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THE ENDLESS STORIES:
reflections on a performative experience with five-year-old children

AS HISTÓRIAS SEM FIM:
reflexões sobre uma experiência performativa com crianças de 5 anos de idade

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Abstract: This article presents an analysis of an experience conducted in Theater classes for Early Childhood Education at a private school in the city of Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the performative methodology, a creative process was set up in which children and teachers performed in the virtual environment. Concepts from the Sociology of Education and performativity were used to understand the children's performative practice.
Keywords: child; child performative; performative pedagogy; body; playfulness.

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Resumo: O artigo apresenta uma análise de experiência realizada nas aulas de Teatro para Educação Infantil de um colégio particular de Belo Horizonte durante a pandemia da Covid-19. Com base na metodologia performativa, foi instaurado um processo de criação em que crianças e professores performaram no ambiente virtual. Conceitos da Sociologia da Educação e da performatividade serviram de apoio para compreender a prática performativa das crianças.
Palavras-chave: criança; performatividade da infância; pedagogia performativa; corpo; ludicidade.

1 Every endless story has a beginning

We began this report by mentioning a period of exception that many education workers went through: the understanding of a new conformation for education in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected Brazil at the very beginning of 2020. During 2020, faced with the transformations demanded by the education system, all the staff at the private school where we reported this practice had to adapt to what is we knew as online teaching. In it, electronic devices mediated teachers and students in synchronous meeting applications. For us, theater teachers who seek the potency of our classes in presence, being in this mediated environment was a challenge and a stimulus to understand the potency of presence, but in a mediated way. We cannot say that the results were always satisfactory or close to what we did in face-to-face classes, but that was the given condition. It was necessary to find the best ways and actions in those virtual meetings, at least more effective actions within the possibilities.

All the classes at this school switched to the online system, including the Kindergarten 5 classes, and in one of them, the seed of the *Endless Story* was born. There were neither planning nor advice for this moment, as it was new for everyone in the school. There was no time to develop a working methodology to guide us in this new circumstance. There was only the need to comply with the content established in the school's work plan.

Looking back over this period, we believe that we developed a performative methodology (Haseman, 2015) that generated this practice-led research. In other words, we understood the classroom as a research laboratory in which our actions permitted us to understand the challenges and experiment with ways of overcoming them. Although we can now put into words what it was like to teach theater in the midst of the pandemic, when we found ourselves challenged to make art in those conditions, we found no other approach than this performative methodology. Research into developing more powerful actions were discovered and guided by practice through experimentation. The result we found was symbolic and only now have we translated this symbology into a written text. Let's look at the definition of performative methodology:

> Accepting traditional qualitative researchers' concern on "the time of performance". It is possible to argue that a third methodological distinction is emerging. This third category aligns with many of the values of qualitative research, but is distinct from it. The main distinction between this third category and the qualitative and quantitative categories lies in the way to express its results. In this case, while results are expressed in non-numerical data, it presents them as symbolic forms, differently from words in a discursive text (Haseman, 2015, p. 46).

What motivates us in this understanding is strictly relates stickily to what the author calls "the time of performance". Launching ourselves into this virtual environment, in the midst of the pandemic, without knowing possible methodologies for our practice, the time we would spend in that situation, experimenting with a new way of doing theater was a performative experience for

us: teachers and students. We had to create together and adapt to this environment that seemed undefined to us. We were in a risk zone, surrendering our bodies to practices that took place in adverse situations, different for each student and teacher. We started and it guided us at each meeting: we invested in what worked, blocked what wasn't possible for everyone, and so we came to understand ourselves in this experience that took for granted our interaction with others and with technology. Not least important, the virtual classes opened up our homes to each other. We believe that this exposure also put us in the risk zone permeating the performative nature of making.

The beginning of this experience was simple: a game that asked the children to transform themselves into robots. Thinking about the principles of bodily expression, movement dynamics, speed, tension and directions, we proposed this bodily transformation, relying on the playfulness of the game of transforming into robots, which guaranteed the child's pleasure—and ours too!—when conducting this activity. The game leader calmly asked the children to start building the robots, using imaginary tools (or symbolized by objects that were at the children's disposal such as pencils, pens...). Individually we "built" ourselves, each in our own home, using our own tools, whether they were imagined or projected onto other objects.

Once the robots were built, we moved on to experimenting with their movement—the focus of the activity for this meeting. This was the start of the action-guided methodology. Free from the classroom control, the children ended up embarking on their own make-believe games. As we began to move the robots, we teachers noticed that they began to create narratives, each in their own way, in their own home. Some of them even "disconnected" from the computer screen - we used quotation marks to make this figurative point, as they did not turn off the computer, they just changed their focus of attention, moving away from what they were hearing from the teacher and embarking on whatever their imagination took them to.

At this point, we began to see the children's agency in the creative process. We understand agency as a concept from the Sociology of Education, present in the studies of Corsaro (2011). It involves understanding the child's action in the social context or practice in an active and effective way. This agency revealed a greater or lesser degree, and it the deconstruction of this exercise took it to the level of dramatic play: a construction that came from them. We understand the concept of dramatic play based on the considerations of Peter Slade (1978), who refers to the idea of spontaneous improvisation, free from certain conventions of so-called traditional theater. To be more specific, this agency occurred in the act of "playing robots" and not just moving around like robots. When we brought this play into the study, we had to understand it in all the power it revealed and led to. Playing is a primordial characteristic of childhood, which stands out when we understand children within a social category. According to Sarmento (2003), playing is a defining characteristic of childhood as a ludic action and a space for projecting the real into fictional situations. We looked at this playing that emerged in the actions of several children and tried to share these moments of fiction and imagination. Many "robots" started fighting (alone in their homes) and we asked

"What's going on?" to which they replied "We're fighting the evil robot!". We realized that the moment was ripe for dramatic play. So, we started a joint narrative, which began with the robots ready to go on an adventure in which they had to rescue a treasure in a castle. All these creative insights came from words they said in the middle of the narrative and the ones that stood out led the story. When they arrived at the castle, we asked them if they could see the evil robot, and one of the students shouted, "I'm the evil robot". As a twist of fate, the drama class ran out of time, so we teachers suggested that we continue it at the next meeting.

Theater classes take place once a week and unfinished work is not resumed, either because of the need to follow the content stipulated in the learning plan we have to fulfill, or because of the new desires of students who are also looking for new "games" in class. However, after a week, as soon as we met virtually, the students in this class were ready to continue the story of the robots.

As the school's area supervisor had given a plan to us, we could not spend so much time developing the story that begun in the last lesson. Therefore, we divided the time that day: the first part we devoted ourselves to the planning for the day and in the final minutes we resumed the story. We asked the children to remind us of what had already happened. Then we retold it from the beginning, going as far as the evil robot in the castle with the treasure. Whenever a "good" robot tried something against the "evil" robot, it quickly found a way out and "counterattacked". At this impasse, we finished another day and committed ourselves to continuing in the next class.

There we realized an important hook for our theater class. The children had embraced this story and, in a way, it became a stimulus for them to seek out theater classes, even virtually. It was a stimulus for them to be attentive and create together. They stopped being recipients of content and repeaters of exercises and became authors, directors, *performers* of this story. We say *performers* because from now on we were going to bring up this concept more clearly, understanding that in this dramatic play the children were not interpreting. Instead, in a way they involved their bodies in actions that revealed their desire to play, have fun, show what they were doing at any moment, without intending to represent. The fact that we turned ourselves into robots, which led us to think of the canon of theatrical representation, does not hold up in practice. As soon as the children get involved in the activity, the whole robot body structure is lost, leaving the bodies of subjects who play and create evident.

2. The playing – the performance

To understand these divergent paths between representation and presence of performance, we looked up at the terms referentiality and imitation (Bonfitto, 2013). Referentiality is directly related to the subjects' being and being in the world, i.e., it is a way to understand persons' own presences, which show themselves, make and legitimize authorial discourses, whether they are

brought about in speech or in their bodies that act. Referentiality is thus the basis to understand what is performative and, consequently, performance. Imitation is already linked to what is representative, or to representation. In a way, it is what we understand as the actor's job—to represent a character. Thus, imitation is the basis of interpretation and representation.

However, Bonfitto went further and presented an impasse for this divergence that seems simplified in discourse:

> The association between referentiality and imitation and its ramifications can be justified to the extent that the reproduction of socio-cultural codes permeates the work of the actor and the *performer*. Richard Schechner, for example, recognized what he called *restored behavior* as a fundamental aspect of the work of both actor and *performer*. In doing so, he also recognized the importance of the role played by socio-cultural codes in their work (Bonfitto, 2013, p. 105).

By bringing up Schechner's (2013) concept of restored behavior and by it conceiving a key or link between the understandings of representation and performance, we can also understand and emphasize that there may be a border zone between these phenomena. At this point we return to our *endless story* of robots: the children's participation was in playing, make-believe and, as in most children's play, the real and the fictional mix together. Thus, imitating robots and exercising their subjectivities, free from physical stereotypes, are two ends of the same pendulum that is in constant motion. At what moments are they interpreting robots? When does this imitation fade away and make room for the children's subjective being, doing and showing off? The restored behaviors serve both sides of this pendulum. Children gave us these behaviors all the time during the improvisation of the dramatic play. The solutions they found to the challenges of the narrative they create in real time all come from experiences and sensations they have already experienced and are happy to reproduce. All of this translates into what we mean by playing. In fact, the very desire to return to this playing, week after week, also gave us the idea of restored behavior.

The way we analyzed it, in the play and consequently in the performance, reality and fiction are mixed together and so we can get closer to Carlson's (2009) analysis, which is based on what he calls binocular expression, according to Schechner's studies. In this expression, the *performer* is under the influence of two operations—that of reality and that of illusion. These operations have a curious effect on performers' bodies and modes of expression, as they do not represent a role per se and, at the same time, have traces of their different selves.

> Within the structure of the game, the *performer* nor is himself (because of the operations of illusion), but neither is he a non-self (because of the operations of reality). The *performer* and the audience likewise operate in a world of double consciousness (Carlson, 2009, p. 66-67, emphasis added).

In our view, this double consciousness, which guarantees that the body is between representation and the quality of being in reality, is constant in playing and performance. That is why we sought to understand playing as performance and children who play as *performers,* who

exercise this double consciousness, leading the audience to experience such liminal state. Why do we talk about the audience being an activity limited to the classroom? From the experience we analyzed, we saw that the children themselves are their own directors and audiences. When a child excels in a particular creation, it is contagious and inspires others to create. We can clearly see that they observe each other and, in a way, are each other's audience. An audience that also favors the feedback loop proposed by Fisher-Lichte (2011), as their own gazes and interactions intensify the performance. By observing other children being inspired or led to experiment, the students also begin to better recognize themselves, their potential, differences, similarities and, consequently, their identities.

Playing becomes performance, allowing moments of interpretation, presence and representation to merge and go together. They are robots, but in any moment they stop being themselves, children in moments of fun, playing and bringing to this endless story what they have already experienced in their bodies. We add to this the fact that they are in their own homes, a more intimate space that, due to the situation, they also had to share. It is the exposure of individuality elevated to a higher level.

In this analysis of the transgressions of the boundary between presence and representation that the children have established in this endless story, we highlight some important points for reflection: 1) the children's bodies, which in themselves are loaded with presence and performative value; 2) the children's effective participation in the conduct of the story, playing the role of co-creators; 3) the playful character that this dramatic play provides, making it a playing, a fundamental characteristic when we think of childhood as a social category. There are other points of analysis that reinforce the understanding of the performative character that exists in the elaboration/execution of this endless story in the format of a dramatic play. However, we stick to those mentioned, focusing our attention on themes pertinent to understanding what we understand as child performers (Machado, 2010), or in trying to understand a performativity of children or their childhood.

The children's attentive bodies always seem to be ready for action, it is something latent. Realizing that the orality of five-year-old children is still developing and that the shyness of some is also an obstacle to speech, we were able to look at their bodies in a different way, capable of carrying more meanings and possibilities than we have imagined. When we announced the continuation of the story at each new meeting, we could see that the bodies of most of them "woke up" and were in a state of readiness for the ritual of transformation into a robot. In fact, this ritual also ended up happening by chance, as they asked us to build the robot again at each meeting. As such, each new episode of the *Endless Story* began with all of us, players/*performers*, building ourselves, making ourselves robots. More than imitating the machine, what we noticed in this ritual was the attention and the state of readiness that the children's bodies were in, as the "imitation" of the machine itself was easily lost. However, the attention remained. Why do we think this is a quality? The body awareness we sought for this group, at this age, was not perfection of movement, but a

state of readiness for creation. This state, when in performance, revealed the identity of the group, the creation and the group in creation. The children's bodies revealed a mixture of restraint and an explosion of energy. Children sought touch, whether from other people, relatives, friends, or from the world around them. In our story, it was no different. In the virtual environment, they wanted to show off their bodies, they felt more powerful when they were noticed. When the school returned to face-to-face activities, bodies instinctively sought each other out. We teachers had to be careful to avoid approaching each other, given the pandemic scenario. But the latency of the bodies was there.

Machado (2010) observed that this corporeality of children seen as *performers* signals the culture that exists in these bodies, using Merleau-Ponty's concepts and approach to his thinking. Translating this reflection, the author does not see the children's bodies as being at the service of culture, nor does he see culture as being at the service of the children's bodies. What stands out, based on her reflection, is that the ways of being and relating to the world and to others are so closely linked that we cannot separate body and culture, body-self and body-other. Let's return to our analysis to understand this issue.

Still in the virtual environment, the desire to return to this endless story was due to the possibilities of realizing this game in the body, for the pleasure that this performance offered. The children's bodies seemed more awake because they knew that at that moment a space/time would be recreated to relive the pleasure they had experienced before. Children's bodies realize themselves while playing and, for this reason, they seek it out. This realization is the very manifestation of childhood culture.

We can also think aesthetically about the child's body. By looking at Fischer-Lichte's (2011) understanding of the aesthetics of the performative, we can see how the body can exercise and offer the performance an aesthetic and a reading key. In her studies, she identifies the understanding she calls the phenomenic body, which in itself signals this culture, as seen in Machado (2010). On the other hand, the author talks about the semiotic body, which would be the body of interpretation, which becomes a character and is read according to the dramaturgical context, trying to hide the *performer* under this "mask". However, what interests us and is present in Fisher-Lichte's (2011) reflections is when contemporary theater understands the boundary between these perceptions of the body and consciously transgress it. The characteristic of contemporary theater is to move between the semiotic and the phenomenic body.

> [...] contemporary theater plays with perceptual multistability. The interest centers on the moment when the perception of the phenomenic body jumps to the perception of the character and vice versa, which happens depending on whether it is the body of the actor or the fictional character that is in the foreground, concentrating attention. Therefore, the goal is the moment when the perceiver is on the threshold between the two perceptions" (Fisher-Lichte, 2011, p. 182-183)[1].

1 "[…] en el teatro contemporâneo se juega com la multiestabilidad perceptiva. El interés se centra em el instante em que la percepción del cuerpo fenomênico salta a la percepcíon del personage e viceversa, cosa que ocorre según sea el

This transgression of the boundary of the body that represents leads us to an understanding of the body that is, stay and does something. The robot characters do not dominate the bodies of the children who, at the same time, do not forget that they are playing a role. We are in that intermediate zone in which the child is the robot without ceasing to be a child, acting and enjoying the moment as a child. The actions are sometimes represented, but most of the time they are lived. Once again, Ficher-Lichte (2011) brings up a dichotomy that we can understand as the basis of the aesthetics of the performative, while talking about the opposition between "representation" and "lived experience" (Fisher-Lichte, 2011, p. 184). Looking at our experience, the story transformed into a dramatic play, it is clear that it would tend to lead us towards a mode of representation, but when it becomes a play, it also becomes a "lived experience".

In short, it is important to realize that the child's performativity, in terms of the signs on their body, is revealed in the border zones: between the semiotic body and the phenomenic body, between representation and lived experience. This space of the 'in-between' is characteristic of what we can call childhood culture (among the many possible ones). It is the hybrid space of creation and life, theater (fiction) and playing (reality), body and culture.

In Pereira (2012) we also understand that it is necessary to pay attention to bodies in performance, as they are seen as poetic bodies, loaded with meaning.

> Whatever the context in which performance is investigated, it can be said that, in all of them, performance finds its term and relationship in the body, in physical presence, since it both marks identities and shapes the body, giving the body another form, another sense - be it a meaning, a sensation or an orientation. This means that in performance the body goes from narrative to poetic, and is not just taken as a physical apparatus that constitutes an individual or organic singularity. The body is a space for representation and acting (Pereira, 2012, p. 293-294).

It is also essential to analyze the second point raised, which refers to the children's effective participation as creators of this story, not only in terms of the elaborated narrative, but also in its realization in space/time, as a game and performance. This participation can happen directly: for example, when one of the children took on the role of the villainous robot, there was a transformation on the other bodies, which stood "against" that child. And participation in this creation can occur indirectly too, manifested through the subtleties that children experience and that are absorbed by us, teachers, or even by other children. The conduction of the game must be very attentive to identify these subtleties, such as a child who says or does something minor, but interesting and possible to enhance the performance. It could be an object they pick up or find, a speech said more quietly, a movement that is different from what the majority of the class is doing. These subtleties can enter into what Fisher-Lichte calls a "feedback loop" (Fisher-Lichte, 2011, p. 104).

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cuerpo del ator o el personage de ficción el que este em primer plano centrando la atención. El objetivo es, pues, el momento em el que quien percebe se encuentra em el umbral entre ambas percepciones" (Fisher-Lichte, 2011, p. 182-183).

To understand this cycle, we need to delve deeper into the author's work and understand that theatrical performance combines the aesthetic nature of the artwork with its social and political character. When we play and perform our Endless Story, we open our perception to the other to seek opportunities within these subtleties to transform our action, making it more fun, playful, and interesting in an aesthetic sense. Perception connects us. As teachers, we are attentive to perceive such subtleties and share them with the whole group. However, the children also connect through them and, in their desire to imitate, resonate with what interests them. Imitation as play is like a magnifying glass capable of amplifying the subtleties that one perceives in another. This "contagion"—expansion of subtleties—is what we understand as the driving force behind this feedback loop that occurs in our story. The feedback loop establishes through the connections of the performers with themselves and between performers and spectators. In our play, we are all performers and, at the same time, spectators. When perception effectively connects us, we take for the whole what was previously restricted to the individual, and this action, desire, or experience becomes part of the larger whole that is performed. When a child experiments with hiding from the camera by crouching down as a way to escape the evil robot, and the others notice this act and imitate it, we have an aesthetic configuration of people appearing and disappearing from the mini screens, creating an interesting and, more importantly, playful aesthetic effect. This joint action was only possible because of the connection caused by perception. "The mere act of perceiving the other is a political act" (Fischer-Lichte, 2011, p. 90). This phrase makes us think beyond, because much more than creating together, we are in an educational space. Understanding our performance as a political possibility of group perception is a way to redefine the school space.

The third point of analysis is present throughout the development of the performance and is linked to the pleasure it causes, i.e., the playful character. Playfulness is a characteristic of play, as well noted by the canons of play studies: Huizinga (2014), Callois (1990), Koudela (2001). However, in this article, we analyze playfulness from the perspective of the Sociology of Childhood, pointed out by Sarmento (2003)

> Playfulness is a fundamental trait of children's cultures. Playing is not exclusive to children; it is inherent to humans and one of their most significant social activities. However, children play continuously and selflessly. Unlike adults, there is no distinction between playing and doing serious things, with play being much of what children do most seriously (Sarmento, 2003, p. 15).

Among the guiding principles of childhood cultures that Sarmento (2003) discusses in his studies, playfulness interests us as a mark of these cultures. It is important to use the term in the plural because childhood cultures vary according to different contexts, but some guiding principles, such as playfulness, appear as a common aspect among them. As a characteristic of childhood, we understand that playfulness highlighted the fun and play in our endless story as a way to effectively perform effectively the cultures of childhood. Since children conducted this performance, playing and playfulness appear as marks of a children's aesthetic, or rather, of children's performativity. They

have notably shown fun in moments of imitation, repetition of the story, discoveries, and games with feelings, such as fear and courage in the face of the villain, demonstrations of overcoming, among others.

If we understand the performative as the capacity to create a self-referential reality and performativity as an identity quality, ideas present in the studies of Austin (1990) and reworked by other authors such as Butler (2003), we can affirm that play is a manifestation of the child's identity seen as a social actor (Corsaro, 2011). If play and playfulness are marks of a culture and performance is the manifestation of such identity, then we can look at our *Endless Story* as a performative manifestation of childhood culture, with children's performativity being the ability to realize this identity in space-time. "Identity means discovery, journey, search and construction of meaning, the ideal horizon of what is placed as good for itself and for the community in which the subject is inserted. We discover what we are by coming to be..." (Féral, 2015, p. 306). Féral (2015) alerts us to the understanding of identity, which realizes itself in the process of creation. This manifestation results precisely from the tensions existing between the act of creating and the identity itself. Therefore, this process is dear to us, not only because it manifests our identity as a social or contextualized group: the creative process makes us find and exercise identity.

2.1 From Unexpected Results to Theatre Pedagogy

The experimentation that occurred from the perspective of performative research, having experience and action as the paths of creation with children, fostered an interesting possibility that was revisited with new groups of Kindergarten 5, students who joined the school the following year. This time, as classes were completely in-person, we had other possibilities, such as the school space, sound equipment, chairs, and benches that served as objects for resymbolization. The narrative thread was different, and robots emerged as well. However, it is important to highlight in a brief description that the exercise that arose in an environment that was completely unfamiliar to us. It constituted a seed of a working methodology that endured in another context precisely because it fostered engagement and collective creation, opening up possibilities for everyone – teachers and children – to exercise their performativities.

What emerged as a performative methodology is viewed now through the lens of Performative Pedagogy (Icle; Bonatto, 2017). Alternatively, it is even seen by the relationship between Pedagogy and Performance (Pereira, 2012), which opens up new paths in education.

In our analysis, especially when we view the social roles of teachers and students horizontally, particularly in theater classes, we have an important basis for understanding performative pedagogy. Furthermore, looking at the world and consequently at the school with the idea that we perform there indicates the direction of ruptures that art can achieve, opening perception to spaces and

relationships. In this sense, we also better understand the presence of students/performers, with special attention to their bodies, full of creative and performative potency. In the new classes, the story brought a new narrative in which, at a certain point, we all passed through a magic door that transformed us into animals. This simple mark can be analyzed for its potent reverberations: at that moment, the children chose the animal they wanted to perform, experimented, changed their minds, noticed classmates more satisfied with their choices, and felt the desire to do the same. Nothing was forbidden; everything could be tried: it was the autonomy to develop the performative persona (Carvalhaes, 2012) in their own way, remembering that at this age representation and presentation (state of presence) (Bonfitto, 2013) are intertwined. They felt proud when sharing their choices. Often, they come to us to tell us what animal they chose, to which we would respond, "Ok, keep going!"

We understand the concept of performative persona from the studies of Carvalhaes (2012) on Renato Cohen, who initiated practices that give us the idea of a presence developed between such process and being on stage. In our process, we perceived this idea of performative persona precisely at the threshold between representing and exercising presence, highlighting children's autonomy and alterity in their participation in the process. Matteo Bonfitto (2013) also explains the idea that performance can place us in this space between representing and exercising presence, free of any trace of theatrical interpretation, a state that the author called presentation. It is important to note that for the author, in an experience, we do not necessarily perceive the categories of representation and presentation as defined and isolated, but somehow they can coexist. This is what we observed in the practice with children: while they are in some way seeking the character, as in the case of animals, they do not cease to exercise their presences and alterities.

In the new in-person groups, the fact that we also ended the classes without a conclusion to the story made them ask us to continue in subsequent classes. This is the point that most caught our attention, because as students, in a certain way, they are developing their own classes, showing what is to be done. The children's participation is effective both in the performance of this story and in the lesson planning. The story continued only because they brought this desire. Over time, they realized that the end of the classes was dedicated to this creation, and they made themselves available to conduct it.

Participating in this way, both in the activities and in the lesson planning, led us to conceive the idea of performative pedagogy, as it places education itself as a performative act.

> Following the line of thought developed so far, we take the notion of liminal space to think of the classroom as a performative space and education as a performative act, enabling the development of teaching-creation processes. Such processes would bear the mark of collaboration between teachers and students, imbued with the characteristics of participants in a performance (Icle; Bonatto, 2017, p. 22)

In performative pedagogy, we perceive the teaching-learning process in a horizontal manner, dismantling the hierarchical idea of content transmission from teachers. We also perceive pedagogy as an inventive and creative manifestation, willing to redefine itself and seek new possibilities. Students play an important social role in the relationship that takes place in the school. As we mentioned above, we seek in children the social actors who perform and represent their position in the various relationships they establish. The children need to exercise the agency we discussed during the creation process, which in itself is a teaching-learning process. In this thinking, we once again establish a powerful link between sociology and performance. Performance reminds us that the artistic, ethical, and aesthetic value of art lies in its creation process. In the so-called *work in progress* (Cohen, 1998), we perceive more than just art being made, but relationships being established and various voices involved in the process with their space for listening and realization.

Thus, performative pedagogy led us to understand the process described and analyzed in these pages: it guided us in the development of a pedagogical plan in the arts with the effective participation of children both in creation and the needs and paths chosen for the development of teaching and learning in art. Their choice to continue the story led us to rethink the lessons, respecting the nature of the process that was in full realization. The children's agency manifested both in creation, with their personas, games and ideas for the direction of the story, and the preparation of the lessons.

3 Conclusion

In this article, we highlight the relationships between performance and education, as well as understand what the performativity of children can be by looking at play as a performative and educational act. The trigger for this analysis came during classes virtually conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led the private school observed here to adopt a non in-person teaching system. Given the strangeness caused by this new form of teaching, especially considering the Theater discipline, we found in the performative methodology a way to explore potent possibilities in our virtual meetings with children. Without a defined plan, we needed to understand how we (teachers and students) would behave in this new reality.

By opening ourselves up to chance and paying attention to what the children themselves discovered and engaged in, we came up with this *Endless Story*, which had to be interrupted in one class due to the end of the regular time, being resumed in the next class, but never finished and always resumed in subsequent classes. Thus, we realized that by experimenting with possibilities, the students took it upon themselves to elaborate the dramatic play, by either actively participating in the narrative developed, or elaborating their own paths of theater education, always bringing back this story with new challenges.

From the point of view of performative practice, we looked at the bodies of children *performers*, who moved between representation and presentation. Bodies that sometimes played roles and sometimes placed themselves in the power of their phenomenic bodies, showed the reality they lived. The liminal space between reality and fiction, typical of play, was part of the performance.

The children's effective participation in the narrative and in resuming the performance each day also led us to view this practice as a performative act driven by the desire and eagerness for creation. Finally, we saw the playfulness that accompanied the whole process as a mark of childhood in this practice, which permeates the children's whole process of being, being present, doing and showing what they did.

As the result of this performative methodology was satisfactory, we decided to bring this practice into new classes, even after returning to school. In other words, through the performative methodology, which led us to reflect on practice as a guide to action, we developed a practice that engages and can be appropriated by the children.

When we extrapolated this practice beyond the virtual meetings, we realized that it opened up our perception to understand it under the aegis of Performative Pedagogy. This is because it reconfigures relationships in the classroom: students get involved in planning their own activities, gain autonomy in their educational process and realize that this engagement reflects in performative creation.

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