

From Children's Play to Dramatic Play: The Contribution of Theatre to the Preschool Child's Affective and Cognitive Development

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Abstract: *This paper analyses the educational value of theatrical games in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of preschool children. The study combines theoretical perspectives from developmental psychology and theatre pedagogy with direct pedagogical observation. The research demonstrates that theatrical play supports the development of language, imagination, emotional regulation, empathy, cooperation, and cognitive flexibility. Particular attention is given to symbolic play, storytelling, and collective improvisation as forms through which children organise and interpret their own experiences. The findings suggest that theatrical games become especially effective when adapted to the developmental characteristics of preschool children and when participation, exploration, and authentic experience are prioritised over performance.*

Keywords: *early childhood education; theatrical play; preschool development; symbolic play; emotional regulation; storytelling; theatre pedagogy;*

Introduction

In Romania, everyone has heard the expression “the seven years from home” (“cei șapte ani de acasă”). The difficulty of translating this expression into English derives precisely from the fact that English lacks a semantic and cultural equivalent to the Romanian phrase. A literal translation such as “the seven years from home” or “the seven years at home” does not evoke, for an English speaker, the same association with good upbringing, politeness, and family education. In the English-speaking world, the meaning is conveyed through various context-dependent formulations and according to the intended semantic emphasis. Thus, expressions such as “to be well brought up” or “to have been raised properly” capture the dimension of family education and behavioural formation, while phrases such as “good manners”, “basic decency”, or “common courtesy” shift the emphasis towards social conduct and respect for the norms of coexistence. Beyond its proverbial character, this expression highlights the decisive importance of the early years of life in shaping personality, behaviour in society, and emotional self-regulation. Developmental psychology confirms this ancestral intuition, revealing that the preschool years represent a period “of intense psychological development”², during which cognitive, emotional, and social transformations occur in close interdependence with the environment and with play activity.

My professional trajectory brought me to the point where, in the autumn of 2025, I had to enrol in a postgraduate psycho-pedagogical training programme (Module I) in order to continue practicing as a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Arts of the “Ovidius” University of Constanța.

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² Ursula Șchiopu & Emil Verza. 1997. *Psihologia vârstelor. Ciclurile vieții (ediția a III-a revizuită)* [*The Psychology of the Ages: Life Cycles (3rd revised edition)*]. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R.A., p. 127.

Within this training module, I quickly discovered that the emphasis is placed on acquiring the fundamental competences necessary for understanding the processes of learning and psychological development, with direct applicability in educational contexts. For those whose profession is acting, as well as for others working in the theatrical field, this module involves becoming familiar with notions of developmental psychology and educational psychology, analysing the age-specific characteristics of children and adolescents, and understanding the motivational, emotional, and relational mechanisms involved in the artistic-educational act. Furthermore, within this first module (addressed to those who will work in kindergartens and with pupils from Years 1 - 8), topics such as didactic communication, managing the teacher (educator) - pupil relationship, and adapting pedagogical strategies to the specific nature of theatrical activities are also explored.

Therefore, for me, the experience of becoming a student once again within a formal educational framework, through this postgraduate programme, imposed a dual shift in perspective. Firstly, the mindset of the one who teaches had to be replaced with that of the one who is being taught; secondly, by choosing, for the practical component of this module, to work with preschool children, the perspective of the actor-improviser, one that is fundamentally instinctive and practical, had to be complemented by a theoretical understanding of the psychological particularities of the preschool child, the developmental stages specific to this age, and the discovery of the most appropriate pedagogical approaches for early childhood. I believe that theatrical practice cannot be transferred into early childhood education without a solid and in-depth theoretical foundation capable of explaining the mechanisms through which the child learns, relates, and develops - precisely those mechanisms that lie, in essence, at the core of what is traditionally referred to as “the seven years from home”.

Through its content, this dissertation aims to demonstrate that theatrical play can transcend the status of a merely recreational or auxiliary artistic activity and become an authentic pedagogical instrument, adapted to the developmental particularities of the preschool child and to the needs of contemporary education.

1. Methodology

The methodology employed in the preparation of this dissertation combines theoretical analysis of specialised literature with direct pedagogical observation and the analysis of practical experience. The theoretical framework is grounded in the works and concepts of representative authors from the fields of developmental psychology, pedagogy, and theatre pedagogy, such as Jean Piaget, Lev S. Vygotsky, Erik Erikson, Jerome Bruner, Viola Spolin, and Roger Caillois. The applied dimension of the dissertation is based on the analysis of theatrical activities carried out with preschool children³, the observation of children’s behaviours and reactions in playful contexts, and their pedagogical interpretation.

2. The Role of Theatrical Games in Education and in the Development of the Preschool Child’s Personality

The proposed topic, *From Children’s Play to Dramatic Play: The Contribution of Theatre to the Preschool Child’s Affective and Cognitive Development*, raises an essential pedagogical question: to what extent can theatre, together with its specific training games, become a coherent

³ Pedagogical Pedagogical practice conducted at Kindergarten No. 52, Sector 1, Bucharest, as part of the “Alternative Week” („Săptămâna Altfel”) programme, between 15 and 19 March 2026.

instrument for the affective and cognitive development of the child during the preschool years? Although the answer may arise instinctively, it cannot be given superficially or merely through enthusiastic references to the benefits of art; rather, it must be grounded in studies, in the knowledge acquired during the psycho-pedagogical training module, and in theories of child development.

In my view, the pedagogical value of a theatrical game does not lie in its spectacular character or in the final product, but in the working process itself. Theatre in education should not be considered relevant because it produces “artistic moments”, but because it generates genuine life experiences within an organised and safe environment and framework. Early childhood education, when properly understood, represents precisely this organisation of the child’s experiences in accordance with their level of development.

2.1. The Cognitive Dimension - Structuring Experience through Symbol

During the preschool years, the child’s thinking is predominantly intuitive and symbolic. Jean Piaget emphasises that symbolic play represents “a form of assimilation of reality into the child’s own structures”⁴. Major pedagogical implications can be drawn from this statement: the child cannot be prematurely introduced to the learning process through abstract notions, but rather through the organisation of the surrounding environment into forms accessible to their cognitive structure. It is precisely within this logic that theatrical play is situated, as it offers the child an organised symbolic framework within which reality is reinterpreted, condensed, and/or reconfigured. In a simple dramatic situation, such as “playing doctor and patient”, the child simultaneously operates with rules, representations, and anticipations. They must imagine the role, anticipate the reaction of the other person, and maintain the coherence of the situation. This activity requires a level of cognitive organisation superior to that involved in spontaneous and disordered play.

From my perspective, this is the fundamental difference between a theatrical activity and an activity based predominantly on the repetition or reproduction of gestures or actions: in theatrical play, the child does not repeat, but creates relationships between elements. They organise their own experience, and the organisation of experience lies at the core of cognitive development. Furthermore, theatrical games involve what today we would call the exercise of executive functions⁵: maintaining attention, inhibiting the impulse to leave the role, and shifting perspective. When considering that in play the child “behaves beyond their usual level of development”⁶, from a pedagogical point of view, this means that theatre can activate the zone of proximal development, that space in which the child, supported by context, achieves performances superior to their everyday level.

Thus, the contribution of theatrical play to cognitive development is not peripheral, but structural. It provides a framework in which symbolic thinking, flexibility, and situational organisation are exercised naturally.

⁴ Jean Piaget. 1965. *Psihologia inteligenței [The Psychology of Intelligence]*. București: Editura Științifică.

⁵ Executive functions are a set of cognitive processes (governed by the prefrontal cortex) that help us to plan, focus our attention, manage our emotions, and achieve our goals.

⁶ Lev S. Vygotski. 1978. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 102.

2.2. The Affective Dimension - Regulating Emotion through Symbolic Experience

Affective development during the preschool years is characterised by intensity and instability. The child experiences emotions fully, but does not yet possess solid mechanisms of self-regulation. Erik Erikson, in his work *Childhood and Society*, places this stage within the conflict between initiative and guilt, emphasising that development depends upon the support of the child's initiative⁷.

Theatrical play creates an intermediate space between reality and imagination, in which emotions may be explored without direct consequences. In theatre games, the child may express fear through the role of a vulnerable character or anger through a controlled dramatic conflict. The emotion is genuinely experienced, yet mediated by symbolic convention. This mediation facilitates the learning of emotional regulation.

The risk of premature evaluation should be carefully avoided throughout the process, because "approval/disapproval prevents direct experiencing."⁸ From a pedagogical perspective, this statement is crucial. If theatrical play is dominated by external judgement ("good", "bad", "correct"), the child focuses on performance rather than experience. Yet affective development presupposes authentic emotional experience.

Theatrical play is one of the few educational activities capable of combining safety with emotional intensity. The child experiences emotion, but within a protected framework. This combination is essential for the development of self-confidence.

2.3. The Social and Moral Dimension - Internalising Rules through Participation

Theatre represents teamwork; theatre is a relational art. Authentic theatrical play cannot exist without a partner and without implicit rules, thus becoming "a free, separate, uncertain activity, yet subject to rules voluntarily accepted"⁹. The voluntary acceptance of rules represents an educational element of great value, both theoretically and practically.

In theatrical games, the rule is not imposed from outside, but is necessary for the coherence of the situation. The child understands that if they do not respect the role or the framework, the game collapses. Thus, the rule becomes functional rather than authoritarian. In my opinion, theatre offers a form of discipline different from the traditional one: active involvement produces responsibility, responsibility produces internalisation, and internalisation leads to morality. Consequently, theatrical games contribute to the development of the social and moral dimension through active participation rather than constraint.

2.4. The Aesthetic Dimension - Refining Perception and Expression

The aesthetic dimension is often treated as secondary in early childhood education; however, it contributes to the development of sensitivity and refined perception. Theatre develops sensitivity to rhythm, gesture, space, and expression, the child learning to observe details, distinguish affective tonalities, and construct coherent expressive forms. This dimension is not merely decorative, nor does it manifest itself only when we encounter "something beautiful";

⁷ Erik H. Erikson. 1963. *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton.

⁸ Viola Spolin. 2008. *Improvizație pentru teatru*. București: UNATC Press, p. 35.

⁹ Roger Caillois. 1958. *Les jeux et les hommes*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 42-43.

rather, it shapes the way in which the child perceives the world, and the way in which the child perceives the world influences the way they think and relate to others.

3. Applied Approaches to Theatrical Play in Preschool Education

The practical experience carried out at Kindergarten No. 52 in Bucharest, during the “Alternative Week” programme, represented not only a compulsory stage of the psycho-pedagogical module, but also a context for the direct observation of the ways in which theatrical play can become an educational instrument. The project I designed within this programme, *Stories That Come to Life*, was designed as a well-structured sequence of activities based on storytelling, improvisation, and dramatic play, adapted to the cognitive and affective particularities of children aged between five and six years old.

From the perspective of my professional training, this experience involved a significant repositioning. In improvisational theatre for adults, spontaneity is often associated with rapid pace, immediate reaction, and comic construction; however, when working with preschool children, spontaneity functions differently: it must be protected, encouraged, and guided without being excessively controlled, the ultimate aim not being the production of a performance or the amusement of an audience. The preschool child does not improvise in order to produce scenic effects, but in order to explore the possibilities of the relationship between imagination and reality.

The activities carried out within the *Stories That Come to Life* project, as well as the theatrical games presented in Appendix I, do not represent merely a sequence of playful exercises transformed into didactic games, but rather a progressively structured pedagogical approach constructed in accordance with the developmental characteristics of the preschool child. Beyond the apparent recreational dimension, each activity aims to develop cognitive, affective, social, and expressive-creative competences, making use of the dominant characteristics of this age period: the need for play, the predominance of symbolic thinking, and the importance of the relationship between body, emotion, and imagination.

Within the context of early childhood education, the effectiveness of a pedagogical approach cannot be evaluated exclusively through the final product or through quantifiable performances, but must instead be analysed in relation to the processes of participation, cooperation, and behavioural transformation generated throughout the activities. From this perspective, theatrical play functions as a complex educational environment in which the child explores, experiments, negotiates meanings, and organises their affective and cognitive experiences.

From a methodological point of view, the activities used within the programme may be grouped into several functional categories.

3.1. Games of Familiarisation and Group Cohesion

Exercises such as *The Name and the Gesture* or *The Imaginary Ball* aim to create a safe relational climate and reduce the anxiety specific to new situations. In theatre education for preschool children, these exercises play an essential role, since direct participation in play largely depends on the feeling of emotional safety.

Through the repetition of names and gestures, children validate one another's presence, develop collective attention, and acquire a sense of belonging to the group. At the same time, exercises based on simple imaginative convention, such as *The Imaginary Ball*, introduce the child

to the logic of theatre without relying on abstract explanations. The child understands theatrical convention through direct experience rather than through definitions.

Furthermore, these games develop what contemporary literature refers to as *shared attention*, namely the ability to follow simultaneously one's own action and the reactions of the other participants. In theatrical activities, this competence becomes fundamental for cooperation and improvisation.

3.2. Games of Bodily and Emotional Expressiveness

Exercises such as *How Do I Feel Today? The Statues*, *How Does the Character Walk?* or *The Character's Emotion* aim to develop non-verbal expressiveness and emotional awareness.

During the preschool years, the body represents one of the principal instruments through which the child communicates with and explores the world. For this reason, theatre pedagogy designed for this age cannot focus exclusively on verbalisation. Gesture, posture, rhythm, and bodily energy become fundamental elements of the educational process.

During the practical activities, it was observed that many children expressed emotions more clearly through movement than through verbal explanations. For example, the emotion of "fear" was spontaneously conveyed through bodily withdrawal, tension in the shoulders, changes in movement rhythm, or lowering the volume of the voice. These reactions confirm that affective expression in preschool children is profoundly embodied. Daniel Stern emphasised that "the development of the child's sense of self is closely linked to bodily experiences and to the relationship between affect and movement"¹⁰.

At the same time, exercises of expressiveness allow the child to experience emotions within a symbolic and safe space. In theatrical play, emotion is not experienced directly as a threatening personal experience, but as the experience of a character. This symbolic distancing facilitates affective regulation and the development of empathy.

3.3. Games of Symbolic Transformation

A central component of the programme consisted of games based on the imaginative transformation of objects: *The Magic Object*, *What Else Could It Be?* and *The Transforming Box*.

These exercises directly exploit the symbolic function specific to the preoperational stage described by Jean Piaget. During the activities, it was observed that preschool children encountered no difficulty in accepting imaginative convention. On the contrary, children tended spontaneously to expand the convention, a box becomes a portal, the portal leads to a dangerous place, then a fantastic weather phenomenon appears and later, new characters and conflicts are introduced.

This mechanism demonstrates that the child's imagination functions associatively and narratively. Symbolic play is not limited to object substitution, but produces a reorganisation of the entire imaginative context. The symbolic play is considered to be one of the child's most important activities because it "permits the separation of meaning from the concrete object"¹¹. At the moment when the child can use a cube as a "telephone" or a "spaceship", they demonstrate symbolic operational ability and cognitive flexibility.

¹⁰ Daniel Stern. 1985. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books, p. 67.

¹¹ Lev S. Vygotski. 1978. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 97.

From a pedagogical perspective, these exercises contribute to the development of creativity, flexibility of thought, problem-solving abilities, and the expansion of the expressive repertoire.

3.4. Character-Building Games

Exercises such as *The Enchanted Hat*, *The Imaginary Animal*, *The Bag of Characters*, and *The Mirror of Characters* aim to develop the child's ability to construct and differentiate characters. During the practical activities, it was observed that role assumption often produced visible behavioural changes: shy children became more active, highly energetic children became more attentive to rules, and withdrawn children communicated more easily through the intermediary of the character. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that dramatic play creates an intermediate space between the self and the imaginary. The child can experiment with new forms of behaviour without perceiving them as direct personal exposure. Play becomes a "potential space"¹² situated between internal and external reality, within this space, the child may explore identities and relationships without the anxiety associated with real consequences.

Moreover, character-building exercises develop empathy, perspective-taking, emotional differentiation, and relational flexibility, while the child begins to understand that different characters speak differently, react differently, and possess different desires and emotions. This capacity constitutes an important foundation for the later development of social competences.

3.5. Storytelling and Collective Improvisation

The final stage of the programme focused on storytelling and collective improvisation activities: *The Story Continues*, *Story Cubes*, *The Changed Ending*, and *The Surprise Character*. These exercises aim to develop cooperation, narrative construction, spontaneity, and the ability to accept the proposals of others.

An essential element observed during the activities was the fact that preschool children accept imaginative conventions very easily when these are constructed collectively. Unlike adults, what matters is not plausibility, but the internal coherence of the game.

Such processes contribute directly to the development of language and narrative thinking. Jerome Bruner considered that "human beings organise experience in narrative form from early childhood, and stories represent one of the principal mechanisms for understanding the world"¹³. In addition, collective storytelling develops the capacity for negotiation and collaboration. The child learns that their own idea must be integrated into a shared context and that the story functions only through the participation of all.

As a conclusion to this chapter, I would note that the practical experience in kindergarten highlighted unequivocally the major importance of the facilitator within this pedagogical process. In theatrical work with preschool children, the adult does not function as a director in the traditional sense, nor as a permanent evaluator of performance. Excessive intervention may block spontaneity, while the absence of structure may produce disorganisation. Therefore, the facilitator must maintain a balance between the freedom of play and pedagogical organisation. Only in this way does theatrical play become not merely an alternative didactic method, but an authentic means of

¹² Donald W. Winnicott. 1971. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock Publications, p. 51.

¹³ Jerome Bruner. 1986. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 11.

organising the preschool child's experience, one that is in accordance with their natural way of learning, relating, and discovering the world.

4. Conclusions

The present dissertation aimed to analyse the educational value of theatrical games in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of the preschool child, starting from the premise that theatre and dramatic play may become relevant pedagogical instruments in early childhood education. Both the theoretical analysis and the practical experience carried out within pedagogical activities confirm that theatrical play responds naturally to the psychological particularities of the preschool child, making use of the child's need for play, imagination, movement, and social interaction.

Following the research undertaken, it may be concluded that theatrical games contribute significantly to the development of language, communication, and expressiveness, while simultaneously stimulating imagination, cognitive flexibility, and the child's ability to construct symbolic and narrative relationships. At the same time, role assumption and participation in dramatic situations facilitate the development of empathy, cooperation, and emotional self-regulation within a context free from the pressure of performance and evaluation.

From a psycho-pedagogical perspective, one of the most important aspects observed is the fact that theatrical play does not function efficiently through constraint, but through voluntary involvement. The child participates because they wish to participate, and this difference radically transforms the relationship with learning. In theatrical play, the rule is not perceived as punishment, but as a necessary mechanism allowing the story to continue. Sometimes, truthfully speaking, adults themselves might also need to rediscover this principle.

The activities carried out during the pedagogical placement highlighted the fact that preschool children respond spontaneously and authentically to theatrical convention. For a five-year-old child, the fact that a scarf may become a dragon does not represent a logical problem, but rather an ordinary story. From this perspective, theatre does not introduce imagination into the child's life; it merely organises it pedagogically.

The dissertation also confirmed the importance of emotional climate in theatrical activities with preschool children. At the moment when the child is no longer afraid of making mistakes, participation becomes freer and expressiveness more authentic. Sometimes, the most valuable pedagogical outcome is not the fact that a child "performed well", but the fact that they found the courage to participate, to speak, or to express their emotions in front of the group.

From a personal and professional perspective, the completion of this dissertation also represented an exercise in repositioning between two apparently different perspectives: that of the actor-improviser and that of the educator. If theatrical improvisation for adults often emphasises rhythm, reaction, and scenic effect, working with preschool children requires slowing down, observing, and accepting that sometimes the best pedagogical moment may appear precisely when the original plan disappears completely - or when half of the children decide that the main character of the story must be "a vampire who eats broccoli and goes to the dentist". From a dramaturgical point of view, the value of this idea may be debatable, but from the perspective of imagination development, it is excellent.

In conclusion, theatrical games may become particularly valuable educational instruments during the preschool years, provided that they are adapted to the child's developmental level and used in a manner that privileges process, experience, and authentic participation. Educational

theatre should not be reduced to the preparation of an “artistic moment” for celebrations or festivities, but may function as a space for exploration, interaction, and personal development.

And if this dissertation demonstrates anything, it probably demonstrates the fact that there is not, in reality, such a clear boundary between play and education. Sometimes, the child learns the most precisely at the moment when they believe they are simply playing.

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APPENDIX I

LIST OF GAMES USED DURING THE PRACTICAL COMPONENT

“HOW DOES THE CHARACTER WALK?”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The children move freely around the play space. The facilitator names different characters, and the children must modify: their walk; posture; rhythm; body expression; energy; etc.

“HOW DO I FEEL TODAY?”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The children stand in a circle. The facilitator invites them to express their emotional state using: facial expression; body posture; gestures; or voice. The children may choose an emotion card or decide for themselves which emotion they wish to portray.

“STORY CUBES”

Duration: 15 minutes.

Description: The children take turns throwing specially illustrated cubes or selecting images representing: characters; objects; places; emotions; or situations. Starting from the resulting images, the entire group constructs an improvised story.

“THE BAG OF CHARACTERS”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The facilitator prepares a bag containing pictures or cards representing different characters. Each child, in turn, selects a character and must create an identity for them (name, place of birth, appearance, manner of speaking, secret, or superpower).

“THE CHANGED ENDING”

Duration: 15 minutes.

Description: The facilitator begins a well-known story. At a certain point, the story is interrupted, and the children must invent: a different ending; different characters; different problems; or different solutions.

“THE CHARACTER’S EMOTION”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: Each child receives or chooses an imaginary character. The facilitator proposes different emotions or situations, and the children must show: how the character laughs; how they become frightened; how they become upset; how they speak; how they react; etc.

“THE ENCHANTED HAT”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The facilitator brings a real or imaginary hat. In turn, the children put on the hat and must instantly become a character, modifying: their voice; walk; facial expressions; etc.

“THE IMAGINARY ANIMAL”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: Children move freely around the play space. The facilitator invites them to imagine an animal that does not exist in reality. Each child must invent: what the animal looks like; how it moves; what sounds it makes; where it lives; what it eats; whether it is friendly or dangerous. After a few moments of individual exploration, the children are invited to “become” that animal.

“THE IMAGINARY BALL”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The facilitator mimes the existence of an imaginary ball and passes it to a child. The ball may change its: weight; size; temperature; texture; etc.

“THE INVISIBLE OBJECT”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: One child mimes the use of an imaginary object without speaking. The group must guess what the object is.

“THE MAGIC OBJECT”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The facilitator prepares a box or bag containing simple objects. Each child, in turn, selects an object and must imaginatively transform it into something else.

“THE MAGIC WAND”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The facilitator gives a child an object resembling a wand or even a real or imaginary wand. The child who receives the wand may transform an object, a classmate, a place within the play space, or even the entire group. The transformation must be performed verbally and physically. For example: a chair becomes a dragon, a classmate becomes a king, the play space becomes a castle, and the group becomes a pirate crew.

“THE MIRROR”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The children work in pairs, standing face to face. One child begins performing slow and clear movements, while the partner must reproduce them exactly, as if reflected in a mirror.

“THE MIRROR OF CHARACTERS”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The children work in pairs. One child portrays a character using movement and expression, while the other child must reproduce the character’s behaviour exactly, as though reflected in a mirror.

“THE NAME AND THE GESTURE”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The children stand in a circle. In turn, each child says their first name and associates it with a simple gesture. The entire group repeats the name and gesture of each participant.

“THE SOUND OF THE STORY”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The children create the sounds necessary for an improvised story using their voices, clapping, or objects.

“THE STATUES”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The children move freely through the play space while music is playing. They must occupy the entire space and avoid bumping into the other participants. When the music stops, the facilitator announces: an emotion; a situation; a character; or a reaction. The children must instantly “freeze” in suggestive and expressive positions. After a few seconds, the music resumes and the exercise continues.

“THE STORY CONTINUES”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The children stand in a circle. One child begins a story with a simple sentence (“Once upon a time there was a dragon who could not breathe fire.”). Each child adds, in turn: an event; a character; an emotion; a problem; or a solution. The story must continue without rejecting the ideas of classmates.

“THE STORY IN PICTURES”

Duration: 15 minutes.

Description: The facilitator prepares images representing: characters; objects; places; emotions; situations; etc. The children choose or draw one image at a time and must contribute to the construction of a collective story based upon it. The story develops progressively.

“THE SURPRISE CHARACTER”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The children create an improvised story or simple scene. At a certain moment, the facilitator unexpectedly introduces: a new character; an unexpected situation; or an important change.

“THE TELEPHONE OF OBJECTS”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The facilitator mimes an imaginary telephone beginning to ring. One child “answers”, while the facilitator or the group decides who is calling; from where; what problem they have; or what adventure is about to follow. The child must improvise the conversation and continue the imaginary situation. The telephone may then pass to another child, while the story continues and develops progressively.

“THE TRAIN OF CHARACTERS”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The children form an “imaginary train” and move around the play space one behind the other. The facilitator proposes: characters; emotions; situations; types of energy; etc. All participants must adapt and transform accordingly.

“THE TRANSFORMING BOX”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: A simple box is placed in the centre of the play space. The facilitator invites the children to

imagine that it can transform into any object or place they wish. Each child, in turn, proposes a transformation.

“THE UNEXPECTED CHARACTER”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: During a story or improvisation, the facilitator introduces a character who does not appear to belong to that particular universe.

“WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?”

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Description: The facilitator presents a simple object (a scarf, cube, rope, sheet of paper, etc.). The children must find as many imaginative uses or transformations for the object as possible. For example, a scarf may become: a river, a snake, or a cloud.

“WHAT HAPPENS IF?”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Description: The facilitator proposes imaginary or absurd situations (“What happens if fish can fly?” / “What happens if dragons are afraid of ants?”). The children respond verbally and physically.