

Research Articles

Exploration strategy for strengthening motor skills in Transitional Grade Children at the Rural Educational Center El Paulón in Bucaramanga-Colombia: “Lupita la hormiguita”

Estrategia de exploración para el fortalecimiento de las habilidades motrices en niños del grado Transición del Centro Educativo Rural El Paulón de Bucaramanga-Colombia: “Lupita la hormiguita”

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Abstract

Exploration processes as an educational experience enable a stronger interrelation and connection between the learner and their surrounding environment. This article aims to use these processes to strengthen the motor skills of children in the kindergarten at the Rural Educational Center El Paulón in Bucaramanga, Colombia, through the pedagogical strategy “Lupita la hormiguita”. This strategy results from a participatory curricular development involving the teacher and her students. This research is part of the National ONDAS Early Childhood Project, which seeks to systematize various significant pedagogical experiences in preschool education in Colombia. Consequently, this work employs the cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection from participatory action research. This approach facilitated the development of the curricular strategy presented here, which aims to enhance the motor skills of the participating children by leveraging exploration processes such as observing, discovering, experimenting, and ideating-developing, thereby making the students’ relationship with their environment more meaningful for learning.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Experiential learning, Practical work (learning method), Children’s games.

Resumen

Los procesos de exploración como experiencia educativa permiten desarrollar una mejor interrelación y conexión entre el educando y el ambiente que los rodea. Bajo esta premisa, este artículo tiene como objetivo utilizar dichos procesos para el fortalecimiento de las habilidades motrices de los niños del grado transición del Centro Educativo Rural El Paulón de Bucaramanga-Colombia, mediante la estrategia pedagógica: “Lupita la hormiguita”; estrategia resultado de una construcción curricular participativa entre la maestra y sus estudiantes. Esta investigación se desarrolla dentro del Proyecto Nacional ONDAS Primera Infancia que busca sistematizar diferentes experiencias pedagógicas significativas de educación preescolar en Colombia. En consecuencia, este trabajo utiliza metodológicamente el ciclo de planificación, acción, observación y reflexión de la Investigación Acción Participativa que permitió configurar la estrategia curricular aquí presentada, para el desarrollo de las habilidades motrices de los niños y niñas participantes, utilizando los procesos de exploración de: observar, descubrir, experimentar e idear-desarrollar; haciendo que la relación del estudiante con el entorno se vuelva significativa para su aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Educación de la primera infancia, aprendizaje activo, trabajos prácticos, juego educativo.

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INTRODUCCTION

Exploration processes in early childhood are vital for cognitive, affective, social, linguistic, sensory, and motor development. It could be said that exploration is an essential element in human learning, as the processes it entails as an educational experience facilitate the development of a better relationship and connection between the learner and their surrounding environment (Álvarez Cedillo et al., 2019). This implies that:

Environments are physical, social, and cultural spaces inhabited by human beings, where intense and continuous interaction occurs among them and with their surrounding context (physical and biological space, ecosystem, community, culture, and society in general).

They are characterized by having precise and visible boundaries, people with defined roles, and an organizational structure. Their value lies in their capacity to foster the development of children, promote the construction of their subjective and daily lives, and connect them with the social, historical, cultural, political, and economic life of the society to which they belong. (Comisión Intersectorial de Primera Infancia, 2013).

Therefore, there are two ideas connected to exploration: proximity and interest (Cárdenas Restrepo; Gómez Díaz, 2014). The first relates to everyday life and the things within our reach. The second involves the ability to capture our attention, meaning the things in our environment that we find meaningful. Both proximity and interest presuppose the freedom and independence of the explorer, which is why children should be encouraged from early childhood to "explore on their own, make their own decisions, and gain confidence in their own ideas, considering mistakes as part of the constructive process" (Fairstein; Carretero, 2001, p. 190).

In this context, four essential functions support the exploration process: observation (Acuña, 2011; Durán Chiappe, 2003), which enables children to freely and consciously explore their environment, gather information about the world around them, recognize patterns, differences, and similarities, and start to develop basic concepts from what they observe. This activity should be guided but not controlled, allowing children to focus on objects or situations that attract their attention.

The second function is discovery (Rodríguez Cristino, 2017), where observations turn into personal knowledge. This introspective act, driven by natural curiosity, helps connect ideas and develop new concepts. Discovery can also involve questioning and examining objects in my environment; thus, this function links what I am familiar with to what interests me. The third is experimentation (Cabello Salguero, 2011), which involves testing ideas and confirming discoveries through direct action. This function strengthens learning by turning abstract ideas into concrete understanding through repeated practice. The final function in the exploration process is ideation (Ramírez, 2008). The ability to generate ideas is a key part of the exploration chain. Ideation means creating solutions, hypotheses, or new methods based on observed and discovered information. It plays a vital role in developing creativity, as it enables children to try out their own ideas and perspectives. Ideation involves making sense of the environment, naming, defining, understanding, and giving meaning to their surroundings.

From this perspective, exploration processes in early childhood are essential for development, encompassing both cognitive but also motor skills. These processes can be an active learning methodology through play and other meaningful experiences. Motor skills can be understood as the exploration of the body within the environment, referring to the ability to perform large and coordinated movements. Activities such as running, jumping, throwing, climbing, and manipulating objects are essential for motor development through practice and experience (Ozmun; Gallahue, 2016).

Haywood and Getchell (2014) emphasize that gross motor skills are the foundation for developing finer and more specialized motor skills. They suggest that children should be encouraged, through various strategies, to participate in a variety of motor activities. This engagement helps them build a solid base of motor skills, which, in other words, means exploring their environment. Piaget (1952), in his theory of cognitive development, highlights

the importance of gross motor skills during the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years). He argues that these skills enable children to interact with their environment and acquire knowledge through physical action and exploration. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978), in his sociocultural theory of development, highlights the importance of social context and interaction in the development of gross motor skills, largely through interaction with other children and adults, who guide and model motor behaviors.

A key element of developing general motor skills is the importance of practice and repetition (Haywood; Getchell, 2014). When children are exposed to a diverse range of motor activities, they acquire basic skills that are essential for engaging in more specialized activities later on. Therefore, general motor skills are not only vital for physical development but also have significant implications for cognitive and social growth. According to Adolph and Hoch (2019), children who participate in a variety of challenging motor activities tend to develop their cognitive skills, such as problem-solving and memory. This participation also facilitates social interaction since many motor activities are performed in groups and encourage cooperation and communication.

The process of exploration is linked to motor development. A lack of motor skills in children can often be traced back to limited exposure to their environment, which hinders their ability to explore. Within the educational field, this exploration can be seen as an active or experiential learning methodology for early childhood. By considering exploration processes as an educational experience, we foster a better relationship between the learner and their surroundings. This environment encourages activities such as observing, discovering, experimenting, and creating, all essential for the development of children's motor skills. This leads to a guiding principle: the classroom itself becomes the learning environment, extending beyond the physical classroom.

As a result of this interrelation, this article aims to use these processes to strengthen the motor skills of kindergarten children at the *Centro Educativo Rural El Paulón* in Bucaramanga, Colombia, through the pedagogical strategy "*Lupita la hormiguita*" (Lupita the Little Ant). This strategy is the result of a participatory curriculum development process between the teacher and her students. Consequently, this work methodologically employs the planning, action, observation, and reflection cycle of Participatory Action Research, which allowed for the development of the curriculum strategy presented here for the motor skills development of the participating children.

METHOD

This research was conducted within the ONDAS Early Childhood National Project (*Proyecto Nacional ONDAS Primera Infancia*), which aims to systematize different significant pedagogical experiences in preschool education in Colombia. In this particular case, the pedagogical strategy involving twenty-three (23) students in the transition grade at the *Centro Educativo Rural el Paulón* in Bucaramanga was documented, with the respective approval of their parents.

The methodology used for systematizing the pedagogical strategy is Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Esteve; Verdía, 2024; Zapata; Rondán, 2016; Martí, 2000), because it links systematic inquiry with transformative action, seeking to generate significant changes in specific social or educational contexts. Since "*Lupita the Little Ant*" is a collaborative pedagogical exercise between teacher and students that utilizes environmental exploration processes, it was decided to systematize the experience using this methodology, which also served as a central organizing principle connecting the environmental exploration with the curriculum.

Participatory action research (PAR) in education emphasizes the active involvement of stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and community members, in every phase of the research process (Flores-Kastanis et al., 2009). Unlike other methodologies that simply describe phenomena, PAR is dedicated to addressing specific challenges through a continuous cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach not only fosters collaboration but also empowers participants, transforming them from mere subjects of study into co-creators of knowledge and agents of change (Goodley et al., 2004; Fals-Borda, 1994).

The participatory action research (PAR) process in the classroom, as outlined by Martí (2000) and Flores-Kastanis et al. (2009), consists of several key phases. First, the planning phase begins with participants jointly identifying a problem and designing strategies to address it. Next, the action phase involves implementing the planned activities, focusing on achieving specific changes in educational practices or dynamics. Following this, the observation phase takes place, where researchers and participants collect data on the effects and outcomes of the actions. This can involve techniques such as interviews, reflective journals, or classroom records. Finally, in the reflection phase, the collected data are analyzed to evaluate the impact of the interventions, identify lessons learned, and adjust the strategies accordingly (Colmenares, 2012). This cycle is iterative, allowing for continuous improvement of practices and progress toward sustainable transformation in educational environments based on the systematization of the experience.

In this practical exercise, the pedagogical strategy systematized here, “Lupita the Little Ant,” is structured in five phases that methodologically utilize the cycles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). The first phase consists of initial exploration, where the exercise of relating to the environment led to an initial meeting with the students, during which an object of study was selected. Following this, a survey was administered to gather the students’ and parents’ prior knowledge about the selected object. A second phase of field trips was conducted to study the behavior of the chosen object. In parallel, a third design phase involved implementing motor development activities that correlate with the object of study. Finally, a closing phase, in which students, parents, and the teacher participated, was used to share the results and progress obtained throughout the entire work cycle. This concluded with the administration of a survey to students and parents about the object of study to compare the results with the initial survey.

The “Lupita the Little Ant” strategy methodologically applies the Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection, as illustrated in Figure 1, to interrelate the processes of exploration—observing, discovering, experimenting, and ideating—and thus generate a design focused on motor development. In this approach, both the teacher and the students are co-creators of the classroom curriculum, using the object of study as a mediating factor. This experience was systematized under the ONDAS Early Childhood project proposal, which includes a systematization matrix, a class log, lesson plans, activity outputs, images, and other tools.

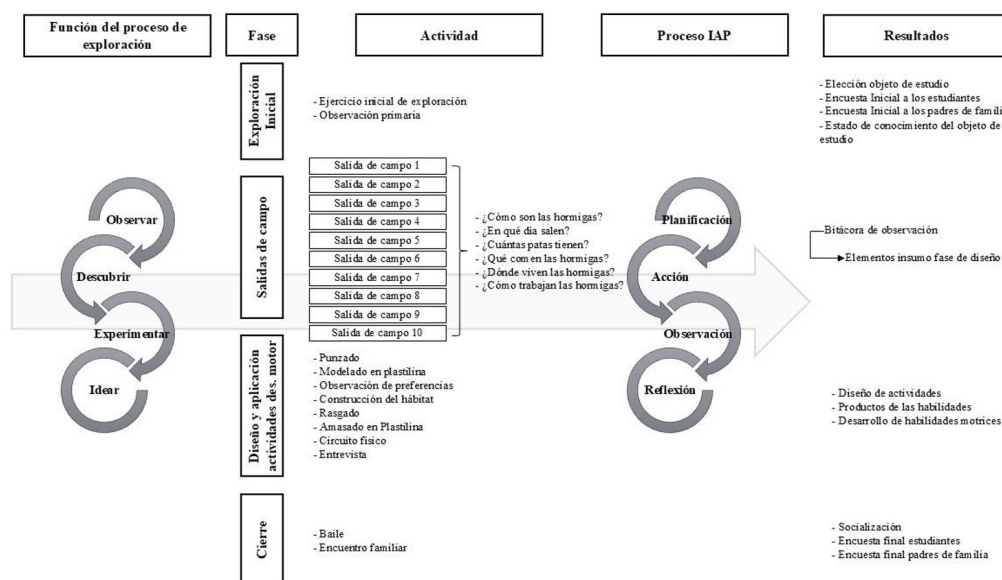


Figure 1. Structure of the pedagogical strategy Note: Our elaboration.

RESULTS

Based on the systematization carried out, it was found that the object of study chosen by the students through primary observation was the ant. It is worth noting that, within the

sociocultural context of the school, this object of observation enjoys symbolic representation (Sancho Larrañaga y Riffo-Pavón, 2022) and territorial appropriation. During the initial phase, a survey was administered to identify the prior knowledge of the students and their parents regarding the chosen object of study.

This initial survey for students revealed that 80% of participants identified the type of ant they saw as *Arriera* (leafcutter ants), 10% as *Guatas* (cowbill ants), and 10% did not know, indicating the object's significance for the majority of participants. This finding is supported by the fact that 100% of the children identified anthills as the homes of ants. Furthermore, regarding the parents, it was evident that they refer to the ant in the region as *Arriera*; similarly, coinciding with the students' responses, they are unaware of interesting facts about ants, and 95% of the families use chemicals to control them in their crops.

In the next phase, several field trips were conducted to identify characteristic elements related to the object of study. This process involved creating an observation log that the teacher and her students updated throughout each trip. We will describe three groups of field trips that addressed the following questions about these creatures as an example for this article: What kind of fruit do ants like? What kind of day do they prefer to be out: sunny or rainy? What kind of plant or tree do they prefer to live on?

For the first example about fruit, the students and teacher conducted three observation trips, each on a different week. During these trips, the children placed pieces of apple, banana, mango, and peach on the ground near the anthills. They waited a while and counted how many ants approached the different pieces of fruit. The observations for the first trip were as follows: 53 ants approached the apple, 20 the banana, 6 the mango, and none the peach. For the second trip, 65 ants preferred the apple, 24 the banana, 10 the mango, and again, no ants approached the peach. For the third and final observation, 58 ants preferred the apple, 21 the banana, 9 the mango, and again, none the peach. In this way, the children discovered and concluded that ants do not like peaches and that their preferred fruit is the apple. In the second example, regarding the weather patterns of sunny or rainy days, the observations were made during two field trips per week for approximately two months. The students recorded their observations on a grid that allowed them to depict the weather conditions through drawings, and then they counted the number of ants they found. This exercise allowed the students to discover that ants prefer to forage for food on sunny days and in the late afternoon. Finally, the third example addresses the question of which plants ants prefer. Building on previous findings, this experiment was structured again through three field trips on sunny days and during different weeks. During these trips, students observed bougainvillea, hibiscus, and a mango tree. They examined each plant and counted the ants present. The observations from the first trip revealed that 52 ants preferred the mango tree, 25 the hibiscus, and 15 the bougainvillea. The second trip showed that 56 ants preferred the mango tree, 24 the hibiscus, and 17 the bougainvillea. The final trip revealed that 60 ants preferred the mango tree, 25 the hibiscus, and 21 the bougainvillea. This allowed the students to discover that ants prefer to carry small pieces of mango leaves compared to the other two plants.

These field trips highlight the functions of the exploration process: observing, discovering, experimenting, and brainstorming. Beyond the conclusions reached, this phase was quite enriching and meaningful for the children, as it fostered dialogue and led to questions about the lives of ants. They compared size, big-small, long-short, up-down, among others. One of the most significant aspects was the change in their behavior toward the subject of study, generating a sensitivity in the children towards the ants. They recognized them as friends and cared for them, avoiding stepping on them, hurting them, or causing them harm.

By correlating the exploration processes with the design of classroom activities, these field trips allowed the ant to be incorporated into the curriculum due to its significance for the students, serving as a unifying element. Consequently, the design and implementation phase of activities for developing motor skills was carried out in parallel. These activities were aimed at developing fine motor skills such as pincer grasp, tearing, modeling, and piercing; and other activities were designed to develop gross motor skills through physical activity, stretching, body awareness, laterality, rhythm, and coordination, among others.

Motor skills encompass all human movements and play a crucial role in shaping the motor behavior of children aged 0 to 6 years. These behaviors are expressed through basic motor skills, which reflect natural movements (Cabrera Valdés y Dupeyrón García, 2019; Gabbard, 2018). The formation of movements occurs at varying levels, depending on the objectives and tasks of the motor activity. This relationship enables children to engage in a deep psychopedagogical process of internal movement formation as part of their ontogenetic development (Graham et al., 2013).

Fine motor skills involve precision, efficiency, economy, harmony, and action, which can be called movements endowed with useful meaning and is what makes the great difference between humans and other species (Fernández García, 2021). This can also be defined as the action of the human being in whose execution there is intervention of the eye, hand, and fingers in interaction with the environment. Thus, fine motor skills are “skills that allow them to: tear, fold, roll, button and unbutton, cut with scissors, tie knots, color, draw a straight, curved, or spiral line (strokes), among others” (Cándales-Castillo, 2012, p. 70).

The relationship between the exploration process and motor development, along with the activities designed to support motor skills, forms the basis of a systematic pedagogical strategy. This strategy uses elements of proximity (from the environment) and interest (resulting from the students' exploration), referred to as the object of study or observation, as the organizing element. In this case, the ant became the central focus of classroom activities, with all activities revolving around it. This approach fostered collaborative learning between the teacher and students in each activity, representing a shift in the curriculum and allowing this project to become the core pedagogical strategy in the classroom. As a result, one didactic outcome of the strategy and this pedagogical approach was that the skills of pincer grasp, tearing, modeling, and piercing all featured an ant as the central figure. It is important to note that the naming of the pedagogical strategy was also part of the students' ideation process; they proposed and chose the name “Lupita.” This element allowed for better appropriation and motivation in each activity.

Significant progress was evident in each activity. In the first month, only a small number of students were able to successfully execute all four skills or techniques. However, from the second month onward, improvement was observed in their execution, along with a high level of motivation among the children for the activities related to “Lupita the Little Ant.” By the middle of the school year, approximately 21 children had made progress in the fine motor skills proposed, including punching, tearing, modeling, threading, and coloring.

In relation to body schema, the activities implemented through the pillar of play and art allowed for the opening of the sensitivity of boys and girls towards processes of spatial orientation and notions, understood, in the words of the Ministry of National Education (2020, p. 8) as:

Experimentation with the body and movement allows for increased autonomy, safety, and independence, enhances interactions with places, objects and people, and in this way appropriates spatial and temporal location: outside, inside, before, after, among others, to develop their orientation and communication skills.

In line with the above, regarding body awareness and related concepts, students were able to incorporate body awareness into their understanding of these concepts more easily and quickly through field trips and exploration activities. They identified and applied these concepts to various objects, such as ants. By the end of the first month, 18 children had successfully understood and applied the four concepts. However, midway through the program, it became clear that the entire group had made positive progress in distinguishing spatial concepts, including up-down, front-back, right-left, inside-outside, and long-short.

In terms of laterality, it is clear that it is not yet fully developed according to the children's age. This is supported by Le Boulch (1987), who asserts that lateralization reflects the progressive development of body schema orientation and the establishment of laterality. In the first month, only 5 students could distinguish between right and left. However, as the strategy was implemented, the children showed progress and began to demonstrate a lateral preference. By the end of the program, 17 students were able to discriminate between right and left and were more spontaneous in applying this understanding.

It is important to emphasize the need to continue strengthening the students' motor development, since not all of them have successfully distinguished between referents, both in objects and in their own bodies. By the end of the project, six children had still not been able to differentiate between right and left. As Comellas and Perpinyá (2000, p. 88) indicate, "the lateralization process has a neurological basis, since lateral dominance will depend on the dominant hemisphere: one will be right-handed or left-handed depending on whether there is left or right hemispheric dominance".

Finally, the activities were related to coordination, which is the human capacity to perform bodily movements. This is important in children's development because it is linked to other functional components that allow them to carry out their daily activities. Properly guided rhythmic education gradually demonstrates the management of time and space, the coordination of movement sequences, and, consequently, a better adaptation to exercise and sports (Escalona, 2016). Auditory stimuli, speech, percussion, music, movement, dance, and movement all contribute to rhythmic education, which has a positive impact on children's psychomotor development (Torres, 2015). Thus, it can be seen that in the first few months, very few students demonstrate rhythm and coordination. As activities and field trips were carried out, it was observed that 16 boys and girls progressed in the development of gross motor skills and also improved in their body expression within interactions with other classmates.

On the other hand, as a response to the students' various questions about the subject of study, an interview was conducted with the school's biology teacher to clarify the children's doubts about ants. The students formulated their questions for the teacher, which were answered by connecting them to the observation exercises they had already completed. As a result of the exploration process, especially the discovery and ideation phases, an exercise was included that allowed students to test their social skills. This demonstrates that motor development linked to the exploration process fosters the growth of other abilities.

Returning to the overall strategy, the final phase was carried out with the support of the parents. The purpose was to share all the learning experiences from the "Lupita the Little Ant" pedagogical activity. To this end, a final presentation was held where the students shared their work. A family dance was organized, and a final assessment was administered to measure the level of understanding of the children and parents regarding ants. The parents' receptiveness, openness, and support for each activity and their willingness to receive feedback from their children were particularly noteworthy during this closing phase.

DISCUSSION

The first important element to highlight is the interrelation of exploratory processes with the development of motor skills, and how, through participatory research in the classroom, a vital pedagogical strategy can be built that transforms learning into something meaningful for the student. As evidenced in the development of the different phases of the pedagogical strategy, when the environment becomes familiar and meaningful, the learner has the opportunity to find meaning in the educational act and becomes an active participant in their own learning.

The above may be linked to the factor of motivation in learning, since, according to Reeve (2018, p. 1), motivation in educational terms is "the process that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-oriented behavior," and as complemented by the sociocultural approach (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is most effective when it takes place in meaningful and collaborative contexts, where the student finds meaning in educational activities). Consequently, the construction of this pedagogical strategy, in which there is an articulating and meaningful object for the student, freely chosen and constantly related through observation, is key to maintaining motivation in preschool children (Pintrich et al., 2006; Caso Fuertes et al., 2019).

Considering the theoretical frameworks on developmental processes, we could add to the proposed discussion that the exploration stage is not merely a phase within human or social development (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978; 1982), but rather that observation, discovery, experimentation, and brainstorming are vital functions for human beings throughout their lives. While exploration is relevant at early ages, the results found indicate that children who

participate in these processes and are in constant contact with their environment develop their motor skills more effectively.

Gross motor skills during the preschool stage are essential for children's overall development, as they encompass physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities. Adolph and Robinson (2015) highlight the importance of the environment in this growth process, explaining that active interaction with their surroundings significantly enhances children's balance and coordination. Therefore, providing opportunities for outdoor activities, exploration, and coordinated movements is crucial. These experiences help strengthen motor control and contribute to sustained progress in developing gross motor skills.

This element leads us to discuss fine motor skills, where the implemented activities show progress in visuomotor coordination, confirming Cándales-Castillo's (2012) assertion regarding the importance of developing skills such as tearing, folding, and threading. During the second month of implementing the activities, it was evident that a considerable number of children mastered these skills, which underscores the value of consistent practice for strengthening fine motor skills. This process aligns with the findings of Medina Alva et al. (2015), who state that repetitive motor experiences contribute to neurobiological development by reinforcing the neural connections involved in fine motor control.

The analysis of progress in body schema recognition and spatial awareness highlighted the importance of the body's relationship with its environment in understanding spatial concepts such as "up and down," "inside and outside," and "front and back." These concepts were explored through play-based activities. By the end of the intervention period, the children showed a significantly improved ability to accurately differentiate these concepts, both in relation to their own bodies and the objects around them.

However, the development of laterality showed a slower pace in some children, which coincides with the findings of Comellas and Perpinyà (2000), who attribute the individual differences observed in the evolution of this skill to neurophysiological factors. This raises the question of how to foster exploratory processes that aid in the identification of laterality, or, for future strategies and research, what activities might have the greatest impact on this element of motor development.

Significant progress in rhythmic coordination was observed in the children through activities that involved sound stimuli, body movements, and the use of music as a teaching tool. Escalona (2016) emphasizes that rhythmic education helps children acquire gross motor skills, enhancing their ability to control movements in both space and time. This development not only improves their performance in physical activities but also promotes greater social integration and autonomy within the school environment. Therefore, it is crucial to continue promoting these practices as part of the educational process in preschool.

The "Lupita the Little Ant" strategy allowed children not only to actively engage in observing the natural environment but also to playfully strengthen their cognitive and motor skills, in line with the theories of Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978, 1982) regarding the active construction of knowledge through interaction with the environment. The curiosity the students demonstrated while exploring the object of study (ants) and recording their habits shows that this type of activity not only enhances their observation and analytical skills but also facilitates the development of their gross and fine motor skills through active exploration of the environment.

As Montessori (1967) emphasizes, the prepared environment and activities that engage the whole body not only promote meaningful learning but also foster the development of autonomy, an essential skill for preschool children. The size comparisons and spatial concepts explored during this experience reinforce the importance of integrating these core activities into the preschool curriculum, as proposed by authors such as Pabón and Ospino (2019), who argue that exploring the environment strengthens not only physical but also cognitive skills.

From a constructivist perspective, the dialogue and questions generated by the children during field trips reflect the interactive nature of learning, in which, through exploration, students construct what Álvarez Cedillo et al. (2019) proposes as "deep meanings." These interactions foster an educational environment where curiosity and discovery drive cognitive and motor development. The empathy and respect for living beings that the children demonstrated

while caring for the ants highlight the positive impact these experiences have on their socio-emotional development.

This aligns with the studies by Mesa and Orrego (2023), who emphasize that core activities such as play and exploration of the environment are essential for holistic development in early childhood, as they promote both knowledge acquisition and the strengthening of motor and cognitive skills. Thus, field trips and integration with the environment within the educational process foster an active and enriching classroom that enhances learning at the motor, cognitive, and emotional levels.

CONCLUSION

Exploration processes in education provide opportunities for the development of a better relationship and connection between the learner and their surrounding environment. When the environment becomes familiar and interesting, meaning becomes a vital element for learning. Thus, the objects being observed take center stage, becoming the central focus of educational experiences. Consequently, exploration (observation, discovery, experimentation, and ideation) becomes a core activity for motor development, which in turn is the foundation for the growth of cognitive and, primarily, social skills.

This pedagogical experience, developed through Participatory Action Research (PAR), addressed the issue of motor development and how, through the process of exploration (field trips), a significant object of study was identified, allowing classroom activities to acquire their identity and direction within the didactic-curricular framework. Thus, "Lupita the Little Ant" provided the children with the necessary motivation to carry out the motor activities proposed in the classroom, and the teacher with the information needed to shape the curriculum.

We concluded that most children improved in activities such as tearing, cutting with scissors, threading, tracing, and coloring, demonstrating the effectiveness of the strategy. It is important to mention that, to strengthen fine motor skills in children of this age, activities should be developed that focus on body awareness, spatial awareness, lateral preference and dominance, and techniques that allow them to perform fine movements; these actions are facilitated through exploration.

This article concludes by highlighting the teacher's significant experience, as the strategy not only fostered the development of motor skills but also opened the door to working on communicative, cognitive, and artistic skills, aligned with preschool goals and integrated with core activities. This systematization, carried out within the ONDAS Early Childhood Project, demonstrates that without her planning, action, observation, and reflection, none of this would have been possible. This pedagogical strategy underscores the value of rural education, a classroom that extends beyond the physical walls, and reminds us that school is a relationship between teachers, students, and parents.

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