

The child expresses him/herself only in free play. He/she expresses what he/she is and without inhibitions; with greater ease, he/she expresses all his/her momentary moods or what he/she has been holding on to for some time¹: the child laughs, has fun, gets angry, shouts, cries, at times he/she seems to despair but, at the end, participates with pleasure.

The freedom to experiment, in doing and in being able to make a mistake, allows the child to test him/herself in safe situations, to know his/her limits and potential, to soften reality in a background of imagination thanks to which he/she exerts control over the situation and its effects. Everything that children do on their own initiative, when they play freely, can never be reproduced by teaching imparted by an adult because it is connected to an internal process, to an intrinsic motivation that leaves indelible and important traces in the form of aware learning.

Within the framework of play, the child can develop a serene sense of self, an adequate self-esteem that helps him/her acquire self-reliance and independence from adults:

«Feeling able and free to do-be motivates the child to expand his/her field of action, his/her curiosity for the exterior world, which will present itself more and more complex but interesting. Previous experiences, self-confidence and the possibility of independent movement ensure that the child finds the motivation to tackle the problems he/she will encounter. The child develops creativity, namely the ability to invent gestures, actions, new behaviour to overcome difficulties that the external or internal reality proposes throughout his/her growth»¹.

Children decide how to play, which rules to use, and how to modify them each time it is necessary to adapt them to their own needs. In this sense, play is not a duty tied to what has to be done, but rather a pleasure supported by what you want to do at that precise moment and, as a free choice, it guarantees the possibility to stop playing whenever you want. This attitude distances children from the mentality of adults, who carry out activities directed at achieving a short-term goal and with the minimum waste of energy. The child does not measure time when he/she plays, does not try to find the quickest route to stop because he/she finds pleasure in the activity itself: in free play, the process overshadows the purpose. The times of play then expand, widen, unfold according to emotional experience and continue as long as the pleasure lasts. On the contrary, when the purpose is more important than the process, you exit the framework of play to enter that of work, of duty.

The free play of children, supported by sensory-motor intelligence in the continuous relationship with the surrounding environment, activates all areas of their personality (motor, emotional, cognitive, affective, social) in a concrete experience which generates knowledge and continuous learning, above all in the 0-6 age group, when development is fast and sudden.

In one of his latest books, Peter Gray² highlights the reasons why, according to multiple scientific studies, play is a natural framework for self-learning. Inside the playful framework, the child can play a wide range of games (physical-motor, explorative, constructive, imaginative...) which integrate different knowledge and abilities elevating the levels of competence and judgment. The marvellous aspect of play is the ease with which, in its implementation, children share knowledge and abilities, a sort of widespread knowledge that becomes the heritage of all and from which all can learn by intuition, imitation or discovery. Play becomes a wide and natural form of peer teaching and of cooperative learning. Children, in general, but particularly the youngest, learn by imitation, watching those around them and readapting the situations to their condition and possibilities, attaining continuous self-learning about everything that interests and involves them.

The strategies referable to active pedagogy imply educational situations that leave the child maximum operational freedom to solicit all areas of his/her personality (affective, emotional, cognitive, motor, and social) and, as a result of these, the potential present in every single person.

This device, which is fully supported and appropriate, does not foresee a complete lack of guidelines and behavioural expectations by the child. The educator, acting on the preparation of the educational setting, may arrange space, time and equipment in order to orient or corner-off the children's behaviour towards expected or desirable actions, though leaving them to act according to their own choices and interpretation of the experience underway.

¹ Vecchiato M., (2007) *Il gioco psicomotorio. Psicomotricità psicodinamica. Roma: Armando*

² Gray P. (2015) *Lasciateli giocare. Torino: Einaudi*