

**CREATION AND IMAGINATION: A CLAY MODELING AND THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROCESS UNDER THE VIEW OF HISTORICAL-CULTURAL THEORY**

***CRIAÇÃO E IMAGINAÇÃO: A MODELAGEM EM ARGILA E O PROCESSO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO INFANTIL SOB O OLHAR DA TEORIA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL***

***CREACIÓN E IMAGINACIÓN: EL MODELADO DE ARCILLA Y EL PROCESO DE DESARROLLO INFANTIL BAJO LA PERSPECTIVA DE LA TEORÍA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL***



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**ABSTRACT:** The present study emerged from discussions about the formation of children with the purpose of analyzing the process of creation and imagination in childhood using clay modeling as an important activity in child development. The theme becomes relevant to expand the child's cultural repertoire, as well as to increase the abilities to create and to imagine, typically human characteristics, which need to be stimulated for the formation of consciousness. The analysis is based on the critical dialectical method and on the Historical Cultural Theory, with a view to highlighting the role of imagination in the formation of superiors' psychological functions. The results revealed that working with clay in Early Childhood Education allows the child to move from the concrete material to more abstract representations of objective reality. Therefore, the transforming act performed in the art activity enables the child to actively participate in the human action in the relationship established with nature.

**KEYWORDS:** Education. Child development. Imagination and creation. Art.

**RESUMO:** O presente estudo emergiu das discussões acerca da formação da criança com a finalidade de analisar o processo de criação e imaginação na infância a partir da modelagem em argila enquanto atividade importante no desenvolvimento infantil. A temática torna-se relevante para ampliar o repertório cultural da criança, bem como aumentar as capacidades de criar e imaginar, características tipicamente humanas, as quais necessitam ser estimuladas para a formação da consciência. A análise subsidia-se no método crítico dialético e na Teoria Histórico-Cultural, com vistas a ressaltar o papel da imaginação na formação das funções psíquicas superiores. Os resultados revelaram que o trabalho com a argila na Educação Infantil permite a criança transitar da concretude do material às representações mais abstratas da realidade objetiva. Portanto, o ato transformador realizado na atividade com a arte possibilita à criança participar ativamente da ação humana na relação que estabelece com a natureza.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação. Desenvolvimento infantil. Imaginação e criação. Arte.

**RESUMEN:** El presente estudio surgió de discusiones sobre la formación de los niños con el propósito de analizar el proceso de creación e imaginación en la infancia utilizando el modelado con arcilla como una actividad importante en el desarrollo infantil. El tema cobra relevancia para ampliar el repertorio cultural del niño, así como para incrementar las habilidades para crear e imaginar, características tipicamente humanas, que necesitan ser estimuladas para la formación de la conciencia. El análisis se basa en el método dialéctico crítico y en la Teoría Histórica Cultural, con el fin de resaltar el papel de la imaginación en la formación de las funciones psicológicas superiores. Los resultados revelaron que trabajar con arcilla en Educación Infantil permite al niño pasar del material concreto a representaciones más abstractas de la realidad objetiva. Por tanto, el acto transformador realizado en la actividad artística habilita al niño a participar activamente en la acción humana en la relación que se establece con la naturaleza.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación. Desarrollo infantil. Imaginación y creación. Arte.

## Introduction

The unveiling of the world is conceived by the child gradually, always starting from its main characteristic, the social. Thus, with the help of socially established signs and instruments, the child internalizes the forms, meanings, and uses of objects. During childhood everything is as new and the universe unfolds in its incredible extension of possibilities.

The creative act is that which differentiates the human being from other species, manifesting itself towards the production of senses and meanings. The imaginative and creative processes in childhood are developed from the established social relationships and from the experiences of playing, because during play the child transits from the concreteness of the material world to more abstract elaborations of reality. This intrinsic relation between the concrete and the abstract becomes more elaborated by the child during its humanization process, making that "[...] the creation of an imaginary situation is not [something] fortuitous in the child's life; on the contrary, it is the first manifestation of the child's emancipation from situational restrictions" (VIGOTSKY, 1998, p. 66, our translation).

The awareness of social relations that surround it, as well as the signifiers and meanings brought culturally, enable the awakening of humanity contained in childhood potency, and Art, in turn, allows the being to actively develop their imagination, constructively, beyond the territory demarcated from everyday immediacy and more rigid social productions, thus deconstructing socially pre-established standards, such as sculpture can create unconventional forms of body representation that differ from the models presented in the media.

The main goal of the work is to discuss about the relationship between art, imagination and creation in the educational process, highlighting the importance of making art in the educational context with clay. To do so, we anchored on the assumptions of the dialectical critical method, of the Historical-Cultural Theory, and of Critical Historical Pedagogy, since such approach subsidizes the mobilization of analysis and reflection about the quality of the experiences lived by human beings.

Moreover, clay is highlighted among the various resources that can be used in the artistic practice in the classroom, as an element to stimulate imagination and creation, not only for its malleability and plasticity, but mainly because it is a non-synthetic material and of unconventional use with children in kindergarten. Clay modeling is able to reinforce the ability of human beings to transform matter, leading children to develop their potential as imaginative and creative agents.

In order to guarantee more depth and specificity to this theme, we will initially approach some aspects about creation and imagination under the viewpoint of cultural-historical psychology for the development of the child, followed by explanations about the mediating role of the teacher in the learning process and child development. Here we understand the stage of Early Childhood Education as a phase with a potential for enchantment, the foundation for all experiences. It is necessary to keep in mind that this stage is not a preparatory period, but rather an extremely important moment in human life, marked by several singularities and needs.

Thinking of the child as a social subject who builds multiple views of reality, and who is inscribed in a certain context, the educational process becomes a generator of possibilities for investigation and learning, in which the production of meaning can be enhanced. The expansion of a more conscious pedagogical practice enables an intensification of sensations, perception of the world, feelings, integration with oneself and with others. Subsequently, explanations are given for the suggestion of activities with clay modeling to stimulate the creation and imagination of children through the mediation of the teacher, considering the school space as one of the responsible for promoting the mediation between everyday life and human creative activity in its most elaborate forms.

## Creation and imagination from a historical-cultural perspective

Uninventing objects. The comb, for example. Give the comb functions of not combing. Until it becomes available to be a begonia. Or a *gravanha*. To use some words that still have no language.

Manoel de Barros – Uma didática da Invenção (BARROS, 2010, our translation).

In his poetic way of expressing himself, the writer Manoel de Barros talks about "uninventing", which would be nothing more and nothing less than creating new possibilities from something that is already there. When we think about creation, we automatically make connections with great achievements of science and technology, forgetting perhaps the richest "uninventing" or even "subverting" daily proposed by children in their games and activities. And it is on this enriched process of children's creation that this work will focus.

Beyond the structural differences of the body, man and animal have a categorical distinction between one and the other, this would be the ability to imagine. Karl Marx (2013), when composing an analysis of civil society in the face of the capitalist production system,

defines work as the process in which man infers transformations to nature, given the inability to adapt to the conditions posed by the environment in its original format,

[...] In order to appropriate natural matter in a form useful for his own life, he sets in motion the natural forces belonging to his corporeality: his arms and legs, head and hands. By acting on external nature and modifying it through this movement, he modifies his own nature at the same time (MARX, 2013, p. 326-327, our translation).

The activity of work performed by man has a uniqueness proper to the human being, the teleological capacity, to anticipate the result in the mental field before the material field, as exemplified by Pederiva *et al.* (2020, p. 11, our translation):

[...] A non-human animal could never imagine being something else or imagine a life of which it does not experience or conceive a body other than the one it has been genetically constituted. The human body is only capable of many things in culture.

Therefore, the act of imagining is a specific characteristic of man in his social relationship with himself, with others, and with his environment. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (2009) promotes a discussion about the processes of imagination and creation in human development, starting from the social and historical premise of humanization constitution, in which he clarifies a trajectory to understand these two interconnected topics. By creative activity he states that it is all "[...] that in which something new is created. It matters little whether what is created is some object of the external world or a construction of the mind or feeling, known only to the person in whom this construction dwells and manifests itself." (VIGOTSKI, 2009, p. 11, our translation). That said, it is necessary to establish a problematization with the idea of associating the act of creating with great productions, limited only to specific sectors of human life, which "[...] is equivalent to saying that the imaginary activity precedes any other form of human activity of creative nature; which allows us to state that, ultimately, the imaginary is what defines the human condition of man" (PINO, 2006, p. 49, our translation). Man is capable of, using his creative capacity, thus conceiving a symbolic and meaningful universe, because "[...] creating is a necessity of human existence. Everything that exceeds the routine framework and contains something new, however small it may be, is related, by its origin, to the creative process" (PINO, 2006, p. 56, our translation).

Imagination is a necessary condition for human humanization; however, it is not an instinctive act, it is directly linked to the social and historical reality of human beings, therefore, it is a social construct that needs to be fostered and developed. One cannot, for example,

adjectivize creative and non-creative people before analyzing whether the environment in which they act has allowed them to have contact with qualitative possibilities to explore their imagination, as Vygotsky explains (2009, p. 22, our translation):

The creative activity of the imagination depends directly on the richness and diversity of the person's previous experience, because this experience constitutes the material with which the constructs of fantasy are created. The richer the person's experience, the more material is available to his imagination. This is why the child's imagination is poorer than the adult's, which is explained by the greater poverty of their experience.

The process of imagination and creation is not spontaneously realized or completed in any of the stages of human life. In childhood, children have more freedom to express themselves: not being conditioned to social laws, the little ones do not yet have chains regarding their behavior, and imagination, if fed with rich experiences, becomes a space, as Girardello characterizes (2011, p. 76, our translation):

[...] of freedom and taking off toward the possible, whether achievable or not. The child's imagination moves along - is moved - with the new that he sees everywhere in the world. Sensitive to the new, imagination is also a dimension in which the child glimpses new things, senses or sketches possible futures.

The human exercise of imagining, as Vigotski (2009) postulates, is a complex mechanism, which causes interpretative misunderstandings about its conception; the author also stresses the need to consider the internal and external impressions of children, "[...] what the child sees and hears, in this way, are the first points of support for his future creation. He accumulates material on the basis of which, later on, his fantasy will be built" (VIGOTSKI, 2009, p. 36, our translation).

By emphasizing the importance of the social environment in this process, it is understood that creativity requires previous knowledge that is (re)elaborated, originating a new psychic production, since the more qualified are the experiences lived and the stimuli received, the better will be its creative power, its intellectual and emotional aspect, culminating in a formation rich in possibilities.

Leontiev (1978, p. 89, our translation), in line with Vygotsky's studies, has as his central idea the social-historical defense of human development. For the author, "[...] the social conditions of existence of men develop by qualitative and not only quantitative modifications." In the same way, he examines the formation of the human psyche, valuing the relations established through the social.

It is only through the objectively developed richness of the human being that the richness of human objective sensibility is partly cultivated and partly created (that an ear becomes musical, that an eye perceives the beauty of form, in short, that the senses become senses and assert themselves as man's essential faculties (LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 167, our translation).

However, recognizing the valorization of social processes, it is necessary to consider the context of the current society, in which capitalism reigns as the prevailing system of production, whose pillar is the valorization of private property, through a distorted and alienated conception of labor, which in this format becomes an ally of exploitation of the economically disadvantaged class, which produces wealth for the so-called "dominant class", causing an economic antagonism.

[...] the working class remains "poor," but is now "less poor" in proportion as it produces an "intoxicating increase of wealth and power" for the owning class, this means that, in relative terms, it remains as poor as before. If the extremes of poverty have not decreased, they have increased, since the extremes of wealth have increased (MARX, 2013, p. 884, our translation).

Absent in animals, the ability to create and imagine is a human faculty, which should be stimulated from childhood, so the child needs to have at its disposal cultural elements that contribute effectively to boost their imagination. However, it is necessary to consider the social stratification characterized by an unequal context in which not all people have the same opportunities to have contact with the maximum human cultural productions, such as museums, cinemas, theaters, musical concerts, and literary productions, among others. For this reason, we must also consider the socioeconomic factor as an excluding element when it comes to limiting access to cultural goods that foster creation and imagination in children's lives.

Moreover, the availability of elements that enable the enrichment of the creative repertoire in children is not equivalent to intuitive or solitary processes; it is essential to interpret it as a mediated activity that needs the other to happen. That said, and based on an unequal society, it is understood the role of the school and the teacher as a mediator in the condition of making possible the contact with the productions most developed by the human being. Considering these statements, the next topic will cover the implications inserted in the teaching action regarding the child development, especially regarding the mediating role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process in Early Childhood Education.

## The mediating role of the teacher in the learning process and child development

At birth, the child is a totally helpless being, unable to survive without adults providing the necessary care for a healthy life. In this respect, according to Vigotsky's studies (1996), in the first year of a baby's life there is a totally peculiar process of socialization, as a result of an original social situation of development, determined by two crucial moments. The first of them consists in a set of particularities of the baby, which is defined as a total biological inability. The baby, being unable to satisfy his vital needs, needs another to meet them, which can only be met with the help of an adult. "Therefore, the baby's relationship with the surrounding reality is social from the beginning. From this point of view, we can define the baby as a *maximally social being*" (VIGOTSKI, 1996, p. 284, emphasis added, our translation).

The second fundamental moment in the life of the being who begins his experiences in the human world and which characterizes his social situation of development is that however completely dependent the baby is on the adult; he lacks the essential means of social communication in the form of human language. "The organization of his life forces him to maintain maximum communication with adults, but this is communication without words" (VIGOTSKY, 1996, p. 286, our translation).

In view of this, it is clearly noticeable that from the moment of birth, the human being needs to relate to the other in order to appropriate social meanings and insert himself in the world as a subject, since the interaction that the child establishes with the adult has a categorical role in his development. "Adults will perform the work of first insertion in the culture of this being [...] who has [...] throughout his life, the challenge of fully developing as a human individuality" (DUARTE, 2013, p. 64, our translation).

In the words of Leontiev (1978, p. 201, emphasis added, our translation), "[...] man is a being of *social* nature, [...] everything that is human in him comes from his life in *society*, within the *culture* created by humanity. This means that the humanity of the being is developed along the process of appropriation of the culture that the new generations encounter at birth, mediated by the other. Without the relationship with other men, it is impossible for the subject to internalize the cultural elements and develop as a being endowed with the truly human characteristics consolidated throughout history. With this, we are social beings, formatted by sociability.

Saviani (2013, p. 07, our translation) elucidates that incorporating the culture historically developed by humanity implies the educational work, while man does not become



man naturally, "[...] he is not born knowing how to be man", it is necessary that this is learned. To become a subject in the world, it is not enough to be in the world, it is not enough to be born and simply live in society, to have only immediate contact with the objects of culture.

About this, Leontiev (1978, p. 272, emphasis added, our translation) clarifies that

[...] The acquisitions of the historical development of human aptitudes are not simply *given* to men in the objective phenomena of material and spiritual culture which embody them, but are only *put* there. In order to appropriate these results, to make them his aptitudes, "the organs of his individuality," the child, the human being, must enter into relation with the phenomena of the surrounding world through other men, that is, in a process of communication with them. In this way, the child *learns* the appropriate activity. By its function, this process is therefore a process of *education*.

To humanize oneself means to include oneself in history, and for this, education is essential in the socialization of material and symbolic culture through the relationships established among men and in educational relationships in the context of the school, which can enable actions that favor quality teaching and learning in the dialectical dynamic.

Therefore, we are not talking about the education received from parents - of course this is not considered less important, but about that systematized education, i.e., organized in an intentional way to enable the subject to have contact with the most elaborate knowledge that humanity has ever produced: the knowledge of science. Such knowledge is not found in the everyday life of men, but there is a specific place through which we can have access to it: the school. This is the specific instance of systematized education, because its function is the "[...] socialization of knowledge historically produced in view of the maximum humanization of individuals" (MARTINS, 2004, p. 65, our translation).

It is in the school institution that the world begins to broaden for the child. Through the intentional work of teachers, children begin their contact with more elaborate culture, appropriating human objectifications and incorporating them into their consciousness. By appropriating more elaborated knowledge, the child learns, and by learning he develops his specifically human psychic capacities. Therefore, the school has a fundamental role from the earliest age to produce humanity in the subjects.

The environment is modified by education, which makes it peculiar to the child at each stage of his growth: in early childhood, the nursery school; at pre-school age, the kindergarten; at school, the school. Each age has its own environment, organized for the child in such a way that the environment, in the purely external sense of that word, changes for the child with each change of age (VIGOTSKY, 2010, p. 683, our translation).

In his studies on higher psychological functions, Vigotsky (2010) made it evident that for the full development of these psychological capacities, the role of the environment is crucial, because for this author, the environment in which the individual lives influences the constitution of his personality, because the more the child experiences spaces rich in stimuli, the better he will develop. In this sense, the school is considered as a privileged locus of possibilities for learning and human qualification, and the teacher as the mediating adult who dominates the elaborated knowledge, capable of organizing the educational work and disseminating it to the children.

Therefore, the teacher is seen as the professional who possesses expertise, since he/she needs to have the synthesis of the theoretical foundations of his/her work, the knowledge of school knowledge, that is, the contents, the ways of teaching this knowledge, as well as the strategies and means necessary to promote children's learning. In this way, educational work is an activity intentionally directed towards ends. For Mello (2009), the teacher is the intellectual whose unique function is to present to new generations the social culture historically produced and accumulated. Thus, it should be noted that the teacher's work at school requires an activity with goals to be achieved with regard to child development.

This means that the teacher's work, i.e., his or her teaching activity, should be purpose-oriented, and this implies the intentional organization of the content to be socialized, as well as the most effective strategies to boost the child's learning, thus developing the formation of new skills and new intellectual functions. It is not enough for the teacher to dedicate only the basic care to the child, such as sleep, food, hygiene, among others, as it commonly happens in spaces of Early Childhood Education. We still see pedagogical practices that are ends in themselves, empty of objectives, with children who remain in these places only to be cared for while their parents work.

Considering that from the studies of the Historical - Cultural Theory every human activity implies an end, it is up to the teacher, in his/her main teaching activity, to plan his/her actions aiming at the transformation of the subjects involved in the learning process. According to Vázquez (1977, p. 187, our translation), "[...] the activity properly human is only verified when the acts directed to an object to transform it start with an ideal result [...] and end with an effective, real result or product". Thus, the teacher will fulfill his role as a knowledge mediator if he is doing pedagogical work aimed at transforming the child's individuality, subjectivity, and personality. In other words, the teacher will only be teaching if he or she organizes his or

her actions to promote learning. Much more than a caregiver, this professional should act proposing situations that stimulate the development of the child's biopsychosocial aspects.

It is a *sine qua non* condition that the teacher is the most psychically developed peer to transmit the most elaborated scientific, philosophical, artistic, etc. knowledge to the children. To be a mediator in the process of appropriation of knowledge by individuals is to consolidate oneself as a professional who holds the most elaborate synthesis of knowledge possible. Thus, the more he is prepared to disseminate knowledge and culture, the more and better the child will learn and develop his psychic capacities. Therefore, according to Vygotsky's thought, "The teacher must know a lot. He must master the object he teaches. The teacher must drink from an abundant fountain" (VIGOTSKY, 2001, p. 451, our translation).

For Leontiev (1978), the teacher should not limit himself to follow or monitor the spontaneous development of the child, but, on the contrary, based on his theoretical knowledge about child psychism and teaching method, he should direct, control this whole process, while being able to establish appropriate pedagogical goals and objectives and organize activities that foster the full development of the child in all aspects of life: cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, among others. Thus, in periods of rupture and qualitative leap in development, it is essential that the teacher presents new tasks that correspond to the subject's changing potentialities and to its new perception of reality. According to Saviani's thought (1997, p. 140, our translation):

[...] it is imperative that the teacher systematically produces knowledge in advance so that he/she can deliberately and systematically develop the process of knowledge production in the students.

Given the above, the teacher as a mediator in the learning process and child development, demands to have the ability to present the richest and most elaborate experiences to children in the process of child development. In this sense, we can ask: Why not offer the most elaborate forms of human culture and its artistic manifestations (painting, dance, theater) to children from the earliest age?

According to Duarte (2013, p. 67, our translation), at school, the child may have contact with the richness of human experiences expressed through Art. Now, this expresses that everyday life will hardly bring these artistic elaborations to the individual's life. "No matter how rich a person's everyday life is, it will never have the wealth accumulated by the history of humanity." Therefore, "[...] to know the most elaborate as a form of expression of others, as an alert for new inventions" (MELLO, 2009, p. 374, our translation), should constitute an

indispensable element that the teacher needs to contemplate in his pedagogical work in favor of a truly humanizing education.

### **Between content and form: modeling with clay**

Considering the necessary value of creation and imagination in childhood as fundamental elements for the full development of the child, as well as the fundamental mediating role of the teacher in this process, it is pertinent to present and substantiate a proposal for an activity that can be developed with the little ones to stimulate the creative imagination, which according to Vigotsky (1990) is an activity of dissociation and association, the process of isolating and classifying characteristics of different objects, as well as combining and changing these characteristics in order to develop other objects.

In fact, activities focused on creation and imagination are usually linked to primitive forms of toys, or even earth, water, dry branches, that is, everything that can be used by the child with a function different from the one developed with social meaning, because "[...] everything that surrounds us has been created by man's hands, all kinds of culture, [...] everything is the product of imagination" (VIGOTSKY, 1990, p. 10, our translation). So why deny the little ones the right to create? Why deny the child's right to subvert the social meaning of objects by giving them the possibility to create with their own meaning until they reach the most socially elaborated forms?

It is, therefore, in view of the above, that we list the modeling with clay as a possible activity to provide children imaginative and creative situations, since "[...] the versatility of ceramics is directly linked to the versatility of man himself", so much so that "since the beginning it was used for making decorative and utilitarian objects. [It is one of the great arts of civilization" (GABBAL, 1987, p. 8, our translation).

The development of the use of pottery as one of the great arts since the most remote civilizations is due to the accessibility of the material, for being easily found and low cost. Moreover, the plasticity of clay allowed different techniques to be developed and perfected by mankind, as well as the range of uses for this raw material. Therefore, it can be said that man has historically appropriated this and other natural resources and transformed them, producing objectifications.

According to Dalglish (2006, p. 21, our translation), the relationship of mankind with ceramics is so intimate and has allowed for so many manifestations of man's creative potential

that "[...] the history of mankind can be told through the history of ceramics, extinct cultures can be known through works made of clay and left by them". It is thus observed that the symbolic charge contained in this material and the huge compendium of techniques available in the handling of clay constitute extremely significant knowledge and practices, especially when it comes to young children who need qualified appropriations for their full development.

Thus, taking into account the deep relationship of mankind with this material, we consider its pedagogical and cultural potential for the qualitative development of the most different creative potentialities of the child, since besides its expressive presence in human productions gathered in the most different cultures and historical periods, this material has much to contribute to the development of children's motor skills, as well as it acts directly in the promotion of the subject's imaginative processes, since its plastic possibilities are more varied, since this material transits in different physical states, including through extremely stimulating transformative processes: curiosity and creativity. Moreover, this practice in the pedagogical context favors the art-education relation, because, according to Brazil (1998, p. 87, our translation), the activities related to the Arts are sometimes despised in the pedagogical context, "[...] understood only as mere hobbies in which activities of drawing, pasting, painting and modeling with clay or dough are devoid of meaning". It is necessary, therefore, to give meaning to such practices for children, especially in Early Childhood Education, through the intentionality, which is only effective through teacher qualification and didactic planning.

Nevertheless, it is also essential to consider that by manipulating clay or even modeling clay, different stimuli are evoked in the child, especially the imagination, the construction of new possibilities of action and ways to organize elements of the environment, thus favoring their social interaction, because such symbolic representations help to express how they see the current reality and the elements that compose it.

Ostetto and Leite (2004, p. 33, our translation) reveal that, "[...] by recording the lived/imagined experiences, they leave their passage marked, the way they think and how they are at that moment. What privileges is the path and not its point of arrival". Consequently, when this child produces, in a free way, he is building, in himself, security, proving to himself that he is capable of creating, combining, exploring and imagining. In the same sense, Lemos and Zamperetti (2015, p. 5, our translation), point out that

[...] clay provides, in the direct work with its mass, the conditions to dominate materiality, since it is a living material, which by itself has an action that leads to equilibrium. Kneading the earth and shaping it are primitive gestures, which considerably influence the coordination of all movements.

It is verified through the placement of Lemos and Zamperetti (2015), that through the work performed with clay it is possible to mobilize the totality of the child being, which, driven by the pleasure acquired in the activity, is led to develop in its physicality, gaining expressive control of its movement, touching its subjectivity concomitantly. Therefore, a subject who coordinates his expression in materiality is also capable of acting in the field of his psyche and affectivity, choosing among the multiple possibilities of expression those he considers most adequate. That is, by conquering gestural and subjective autonomy, while modeling clay the child learns to create and recreate itself. For, just as he observes the concrete transformations produced by his will, he can also direct this same force inside himself, conquering self-control of his behavior. Through artistic activity, one humanizes oneself, one acquires an intentional character, one abandons the purely instinctive nature to weave symbolic subjectivities.

Still regarding the humanizing powers of working with clay, Gabbai (1987, p. 15, our translation) states that modeling "[...] allows us to express our thoughts without having to express words: movement, shape, volume, and gesture carry the living language of the inner world, reflecting character and temperament with strong impressions of personality". Thus, we highlight the relevance of working with clay also from the point of view of exploring the material, the creative process, motor development, the possibility of associating the practice with the historical concepts that involve the material, and the expansion of the referential with this element of art and human history.

Moreover, unlike its synthetic counterparts, clay allows a three-dimensional and durable work of creation, besides being aesthetically more interesting, once the burning is done, it becomes more resistant, can be exposed and admired by other subjects, arousing in its creator different feelings characteristic of creating and socializing, by allowing the child to go from the concreteness of the material to the abstraction in the creation of idealized forms, which are being transformed with the fluidity of the material. It is possible to state, therefore, that the work of modeling clay by children allows, among other things, to express the transforming potential of man over matter, bringing to the surface the subject child, as well as his bodily and spatial perceptions of himself, of objects, of the concrete as a whole.

## Final remarks

Given the above, we emphasize the importance of stimulating imagination in childhood as a potential developer of the child's higher psychic capacities. Moreover, the imaginative process acts by expanding and enriching the subjectivity of the subject, providing greater freedom from situational limitations, being able to conceive within oneself more qualified ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting in the world. This increase in human psychic capacities to subjectivize the real, going beyond the barriers of concreteness, allows innovations to be conceived, because it is precisely through the possibility of playing with reality in the virtuality of thought that it becomes possible to resize and re-signify the elements present in human daily life and thus overcome it.

When this imaginative process is intentionally stimulated at school, the subject's possibilities of existence and action are infinitely expanded, since it is through the subjectivity of the psychically qualified adult that the child can access and come to understand the different forms and contents available to its appropriation and that can be arranged in the realization of its creations.

Thus, the artistic universe emerges as a framework of knowledge, practices, and reflections that broaden the limits of sensitive and subjective perception. Thus, we highlight the fundamental role of art for education as an element that expands, quantitatively and qualitatively, the perception of life in its material and immaterial aspects, allowing the exploration of meaning and significance through the experimentation of several available materials. In art, it is through the deep excavation of matter that we find the sublimation of meanings and the re-signification of everyday life. By creating, human beings make it possible for their imagination to materialize and transform itself before the unfolding of the material world. This dialog between man and nature allows a series of reflexive processes and the sensitive achievement of new perceptions.

Moreover, artistic productions have a subversive character to normality and the repetition of socially imposed standards, which enables the subject to enter new perspectives on being, and acting in the world. This critical and innovative way of relating to the human cultural universe allows the reflexive development of perception, acting equally in the opening of the being to the new and to the acceptance of that which is different from convention.

Modeling with clay, on the other hand, mobilizes the child's body and subjectivity, involving her as a whole in the production process, which promotes an integration of the child's being in her activity.

Clay presents itself, finally, as an ideal material for children's learning. Essentially because of its symbolic charge, radical from the origins of humanity. The practice of pottery is a way of doing that goes back to something deeply human and primitive, because it communicates with the primordial roots of becoming human. When the child has access to this millennial technique of creating through clay, he realizes with his hands the transforming essence of humanity that, interacting with nature, modifies it, recreating the world and themselves.

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**Authors's contributions:** *Marta Silene Ferreira Barros*, who dedicates her studies about human development, addressed the basic foundations of the dialectical critical method and the Historical-Cultural Theory articulating them to the impacts of Art for the appropriation of the cultural repertoire of the human gender by the child and for the development of higher psychic functions. It dialogued with primary and secondary authors of both theories - philosophical and psychic - on the development of the higher psychic functions. *Dayanne Vicentini*, which has as object of study the teacher training for learning and child development, brought to the article, fundamental discussions emphasizing the mediating function of the professional in order to enhance the maximum access of children to the elaborated culture and specifically, to the artistic knowledge. It dialogued with authors who have teacher training as an object of study based on the Historical-Cultural Theory and Critical Historical Pedagogy. *Ana Letícia Ferreira* and *Maira Dellazeri Cortez* whose object of study is Art in the learning and development of young children, brought possibilities of working with clay as an artistic instrument capable of developing psychic functions linked to creativity and imagination, which contribute to the formative process of the subject. They started from the dialogue between authors from the educational area and the Plastic Arts. *Natália Navarro Garcia*, based on the foundations of the Historical-Cultural Theory, addressed the process of humanization of the child, specifically highlighting the role of creation and imagination in the development of higher psychic functions, as well as the importance of schools of Early Childhood Education in the formative process of the subject.

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