the salon employees are serving customers; 3) sequence of actions in which the owner of the beauty salon is robbed in front of the establishment; 4) robbery of customers at the beauty salon; 5) pursuit of the thief by the police in the schoolyard; 6) exchange of gunfire and arrest of the assailant by the police; 7) release of the thief by the police; 8) the thief returns to the beauty salon to offer gifts to all his victims and celebrate with the children. In turn, the spaces used during the "beauty salon robbery" game by the children were the brick dollhouse (transformed into a beauty salon), the central area of the square, and the entire perimeter of the school's vast garden. Below, I share an episode whose central narrative is the organization of the robbery game by the children:

> ***Whoever wants to play robbery, put your finger here!***
> After their afternoon snack, around 3:30 p.m., the children leave the cafeteria with their teacher. Amidst enthusiastic conversations, hugs, holding hands, and smiles, the children head to the classroom. Upon arriving in it, **the teacher tells them that it is time for a free-choice activity in the schoolyard**. I hear the children celebrating in unison. In fact, in these first six months of observation, I noticed that **this moment of free use of the schoolyard is the most anticipated moment for the children in their daily routine**. The children start to leave the room. As usual, I watch Gael, Otho, Maria, and Bella carrying the two boxes of costumes and props into the schoolyard, towards the dollhouse in the square. Théo, Caio, Vitto, Mel, Bia, Isa, Maya, Anna, Tony, Bruno, Mavi, Cauê, Tobias, and Brian followed the quartet. The other children in the class divide themselves between playing in the sandbox and using the toys in the park. Little by little, I approach the larger group of children. Then, **I notice that Bella organizes the circle, calling all her classmates:** 'Meeting, meeting!' **The girl extends both hands and declares: 'Whoever wants to play robbery, put your finger here, it will close, it will close!'** All the children place their fingers under Bella's hands. The girl closes her hand. Soon after, **the children sit in a circle**. At that moment, I approach the circle and am stopped by Otho, who declares: 'You can sit down, but you will not play.' Paying attention to his instructions, I ask permission to sit near the circle and am immediately authorized by a nod from Otho. **The initial agenda of the meeting is to define the roles that will be played by the children in the role play:** the madame (the owner of the beauty salon), the thief, the beauty salon employees, and the police officers. **The debate is intense** among the children, as each **character demands a certain gestural and verbal performance** in the role play. Based on the initial agreements, **the children choose the costumes and accessories to make up the characters' outfits**. The **central discussion** is the **costumes of the madame, the thief, and the police officers**, which are **the roles most sought after by children**. Mavi, Cauê, Tobias, and Brian separate the salon's utensils: hair dryer, combs, brushes, mirrors, makeup, and aprons. Maya, Anna, and Bruno **distribute the caps to the police officers and the weapons**, tree branches collected from the yard. Otho shows his colleagues the **black balaclava hood**, which triggers a moment of general euphoria in the group. At that moment, Tony, excited, warns: 'Now we're going to have a real thief.' Mel, Bia, and Isa look for the fantasy money in the reference room and divide it between the employees and clients of the salon. However, **the largest amount of money is placed in the purse of the madam**, the salon owner. Otho takes a cloth bag from inside the costume box, with which he will collect the money he will steal during the robbery. In turn, Maria and Bella **use Lego pieces to assemble the gifts that the thief will distribute to all the salon's customers after being released** by the police – the game outcome. (Field Diary, emphasis added)

As can be seen in the events described, at the time of the free-choice activity, the children had the possibility of taking toys, costumes, and unstructured materials from the reference room to the schoolyard, in addition to using the equipment and artifacts intended for playing in the school's outdoor area, such as buckets, shovels, pans, molds, kettles, carts, trucks and wooden furniture that made up the dollhouse scene. The dollhouse – a masonry construction with capacity for eight users – was in the central area of the schoolyard. The observation of the sociodramatic role play of "beauty salon robbery" occurred practically throughout the entire period of fieldwork, in the afternoon shift, after the children had had their snack, during the period in which they had one hour and thirty minutes for free-choice activities in the entire external area of the school.

The daily free use of the playground by children confirmed the argument of Morrissey, Scott, and Rahimi (2017) about the importance of naturalized elements, equipment, and open-ended materials in outdoor spaces in the external areas of schools as mobilizers of play in this territory. This means that "[...] outdoor play environments, along with the provision of open-ended materials [...] support more extended and complex socio-dramatic play" (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017, p. 14). In this sense, as Spréa (2018, p. 24, our translation) reminds us, "[...] the experience resulting [from children's play] is also a consequence of the circumstances that provoke it". In this research, the children's free access to the naturalized space, intentionally planned with equipment and materials, allowed them to develop, in an increasingly sophisticated way, the definition of the roles of the characters and the plots of their sociodramatic role plays.

In the following episode, it is possible to observe the power relations between the children in the distribution of the characters in the role play:

> ***The game planning meeting***
> Near the sandbox, the children gather in a circle to define the characters, costumes, and artifacts they will use in the role play of robbing the beauty salon. After all the children sit on the floor, Bella speaks up, indicating her choice of one of the main characters in the role play:
> **Bella:** Today, I'm going to be the madam.
> **Maya:** You are always the madam.
> **Mel:** I also want to be the madame, very rich, and the owner of the salon.
> **Isa:** The game is not just for one person.
> **Cauê:** Bella doesn't own the game.
> **Otho:** Today, there may be another owner of the salon.
> **Bella:** I have an idea! There could be a madam, the owner of the salon, with two daughters.
> **Mel:** So, Isa and I are her daughters.
> **Mavi:** There aren't enough bags for all of you, nor are there enough high heels.
> **Isa:** Young daughter doesn't wear a purse.
> **Brian:** That's right, children don't use bags, they don't have money.
> **Maya:** The mother is the one who uses the bag.
> **Bella:** I want a lot of money in my purse.
> **Otho:** I'm going to be the thief. Today I brought a bandit's hood.
> **Tobias:** And who will be the police?
> **Brian:** You, Cauê, Tony, and I can be the police officers.
> **Tobias:** But there may be a police girl too.
> **Bia:** I want to be a police officer.
> **Cauê:** Okay, Bia. You can be a police officer too.
> **Anna:** But who will be the customer of the salon?
> **Maria:** I'm going to be a hairdresser. I'm not going to be a customer.
> **Bella:** Anna, can you be a customer?
> **Anna:** Yes!
> **Bella:** Maya could be the other hairdresser.
> **Vitto:** I'm also going to be a hairdresser.
> **Maya:** I'm going to be a hairdresser and makeup artist.
> **Vitto:** And Gael can be our customer.
> **Bella:** At the robbery, when the thief enters the beauty salon to steal the money, you have to scream really loudly.
> **Otho:** But scream really loud.
> **Tobias:** You have to scream and be scared.
> **Tony:** Just look like you're scared.
> **Maya:** You may tremble too.
> **Anna:** They might even faint a little bit.
> **Otho:** They just can't run away. (Field Diary)

The dialogue between the children in the episode demonstrates that, when peers meet to plan the role play, "[...] children are motivated to engage socially with peers, and practice skills in communication, negotiation, symbolic and creative thinking, and problem-solving" (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017, p. 2). During the research, I observed that the daily meetings to plan the game were very much appreciated by the children, as they allowed them to share points of view, argue about the plot, define performances, and present themselves to the group to interpret the characters. As observed in the shared episode, the children engaged in *intense negotiation processes during play* (Donner; Lundström; Heikkilä, 2024), which sometimes even defined the possibility of participation or exclusion of classmates.

The definition of the characters, rules, spaces, and operating conditions of the role play provided a denser social relationship between the children, restricting the participation of colleagues who were unaware of what was being proposed as the plot of the interactive story. And, for this reason, on many occasions, it was noticeable that *the interactive play space was protected* (Corsaro, 2011) by the group of peers who met

daily, excluding children from other classes from accessing the beauty salon space, or even the perimeter of the area where the police were chasing the thief. Given this, it can be inferred that "play causes in the subjects who play the eminence of activating certain knowledge that may not make sense in another activity, but which is fundamental for the play to occur" (Spréa, 2010, p. 178, our translation). In this direction, in the next section, the focus of discussion will be the process of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011) present in the role play of "beauty salon robbery."

"This is a robbery!" Interpretive reproduction in action in role play

> ***This is a robbery, ma'am!***
> Upon arriving at the schoolyard, I notice the children's beauty salon is in full operation. Clients are being attended to by the hairdressing and makeup team in the salon. I hear the **children emitting the sound of hair dryers and the sound of pretend scissors** being used while serving customers. Meanwhile, the salon's makeup artist, equipped with blushes, eye shadows, lip glosses, and lipsticks in different colors, attends to a client excited about the color on her face. After a few minutes, Bella appears with her makeup on at the salon door, **holding hands with** Mel and Isa, who are carrying two dolls. **Immediately, the employees** – Maya, Maria, and Vitto – **interrupt the service to escort the special client out**. Her look consists of pink sunglasses, a yellow floral dress, an orange scarf, white high heels (worn with sneakers), and a black leather shoulder bag. Observing the scene, I recognize that it is the madam, the owner of the salon, accompanied by her two daughters. Immediately upon leaving the salon, the girls are approached by Otho, the thief, with his black balaclava and a machine gun (a long tree branch), who declares loudly: **'Hands up, ma'am, this is a robbery!'** Bella, **the madam**, with Mel and Isa (her daughters), **begins to tremble and scream uncontrollably**. **The thief**, faced with the situation, **orders: 'Give me the bag, madam. I want all the money.' Bella, screaming, hands over her bag.** The **three girls sit on the sidewalk outside** the beauty salon, devastated by **the situation, making crying sounds**. The thief, with the bag over his shoulder, **pretends to be knocking on the** (non-existent) **door of the beauty salon**. Maya, an employee at the salon, opens the door and is surprised by the thief's invasion. The **employees and customers**, **screaming for help, hand over the money and some objects, which are placed in the bag** carried by the thief. The thief **grabs a broom handle, simulating a motorcycle, and flees at high speed through the garden**. Maya left the service area, accompanied by Maria and Vitto. **The girl simulates using a telephone in her hand**. I realize that **it is a call to the police**, because the girl shouts: 'Hello, police, hello, police, there is a robbery here in the salon.' **The quartet of police officers** – Brian, Cauê, Tony, and Bia –, who are close to the beauty salon, **armed with their weapons (tree branches), run towards the thief, emitting the sound of gunshots**. The chase lasts a few minutes, as the group moves around the entire perimeter of the schoolyard. Otho, visibly tired, stops running. At that moment, **police officers** Brian, Cauê, and Tony **hold his hands, simulating the use of handcuffs**. **Police officer Bia** emphatically **declares to the thief: 'You lose, you lose! You are under arrest. Give me back the bag with the money.' The children participating in the role play, euphoric, applaud the capture of the thief**. After a few minutes, after being questioned by the police, the thief is released. **After being released, the boy went to the reference room and found a bag with several Lego pieces and distributed them to each of the children**, saying: **'I don't have the money anymore, but these are the presents I bought for you.'** The children, excited, celebrate receiving their presents. Sitting on the sandbox wall, I observe that the beauty salon is open again. At this point, **the quartet of police officers and the thief become customers of the salon**. Anna and Gael, who **were clients at the beginning of the role play, take on the role of hairdressers**. The beauty salon's operation is interrupted when the teacher tells the children that it is time to go to the bathroom, wash their hands, drink water, and return to the reference room. The end of the afternoon approaches. Soon, the family members begin to arrive to pick up the children. (Field Diary, emphasis added)

As can be seen, children, during play, "[...] simultaneously use (as well as refine and further develop) a wide range of communication and discourse skills, [...]" (Corsaro, 1993, p. 65) based on a dense process of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011). In effect, children's sociodramatic role play "[...] goes beyond mere reproduction of various real life scripts, as children appropriate and embellish adult models to fit their

concerns and values" (Corsaro, 2009, p. 304) in the ongoing play routine development. The presented analytical argument corroborates Spréa (2018, p. 22, our translation) when he argues that "[...] playful forms of social interaction are access routes to culture; they are connective bridges that inform children about more elementary aspects in the organization of their environment."

Based on this indication, in the plot of the role play under analysis, the beauty salon appears as a work space in which the owner of the establishment and her two daughters, the employees (hairdresser and makeup artist), and the customers are present. The children, when naming the owner of the beauty salon as "madam," or even when, during the planning meeting for the role play, they stated that the character was rich and, therefore, needed to have "a lot of" money in her purse, highlight the social class differentiation between owners and workers. Likewise, the asymmetrical power relationship between the owner and the employees is noticeable, as they all interrupt their service to watch her leave the beauty salon. In this direction, it is evident that, in role play, "[...] children have a sense of status as power and authority over others [...]" (Corsaro, 2009, p. 304) that stands out in the differences between the characters' performances.

It is possible to note that the beauty salon is frequented by financially wealthy clients, which justifies the two moments of the robbery: a) the robbery of the owner; b) the robbery of the clients in the beauty salon. Although the pursuit and capture of the robber by the police are highlighted in the unfolding of the plot, the climax that marks the end of the role play's plot is the redemption of the criminal when he rewards the victims with the distribution of gifts. In fact, the outcome of the game confirms Corsaro's (2009, p. 304) statement that "children tend to embellish rose play themes to make them more interesting and dramatic in the peer culture."

Furthermore, from an analytical point of view, as observed by Morrissey, Scott, and Rahimi (2017), in sociodramatic role plays in Early Childhood Education, the episode includes the *substitution of objects*, *imaginative transformations* in the development of the role play's plot and the *influence of the physical context* occupied by the children. In relation to the *substitution of objects* (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017), the following stand out: tree branches used as weapons, a broom handle used as a motorcycle, and a child's hand transformed into a cell phone to notify the police about the robbery. In turn, *imaginative transformations* (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017) are identified in the sound emitted by children to represent the noise of hair dryers and the sound of imaginary scissors used by hairdressers when serving customers. In the flow of events observed during the role play, it is also notable: a) the thief's action when knocking on the imaginary door of the beauty salon; b) the sounds of gunshots being emitted by the police officers and the criminal during the chase; c) the use of imaginary handcuffs by the police officers to arrest the criminal.

In this context of the development of the robbery game, the *influence of the physical context* (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017) was equally noticeable. The possibility for children to move freely throughout the school's outdoor area – schoolyard, garden, and square – and use the materials and equipment available in these areas certainly allowed for a more sophisticated role play plot. The presence of fruit trees in the schoolyard, a large sandpit in the square, a brick dollhouse – where around 10 children could play –, and the variety of plants and flowers that made up the garden, influenced the composition of the different scenarios for role play. This finding confirms the argument of Morrissey, Scott, and Rahimi (2017) that naturalized spaces in Early Childhood Education directly influence the processes of sociodramatic role play, as there is a tendency for children to engage in longer periods of social interaction and development of the dramatized plot.

Given the above, it is worth highlighting, in the role play under analysis, the presence of *touch in social relationships between children* (Keranen; Viljamaa; Uitoo, 2021) and *gestures* in interactions between peers. In their ethnographic investigation, Keranen, Viljamaa, and Uitoo (2021) observed the occurrence of touch in social relationships between children in the daily life of preschool in the following ways: 1) as an invitation, 2) as an attempt at control, and 3) as a conventional pattern. From this perspective,

in the numerous occurrences of the sociodramatic role play of robbery observed in the research, touching also manifested itself in social interactions between children in the modalities listed by the authors.

Touch between children was used repeatedly as an *invitation to play* (Keranen; Viljamaa; Uitoo, 2021), to sit together during planning meetings for the game, or even to share the same scene in the role play plot – as, for example, in the roles assumed by children as hairdressers, makeup artists and clients who shared the same space in the beauty salon. In turn, *touch as an attempt at control* (Keranen; Viljamaa; Uitoo, 2021) was evidenced in the subtle regulations of the spaces in which children shared a joint action, or to *protect the interactive space* (Corsaro, 2011) where the role play took place. Regarding touch as a conventional pattern, it was common to observe children holding hands or sharing hugs and affection when sitting close to each other.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the children's gestures also made up their performances during role play. As an example, in the episode shared at the beginning of the section, it is possible to highlight the children's applause at key moments in the role play's plot, such as when the criminal was captured, when the employees and customers of the beauty salon trembled in fear of the thief, and when the children exchanged waves during their performances as characters. From this perspective, based on field observations, it was noted that children's gestures were a crucial element of nonverbal communication and characterization of the characters played in the role play. Given the above, I share the final considerations in the next section as a conclusion to the article.

Final considerations

Based on the discussions shared throughout the article, it is worth considering that sociodramatic role play is "[...] a significant activity in young children's lives" (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017, p. 2, our translation), as it enables interaction "[...] with peers and the adult world through cultural routines [...]" (Evangelista; Marchi, 2022, p. 10, our translation) that are expressed through sophisticated processes of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011). During the research, the children's engagement and participation in planning plots, performances, costumes, and play scenarios were notable, through social interactions constituted by *negotiations with peers* (Donner; Lundström; Heikkilä, 2024). As Saracho (2020, p. 9-10) argues, sociodramatic role play "assists children to interpret their social world, family, school, and community, and role play their perceptions of those worlds".

Overall, in the plot of the observed episodes of the robbery game, there were constant *substitutions of objects*, *imaginative transformations* (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017), *touch as a mode of social interaction* (Keranen; Viljamaa; Uitoo, 2021), and the marked presence of *gestures* in non-verbal communication between the children. As can be seen when reading the article, the *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011) processes experienced by the children were supported by a teaching team that prioritized extended daily time for free play throughout the school's outdoor area, access to and the possibility of choosing a diversity of materials and equipment intentionally organized and offered in the square and its surroundings, as well as a *naturalized physical context* (Morrissey; Scott; Rahimi, 2017).

Given the above, it can be stated that the research ratifies the position of Corsaro and Molinari (2005, p. 17) that "[...] cultural context is a dynamic that is continually constituted in routine practices collectively produced at various levels of organization." In this research, they were evidenced in the creative ways in which children, through sociodramatic role play, appropriated adult culture and attributed meanings to it through the production of *peer cultures* (Corsaro, 2009).

In this sense, it is worth highlighting the *subversion of reality* (Spréa, 2010) present in the robbery game experienced by children in the dramatization of the characters involved in the plot. For example, in the role play analyzed in the article, the thief was captured by the police, released, and redeemed of his crimes by giving gifts to all the characters harmed by the crime committed. All these aspects reaffirm Corsaro's

(1993, p. 64) argument that socialization can be understood "[...] as a productive-re-productive process of increasing density and reorganization of knowledge that changes with the children's developing cognitive and language abilities [...]" within the social contexts in which they participate as subjects.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary to consider, as pointed out by Pires (2010, p. 147, our translation), that "[...] social interaction with 'the other' is something that needs to be developed." From this perspective, the school of Early Childhood Education is a useful space for promoting times and spaces for social interaction between children, so they can meet, talk, and play together.

Given the above, it is inferred that it is urgent that professionals working in Early Childhood Education institutions, such as the school researched, understand Corsaro's (2005, p. 110) argument that "is through collective production of and participation in routines that children's evolving memberships in both their peer cultures and the adult world are situated." This means that play needs to be promoted and supported in Early Childhood Education institutions as a right for children to experience childhood, since it is "[..] a way [they find] of being and acting in the world [...]" (Spréa, 2010, p. 21, our translation) through sophisticated processes of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 2011) that provoke adults to see, feel, and perceive the social world in other ways.

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