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The games as a pedagogical tool in the improvement of its teaching practice

Abstract

The objective of the research was to analyze how the game through its various methodological, playful and didactic strategies enable the development of the pedagogical practice developed by teachers of the initial level in the teaching-learning process. The methodology used was centered on the qualitative approach, based on interpreting the meaning of the actions carried out by the teachers using the semi-structured interview technique, whose instrument was the questionnaire based on open questions. The results showed that the teachers managed to improve their work at the pedagogical level and significantly after having been prepared and developing this strategy.

Keywords: Play, early childhood education, body expression, preschool teacher, preschooler.

Introduction

Play is a channel for children to express their inner world; it is a natural and primordial means they use to communicate (Duhalde, Herzberg, De Simone, Martínez, Russi and De Schejtmann, 2016). Developed countries such as Finland, Singapore, Japan, among others, give an important role to the first school stage of the child to achieve learning; also, neighboring countries such as Chile highlight its importance and, likewise, their learning days are directed through moments of free play.

UNESCO (1980) pointed out that there are differences between learning outcomes, with early childhood being the least favoured; for this reason, play should be highlighted and valued as a pedagogical tool for learning (Ceballos, Susinos and García, 2018). Various studies have

argued, from different disciplines, the importance of quality education at early ages since it can mean a critical difference towards the future of the child (Morgan, 2019). Similarly, play develops synaptic connections -neuroeducation- and its relationship with learning (Gutiérrez and Ruiz, 2018; Marqués and Osses, 2014).

As far as children are concerned, it is being discovered that play is a frequent activity that children integrate into their daily activities; for this reason, educators must be attentive to the different research methods in relation to this topic (Theobald, Danby, Einarsdottir and Bourne, 2015). Thus, play is a major factor for children; from birth, this need is inherent to adapt, mature, develop, and learn. Our interest is to carry out the analysis and synthesis of the evaluations of the teachers who have carried out the training with respect to their pedagogical practice.

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Research on the subject has shown that play allows for the expression of language as a means of social communication, in which children interact by making their desires, interests and preferences known. When playing, children develop superior thinking skills, creativity unfolds by using the resources of the environment that children have at their disposal; in those moments, curiosity is born to experiment and give life to their imagination; for this reason, the environments and materials proposed for these playful activities must provide creative functionality in its maximum expression, being the game an exclusive pedagogical tool for the development of this skill (Melo and Hernandez, 2014; Albornoz, 2019).

Likewise, the validity and impact of role-playing on the construction of the symbolic function in preschoolers was demonstrated, with the need for spaces that allow children to appropriate the game being fundamental (González, Solovieva and Quintanar, 2014). For its part, the importance of play has been highlighted in order to show how infants give rise to the unfolding of their emotions and lived experiences; in addition, it contributes as a behavior modifier, which benefits their behavior within different contexts (Tamayo and Restrepo, 2017; López and Delgado, 2013).

Theoretical basis

Play is one of the primary educational activities and deserves to be approached as the hallmark of a school that provides recreational spaces for learning.

One outstanding quality of play is that it is an agent of transmission and a space that is always conducive to discovery and creation. Play is important in the education of children since, by its very nature, play is its reason for being (Unesco, 1980). Montessori, with his theory of the absorbing mind of the child, proposes to change this traditional approach, respecting his natural way of learning, moving forward on a path where everything is joy and love (Morales, 2016).

For this reason, early education should be a space where children learn happily without hindering their curiosity, their desire to experiment, to know and, above all, to play.

Piaget is the most recognized for its contributions in education in terms of the cognitive development of children where play stands out as an expression and representation of the experiences, of those significant moments, being the way they have to know and understand the world.

This same reference is used by Cuellar, Tenreiro and Castellón (2017), who consider play as a spontaneous activity of enjoyment by which children have fun and become reality, evoking their experiences while they play.

Thus, play becomes a tool that not only responds to children's inherent needs, but also generates highly significant and integral learning; for this reason, the Peruvian Ministry of Education (2014) proposed free play as a natural activity that starts from every child's need and allows him/her to enjoy and take pleasure in comfortable environments with significant adults in order to develop a set of skills and, in this way, be able to adapt to his/her environment by exploring, projecting and communicating.

Various types of play have been established for early childhood: 1) motor play: this is linked to the child's play with his or her body; from there, he or she will experience various sensations and emotions; 2) functional or construction play: this is evident in the sensorimotor stage, which consists of the implementation of a set of meaningless behaviours solely for the purpose of pleasure and satisfaction in finding the functioning of objects; 3) symbolic play: this refers to the use of the symbol that implies the representation of an absent object; that is, outside the context (Reyes, 1996).

In addition, it can combine in its representation real or imaginary actions with the purpose of understanding reality. In this game, children may evidence pleasant and unpleasant experiences, imitate people who are important to them or those who have caused them some discomfort.

Symbolic play is fundamental to children's mental and emotional development (November, 1997). Gil and Sánchez (2004) point out that the essence of symbolic play lies in the fact that when children evoke symbols of situations they have lived through, they represent them when playing; for example, the child uses a doll and makes it talk as if it were a baby. (González and Solovieva, 2016); and 4) social play or play by rules: it emphasizes reciprocity with peers as the essence of the child's play, the need to involve others in order to complement or integrate his or her play; it is characterized by the assumption of rules in function of the specific game.

Likewise, Gutiérrez and Ruiz (2018) stated that children are beginning to internalize social concepts of help and collaboration, which attributes to them the ability to think objectively and assume certain playful rules to develop in a given group and game.

Learning integrates social adaptation, personality building and the deployment of life skills. Games provide children with intense

physical mobility which, in turn, is closely related to the cognitive and socio-affective aspects, as well as providing them with values and having an emotional effect that increases their positive interactions with their peers as well as connecting them to any other teaching process in the different subjects (López y Delgado, 2013; Aypay, 2016).

Playful activity is the basis for developing children's potential since it allows them to socialize and expand their communication skills. If children have opportunities to play, one can be sure of the management of their emotions; therefore, it would be the basis for their personality through the interaction of stimuli that generate a response from those involved, which allows for a satisfaction in the reciprocal relationship between them when playing (González, Solovieva and Quintanar, 2014; Córdoba, Lara and García, 2017).

Children, while playing, communicate and interpret. In negotiations with their peers, they attribute to themselves the exchange of roles; in this sense, they are able to integrate play with the learning of a child-oriented activity; that is, to watch how they play and learn, and how they become experts in the creativity they display in mobilizing different capacities of this kind (Stegelin, Fite and Wisneski, 2015).

To play is to enjoy freely, it does not have a goal in itself; children play because they need to, they are not aware that, in those moments, their potential is being developed; their life is a small world where their thoughts, aspirations and biological and psychological needs stand out and are satisfied with a special educational meaning. Play is a powerful tool for learning because it promotes the child's overall well-being (Sivevska, Petrovskaa and Cackov, 2013).

The practice of teaching in early childhood is crucial to educational training because the brain, personality, language and motor skills are developed in the first years of life; in other words, children's whole being is developed.

Carro, Hernández, Lima and Corona (2016) stress the importance of ongoing training as a responsibility for responding to the comprehensive development of children. In addition, the skills that a teacher must possess must be comprehensive and consistent with his or her pedagogical practice, assumed with aptitude, willingness and values to know how to respond to different problems that may arise in his or her work (Manrique, Marcano and Aular, 2017).

The contributions that are developed around the educational field in early childhood constitute a significant value for pedagogical practice; the perceptions (experiences, ideas, opinions) enrich the teaching work since they eradicate the

problems around learning; understanding this period as a critical age to develop the foundations of thought, behavior and social-emotional capacity.

It is necessary for educators to be constantly updated in terms of strategies that allow them to effectively care for the children in their care. Teachers committed to education are qualified as true professionals, breaking away from those who consider them as caregivers or nannies (Bryant, Bronwyn and Ewing, 2018).

Commitment is the source of a teacher's profile; it is evident in their work as mediators rather than transmitters, demonstrating their professionalism, both individually and collectively (Fuentealba and Imbarack, 2014). The pedagogical experience based on the constant reflection of his practice can be a reinforcement to improve the educational task (Razeto, 2016).

Therefore, a preschool teacher must show her commitment through constant updating as part of her professionalism and, above all, her vocation to assist the children in her care in an assertive and productive manner, being aware that her intervention will be an imprint on the future of that child.

The didactics of the game shows us the importance of this tool in education due to the connection that allows children to learn about the natural environment and their society. Didactics examines play as a recreation that provides learning and attends to all the dimensions of the child, producing complete satisfaction (López y Delgado, 2013).

When the teacher makes use of play, his or her objective is to involve the socio-affective area while it is being performed. The role of the educator is to provide methodological and pedagogical resources, offering accompaniment where roles are exchanged, giving rise to the use of creative strategies with timely communication that encourages the active participation of children (Loredo, Gómez and Perea, 2005 and Meneses and Monge, 2001); for this reason, the resources that accompany the game must be planned by a teacher who knows his or her role and adapts them to the children's main interests in order to create an efficient vehicle for their comprehensive training (Moreno, 2015; Zare & Zade, 2014).

Children spend so much time and energy every day playing that philosophers, researchers, teachers and parents have wondered about the role of play in child development (Barnett, 2018). For this reason, there is a need to establish strategic alliances with the different actors in the educational community, with the role of the family being fundamental, since parents are the first models and trainers; therefore, involving them in all activities is substantial. In this way,

play transcends their homes and continues to generate learning (Razeto, 2016; Melo, et al, 2017).

Parents must understand that their children need to play in order to develop and form their personalities, as well as being a vehicle for positive interaction between parents and children; in this way, the family ensures the foundations for harmonious and solid development that will benefit their children in the future, with early childhood being the determining factor in adult life. In other words, it is the parents' task to play with them and enjoy this moment when different skills are recreated and developed (Carsley, Liang, Chen, Parkin, Maguire and Birken, 2017).

The importance of having spaces for play is vital because it implies a correspondence to the main needs of a child to learn in a natural and simple way, starting from what they like to do and not where the curricular content that must be fulfilled is preponderant, with tasks that make no sense to them, leaving aside the center and reason for a school: children, those who need to learn with play activities essential to their healthy development (López and Delgado, 2013).

Tamayo and Restrepo (2017) relate play to learning because of its playful mechanism by becoming an encouraging method that produces pleasure and emotion, with which children internalize disciplinary content more easily. It can be stated that the essential activity of children is to play; therefore, resources, spaces and adequate accompaniment must be available according to the needs, characteristics and maturity of the children. In early childhood, play is elemental because of its impact on access to learning in a meaningful way. Providing an opportunity for children to play is a response to the desire to satisfy children and thus fulfil the role of educator (López y Delgado, 2013).

Methodology

The research carried out was qualitative, oriented towards describing, understanding, analyzing and interpreting the phenomena explored in a natural environment where the participants develop in correlation with their surroundings, based on an interpretative perspective centered on understanding the meaning of the subjects' actions, observed behaviors and their manifestations (Hernández y Mendoza, 2018).

The study setting was a military-dependent educational institution serving children under four years of early education. It has 30 teachers on its staff, who are distributed in two working shifts according to the pedagogical assignment required (cradle or kindergarten). It also has an

interdisciplinary team specializing in nutrition, nursing, psychology, speech therapy and physical therapy.

The selected informants were Early Childhood Regular Education (EBR) teachers from Ugel 03 in Metropolitan Lima, which belongs to the Peruvian Navy.

The technique used was the qualitative research interview, characterized as a form of social interaction where the researcher stands in front of the researcher and asks him questions to gather information and draw conclusions about what is being investigated. Likewise, field notes, records and notes of the facts related to the investigation were used, evidence that they provide during the writing of the observations that can be used in the inferential analysis (Hernández y Mendoza, 2018).

The method of inferential analysis was used together with the process of triangulation of the observed facts (field notebook with the theoretical constructs of the research and opinions of the experts) for the treatment of the information obtained.

Data triangulation consists of the use of various sources and methods of information collection. It is based on research and provides a greater richness, breadth and depth of data, which come from various participants in the process (Hernández and Mendoza 2018).

Results and discussion

As for the results obtained in the category of play strategy, the teachers agree that it is a pedagogical tool for learning, which responds to all areas of child development, and they also mention how children enjoy playing.

The game is a tool that allows children to acquire all their learning because it is there where the child enjoys and where both the social and the emotional part can be strengthened. This is supported by what López y Delgado (2013), and Aypay (2016), have said that play is substantial for the integrality of learning, which occurs in social interactions, the basis for personality and the development of their potential, useful for their future lives.

"It is a novel tool that helps children to be autonomous at all times, helps learning without having to sit in chairs and make application sheets, helps to communicate, socialize, seeks to solve". (Fernandez, Molina and Oliveras, 2016)PAGE MISSING.

According to the above statement, it is not possible to expect children to learn in a passive condition, only as mere recipients, since play is an inherent principal tool for learning the curricular areas, benefiting and giving efficacy to

the teaching-learning process and facilitating the purposes established for teachers in their work.

Likewise, Carol Punza (the expert interviewed) maintains that play, at the initial level, is the essence; it is not possible to imagine classrooms where play is not developed; therefore, it is one of the principles of initial education; it is one of the strategies where the child develops the greatest amount of learning; therefore, play must be fundamental, as the axis of every strategy for the development of children's potential.

Hence the importance of linking the competencies established in the curriculum, the resources and spaces where children will play and, lastly, the accompaniment that makes it possible to record performances or productions in order to evaluate them and provide them with other learning opportunities.

This is alluded to by González, Solovieva and Quintanar (2014), who consider that the teacher is responsible for understanding what play is, its importance, its value, its benefits, the conditions it requires and relating it to the purposes established in a planning that is consistent with pedagogical practice and which demonstrates and promotes the active participation of children in the development of the play activity.

Likewise, Lucia Masías (interviewed expert) states that the theoretical foundations coincide in the importance of play. The child, when playing, uses the thought, emerging neurological connections. Playful activity is innate in early childhood; the child learns through play; it is a spontaneous activity and, through it, should generate new learning; it is important to create planned situations and to let children play freely.

Gallardo and Gallardo (2018) validate the above, since teachers need changes in their way of teaching, in playful scenarios that facilitate the acquisition of skills with a constructive quality, where teachers respond effectively to the main needs and interests of children, using meaningful strategies that allow them to have professionals who provide real learning.

Similarly, Tamayo and Restrepo (2017) relate play to learning because it is a playful strategy and an encouraging method that produces pleasure and emotion, with which children internalize disciplinary content with ease.

The teachers, knowing the importance of play within their pedagogical practice, recognize and assume responsibility for their professional difficulties; the teachers refer that the most complicated thing is the change in their practice, the children's reaction and whether there would really be results. The difficult thing is to break with the idea that children have to be the ones

who build their learning; teachers are only mediators,

In relation to the subcategory referring to materials, teachers consider non-structured materials to be important and, above all, those that are based on their natural context within children's play in order to facilitate the deployment of skills, imagination and creativity.

Materials within play are important because they enrich children's play, although children by their nature play and learn, run in the garden, count stones, collect leaves; children have unique imagination and creativity to play with; therefore, any material can be useful.

Materials must be novel whether they are structured or unstructured; they create while playing, the child has the ability to create, to imagine, etc. Not because they have a basket to play with, they have to keep elements as they can use it as a hat or a seat; with the boxes they can make their castles, among others.

This appreciation is related to contact with the natural elements of their environment, which provide experiences that involve all their senses, allowing direct contact with the physical world, learning through exploration and manipulation of objects (Bento and Días, 2017; James, Hess, Perkins, Taveras and Scirica, 2017; Wan and Zulkiflee, 2012).

With regard to the subcategory referring to spaces or contexts, the teachers agree that children prefer and enjoy open spaces in the open air since these allow children to enjoy and interact with their natural environment.

Children enjoy all environments, the context that attracts their attention, that is of their interest, but they enjoy the outdoors more, with nature, where there is sand, flowers, when the birds pass by; if they can have the opportunity to have an outdoor space, it should be used to the fullest.

For Moreno (2015), it is necessary to have a context with a favorable climate, with positive interactions, pleasant moments where the children can, naturally, play and, without realizing it, develop various skills; then the resources that accompany the game should be planned by a teacher who knows the characteristics of the children he serves, looking for the most appropriate ways for them to learn.

In relation to the subcategory related to accompaniment, the teachers express that accompaniment should provide physical and emotional proximity without invading the children's play. In addition to having a timely observation by the teacher to make decisions regarding the learning that children are developing at the time of playing.

Accompaniment is very important; the teacher's role is transcendental because she is

the one who must provide a welcoming and harmonious atmosphere with proximity to listen and be attentive to the children's needs, respecting their spaces and watching over their physical and emotional safety at all times. This accompaniment requires a lot of observation because at this time the potential of the children is unfolded as well as their difficulties; all of this allows for the recording and evaluation of their progress or needs at all times.

Pramling and Asplund (2008) point out that the teacher's intervention will be subordinated to the demands that children may make when playing; that is, it will depend on the context in which the child is; a teacher who accompanies guarantees the necessary conditions in all the areas she must attend to, assuming her role as mediator.

Children are often inhibited by the presence of an adult who overwhelms them or intervenes unnecessarily; therefore, children should be allowed to play freely because it gives them the opportunity to carry out activities that, perhaps, they have not dared to do before in class (Theobald, Danby, Einarsdottir and Bourne, 2015).

In the second category, Teaching Performance, aspects of improving their practice, the teachers, after having received the training, feel satisfied and satisfied with what they have received, have been applying it and agree with the achievements since the benefits are evident.

Training is the action aimed at increasing the skills and knowledge of the professional in order to prepare them for the work they do; it is a constant process within the training of any professional and even more so of those who teach due to the high demand of a globalized world and of knowledge; it is necessary that those in charge of teaching have the necessary tools to provide a quality education.

Teachers will no longer be seen as childcare workers as they demonstrate their professionalism in the classrooms where they accompany children in an appropriate manner and thus form future men and women of a 21st century society (Murray, 2018; Bryant, Bronwyn and Ewing, 2018).

Informants compare the before and after by applying the strategy of the game; they report that their practice has improved a great deal compared to their previous work; they are surprised by the favourable changes in their professional performance; they now feel that their children are learning, they see significant changes in both the process and the results.

In teacher training, awareness must be raised, with a view of uniqueness, to early childhood, taking into account the particularities of each child to learn and develop in learning

contexts. Teachers must focus their methodologies on the benefits of the children they serve (Martínez and Muñoz, 2015).

Conclusions

After having carried out a consensual analysis of the research process and its results, they lead us to establish that the game strategy category is conceived for teachers as an effective tool for the optimal and progressive development of learning; it respects children's maturing processes, strengthens their emotional state, guarantees cognitive function, encourages creativity and helps to guarantee quality education.

In this way, it is interpreted that the category exposed has a significant influence on the improvement of the pedagogical practice of the initial education teachers of the naval educational institution.

On the other hand, we can establish that the subcategory materials, is admitted for teachers as varied elements from structured, unstructured and the most significant, those of the own context or natural environment; all serve as instruments that contribute to the child's game, generating imagination, inquiry and key cognitive processes for learning.

In this way, it is interpreted that the subcategory materials have a significant influence on the improvement of the pedagogical practice of the teachers of the early education in the naval educational institution.

Likewise, the context subcategory is accepted for teachers as a space that provides the necessary conditions for positive interactions, dynamic play, deployment of skills and a favorable emotional environment for children. In this way, it is interpreted that this subcategory has a significant influence in the improvement of the pedagogical practice of the teachers of the naval educational institution.

Similarly, the subcategory accompaniment is for teachers a starting point for the detailed observation of a set of skills that are mobilized, which serve as a basis for planning that responds to the interests and characteristics of the children being served. In this way, this subcategory is interpreted as having a significant influence on improving the pedagogical practice of early education teachers in the naval educational institution.

Similarly, in the category of aspects of improving their practice, teachers state the benefits of applying this strategy and how their classroom performance has been strengthened, comparing the results of before and after training and feeling satisfied with the results. Thus, it is

interpreted that this category has a significant influence on improving the pedagogical practice of early childhood teachers in the naval educational institution.

Then, we can conclude that, after analyzing the two work categories plus its three subcategories based on interviews to teachers who received training in the game strategy, this tool allows and contributes to the improvement of the pedagogical practice of the teachers of early education of the naval educational institution. This way, it responds to our research problem.

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