



## **Playing and Its Importance in the Child Psychoanalytic Therapeutic Process**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors DP and EFK designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors JVP and TRA managed the analyses of the study. Author DNS managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

When it comes to playing, there is the impression that this is something recreational and fun; however, for psychology and psychoanalysis, this goes beyond recreational lines. Playing has a significant value in human development. This study sought to show the importance of playing in the child's life and in the therapeutic process from the perspective of the psychoanalyst. For psychoanalysis, playing is used as an instrument of evaluation and intervention, allowing the analyst to monitor the child's emotional development. We understand the child's playful activity as an expression of their desires, traumas and the elaboration of their conflicts.

*Keywords: Play; child development; psychoanalysis; psychoanalysis with children.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Playing is something observed in the lives of children from, virtually, every culture in the world. When talking about playing or toy, it is immediately associated with a playful activity of recreational sense, but for psychology, it goes beyond that [1].

Playing provides the child the development of various cognitive abilities, it is of fundamental importance in the process of language acquisition, in the process of symbolization, with its meanings and signifiers, allows the child's freedom to create. In general, the act of playing, plays a fundamental role in the development of the infant [2].

In the context of the child, in psychoanalysis clinic, play is used as an instrument of evaluation and intervention, allowing the analyst to monitor the child's emotional development [3].

The play has been the object of study of psychoanalysis and some authors, since the founder of Psychoanalysis, Freud, later Melaine Klein and Winnicott, among others, are concerned with analyzing children who make use of play. Faced with a theme so vast and important like playing, it becomes relevant to expand our knowledge about the theme by understanding its relevance to children's clinic and working with children's groups [4].

The objective of this work is to define the concept of playing, investigating its importance in human development, observing the place of playing in the psychoanalytic technique with children, after all: The child who does not play does not venture into something new, unknown. If, on the contrary, he or she can play, fantasize, dream, it is revealing to have accepted the challenge of growth, the possibility of making mistakes, of trying and risking progressing and evolving.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the literature review, which follows as search protocols in reliable databases, to ensure the rigor necessary for the identification of the theme and is used to guide the development of projects, indicating new questions for future investigations. For this work, the bibliographic search of indexed articles in Scielo, Pepsic, Google Scholar, and Web of Science.

The scientific databases were accessed during the first semester of 2020, having as inclusion

criteria scientific articles that addressed the theme of the importance of playing in child psychotherapy within the perspective of psychoanalysis.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When talking about playing, it is necessary to define its concept, differentiating it from other forms of behavior. A possible definition of the concept of playing is that it is characterized as a behavior that has an end in itself, that arises free, without a notion of obligation and is exercised by the simple pleasure that the child encounters when putting it into practice [5].

For Freud, the child playing creates a world of his own or rearranges the things of his world in a way that pleases him. [6] The child takes his game seriously and invests emotion in it. That is, for psychoanalysis the act of playing, represents a form of deep and comprehensive communication because the child makes the toy an instrument to manifest his affections, symbolize and elaborate his anxieties and reveal his inner reality.

Melanie Klein, one of the forerunners of child psychoanalysis, idealized the technique of analysis by playful activity. For her, the toy was the language of expression of the child. Play, the children's natural activity, was considered the expression of unconscious fantasy [7].

The theory of play developed by Winnicott starts from the consideration that play is primary, and not a product of the sublimation of instincts. It is a basic way of living, universal, and proper to health, which facilitates growth and leads to group relationships. Playing should be a creative experience. For Winnicott, playing is an indicator of baby health, development, and feeling of *being*. The pleasure in play is the guarantee of the health of those who play [8].

It can be said that Winnicott's play is situated between the two fields proposed by Freud related to the experience of individuals, a field that refers to the psychic, personal and internal experience of each one, and another that speaks of the external reality and socially shared. Winnicott speaks of an intermediate field, which makes the transition between the Freudian poles. He considers playing, as being a bridge between this internal psychic and external world of the subject [8].

As approached, in Klein theory playing is the natural means of self-expression of the child to

free themselves from their feelings and problems, in the same way, that in certain forms of therapy for adults the individual develops his difficulties by speaking [9].

Although the above authors highlight the importance of playing throughout their works, it can be observed in their texts divergences in the way they perceive play. What Winnicott proposes is something different, he looks at playing itself as an object of study, on the other hand, Klein and Freud see the act of play as a form of communication extremely important for the session with children [10].

According to Winnicott, play begins in the mother-baby relationship, when the mother makes concrete what the baby is ready to find. This complex process is highly dependent on the mother or maternal figure. The importance of this is the fact that the baby develops the ability to trust the mother, and consequently, in the other people around him [8].

Another very important point, within the theory of child development elaborated by Winnicott and which is also related to playing, is the question of *the self*. The theoretician reports that it is in playing, and only in playing, that the individual child or adult, can be creative and use his integral personality, and it is only by being creative that the individual discovers the self [8].

The play takes place in that middle zone between me and non-me, that is, between the inner world of the baby and the external world, between the individual and the environment. This is where the creative experience needed for self-structuring takes place. Thus, it is understood that both play and creativity are at the basis of the psychic process that structures the *self* [11].

It can be said that the tranquility that is born from the experiences of trust is the basis for the creative activity that manifests itself in play. The sum of these many experiences of relaxation and creation is that they allow the formation of a true feeling of *self*. It is in play and perhaps only in play that the child and adult experience enough freedom to create and create themselves [12].

Both Klein and Winnicott and Freud believe that it is by playing, symbolizing, speaking, and representing the contents that disturb her, that children reveal and can elaborate traumatic moment that occurred during their development. Winnicott confirms this when he reveals that it is

easy to realize that children play for pleasure, but it is much more difficult for people to see that children play to master anguish, control ideas or impulses that lead to anguish if they are not dominated.

Freud states that in his play, children repeat everything that made a great impression for them in real life. [6] Thus, the function of playing can also resignify traumatic, conflicting and difficult experiences. When the child performs a playful activity, a cathartic movement begins, that enables the process of elaboration of the situation that was once experienced unpleasantly and painfully. Ludotherapy allows access to unconscious childhood fantasies, helps in the elaboration of anguish in the face of their loss and provides the child with knowledge of their internal and psychic reality.

The variety of emotional situations that can be expressed through playful activities is unlimited: for example, feeling of frustration and being rejected; jealousy of the father and mother; aggressiveness; pleasure; anxiety, guilt, and pressing need to make reparation. In the child's play, we also find the repetition of experiences and real details of everyday life, often intertwined with their fantasies [13].

According to the authors, [4] regarding clinical care, M. Klein noticed that children's games, their stories and scenarios they invent, the drawings they make, everything could be seen and heard as if it were the adult is talking. He proposed that as long as we can speak to the child in his language and in an understandable way, the interpretations given to them can produce a profound effect on his psyche, providing significant improvement in his social, emotional, and intellectual life.

Similarly, playing allows the child to express their trauma, conflict or prevalent problem experienced. The design made by the child and the toy are subjective creations that are based on the ability to repair. In this way, the communication of the child happens through the symbolic and the playful.

Playful activities represent the fantasies, desires, and experiences lived in childhood, thus, becoming an instrument for the child to expose situations or experiences that afflict them. Play can be used therapeutically because it facilitates the expression of the child is psychic reality.

Klein considered that, just as the associations with the elements of the adult dream led to the

discovery of the content latent (unconscious), the same occurred concerning children's games. Analyzing the play with the dream model, it was possible to reach the heart of the unconscious fantasy. [14] As in the analysis of adults, children's games can lead us to know the latent meanings, and establish correlations with situations experienced or imagined by them, providing the child with the possibility of elaborating such situations. The analysis would then help the child to resolve fixations and correct evolutionary errors that would be prevented or disturbing their development.

The goal is for the child to achieve, through playing in the analysis and its interpretations, the mastery of anguish that afflicts him, which robs him of most of his psychic energy and causes him suffering. When playing, even the very small child will try to overcome unpleasant experiences. [15] By playing the child not only overcomes the painful reality, but the toy helps him to master instinctive fears and internal dangers, by the projection of these in the outside world. The child can move the intrapsychic processes abroad.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In this bibliographic article, about the theory of playing with a psychoanalytic approach, the objective was to highlight the importance of playing in child development and the importance of the this act as an instrument in the analytical *setting* with children.

It was found that playing is an act of paramount importance in human development, and with this is observed unanimously in the work of all the theorists researched, because these reveal the importance of the act for the child whatever their culture.

Play began to be a psychic representative of the inner processes: if the child does not play, it is a sign that something goes wrong in the course of their development. Not playing is a cry for help on the part of the child, indicates psychic suffering.

If the patient cannot play, the analyst's job is to help him get out of this impossibility to the situation of what he plays. If the analyst himself cannot play in this process, in this case, it simply does not serve the craft, because, in the psychoanalytic treatment, it is not only a child's play, but a fun for two in which the analyst enters the transfer process, joining the children in the games, but keeping a look and analytical listening.

The child who plays, is the child who had a good elaboration of the potential space with his mother, is the child who learned to be alone, is the child who elaborated his capacity for creativity, that is, is a healthy child. Compulsive play, repeated play, or the exaggerated search for pleasure in play, evidence the threat of an excess of anguish, also indicating psychic suffering.

Those who observe child behavior will agree that play manifests itself in various forms: slipping, climbing obstacles, jumping, kicking a ball, handling toys, imitating adults, manipulating sand, modeling, etc. Laughter or smile, contentment, as well as concentration, effort, seriousness, and even moderate tension can be revealed in the physiognomic expression of the child while playing; each detail of the behavior, such as changes in posture or facial expression, can give a clue about what is going on in the child's mind, possibly in connection with what the analyst heard from parents about their difficulties.

Playing and creating is, above all, a way for the analyst to behave in front of his patient, hoping that he can play and create with and through his pathology, learn with it. The analyst accepts the pathology, accepts chaos, and patiently expects creative play. He does not seek coherence where it does not exist, he does not organize hastily. The unprotected experience of the session, thought close to playing, promotes the encounter of the other and promotes the encounter of oneself, of the true *self*, in the expression win nicottiana.

#### **CONSENT**

It is not applicable.

#### **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

It is not applicable.

#### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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