

Language and relationship with the others: contributions from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to child psychotherapy

Rosa Angela Cortez de Brito* 

Willyan da Costa Mota 

Lucas Bloc 

Virginia Moreira 

Universidade de Fortaleza, Fortaleza, CE, Brasil

Abstract: Our article aims at discussing the notion of language and the relationship with others in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a possible foundation for humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy with children. For Merleau-Ponty, language presents itself as a living and intersubjective experience and the recognition of oneself and others by the child would not occur in intellection, but through the experiential dimension. The psychotherapists listen to the child and their participation occurs as recognition and affectation in the face of children's language. The relationship constitutes a double reversibility: recognition of the other by the child in his own experience of the body and of the manifest feelings about others; affectation of the encounter, experienced by both the psychotherapist and the child. We conclude that this proposal represents a fruitful contribution to humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy with children by privileging the child's understanding beyond stereotypes and crystallized notions of childhood.

Keywords: language, intersubjectivity, phenomenology, humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy, play therapy..

Introduction

Psychotherapy with children is an intervention that contributes to the relief of emotional suffering and to the care of difficulties that may compromise child in his/her daily life (Carvalho, Fiorini, & Ramires, 2015; Deakin & Nunes, 2008; Prout & Fedewa, 2015; Weisz, Doos, & Hawley, 2005). The World Health Organization recommends this intervention as the primary care strategy in situations where children have experiences that are understood or diagnosed as psychopathological (World Health Organization, 2017).

Since the first proposals for intervention and therapeutic care for children – such as the case of the boy Hans, by Freud; the systematization of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein's proposals for clinical child care (Deakin & Nunes, 2008); and the principles developed by Axline in his non-directive psychotherapy (Axline, 1947/2013) –, the contributions and propositions of psychotherapy models have increased significantly (Landreth, 2012).

Studies in psychotherapy with children have emphasized the psychotherapist's training in the handling and treatment of situations such as behavioral problems, drop in school performance, monitoring of psychopathological conditions, and developmental disorders (Bratton, Purswell, & Jayne, 2015; Deakin &

Nunes, 2008; Lin & Bratton, 2015). Aspects concerning the relationship developed between the psychotherapist and the child and the qualitative elements that constitute the development of psychotherapy with children have been less prominent in studies, to the detriment of the development of techniques focusing on the treatment of illnesses (Deakin & Nunes, 2008; Prout & Fedewa, 2015).

Therapeutic factors, such as the establishment and maintenance of the therapeutic alliance, the empathic posture, clear objectives around psychotherapy, and the consideration of the client's active role, are strong predictors for positive results in psychotherapy (Wampold & Imel, 2015). This data points to the need for greater attention to psychotherapy's relational aspects, as these are central elements in their effectiveness (Wampold, Baldwin, Holtforth, & Imel, 2017).

As the relational aspects develop through communication between psychotherapist and client (Boswell, Kraus, Constantino, Bugatti, & Castonguay, 2017), we consider it relevant to understand the development of language in the context of psychotherapy. Concerning psychotherapy with children, language takes on a unique shape due to this human life period's specificities and how the child establishes contact and relationship with the world and other people.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, language presents itself as a living experience in us and intrinsically intersubjective (Gamboa, 2014; Merleau-Ponty,

* Corresponding address: rosaacbrito@gmail.com



1964/2012), i.e., it is established in the relationship with the other. In courses on child psychology, taught at the Sorbonne in the 1940s, the philosopher starts from the premise that childhood cannot be terminated entirely (Verissimo, 2011) and highlights the childhood experience as a “privileged manifestation. . . in a nascent state and before objectification” (p. 460). Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) discusses the importance of recognizing children in the way they present themselves and maintaining a critical eye on the previous concepts constructed about them, childhood, and the concepts of health and disease as a possibility of knowledge of the child phenomenon.

From this perspective, we started from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, elements to think about possible contributions as a basis for psychotherapy with children, more specifically in the humanistic-phenomenological approach. We understand that this phenomenology can contribute to a clinic that is inspired by his thinking. Although we chose to discuss language and the relationship with the other on different topics in this article’s development, we emphasize that they are closely interlinked in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological lens underlies the humanist-phenomenological perspective, a current clinical proposal constituting the intersection of humanistic psychology and phenomenological psychopathology. In this intervention proposal, the psychotherapist seeks to access and understand the child’s *lebenswelt* (lived world), recognizing the different meanings constituted from his/her historicity, culture, family relationships, and openness to the world as a being of possibilities. Humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy is a clinical proposal that focuses on individual and group care (Correia & Moreira, 2016; Moreira, 2012, 2013; Moreira & Bloc, 2013).

In this article, we focus our discussion on the fertility of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology by providing foundations that allow an effective understanding of the child’s experience. Thus, this theoretical essay seeks to discuss the notions of language and the relationship with others in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as a possible foundation for humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy with children. For this purpose, we present the notions of language acquisition and the relationship with the other in this phenomenology. Then, we discuss the possible contributions to psychotherapy with children of humanistic-phenomenological reference.

The process of language acquisition in childhood

In his search for recognition and reflection on the phenomenon of language acquisition by humans, Merleau-Ponty focused on studies in the fields of psychology and philosophy. In the language acquisition process,

it is essential to differentiate the child’s and adult’s perceptions. Unlike the adult, in which the perceptual process stops in the sets with organized details, without prejudice to details or even the whole, the child has a vision of the whole. It means the reality around him/her as a whole, without prioritizing aspects of this whole of the individualized form (Merleau-Ponty, 1934/2015).

Despite this difference in perceptual organization, since the first days of life, it is already possible to observe a common fact: the child’s attempt to relate to the world, but adequately and possibly to his childhood condition. For Rocha (2011), it is the language that enables an organization of what is perceived. The language development process occurs based on this relationship with the other, through attempts to establish communication: “it is the relationship with the environment that incites the child to language: it is an objective defined by the outside, and not pre-established in the organism” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 9).

In the first few weeks, smiles point to communicational establishments with others to express satisfaction and react to other people’s smiles. For Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006), this data “already assumes a relationship with another person” (p. 8) and precedes verbal language. In the first months of life, the child uses different forms of expression until reaching the babbling, considered by the philosopher to be an “ancestral form of language” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 7) polymorphic, with an extraordinary richness of possibilities.

From the act of babbling, Merleau-Ponty (1960/2014) states “that the child speaks and will learn to apply the principle of speech differently” (p. 65, emphasis added in the original). However, it is impossible to say that there is already a relationship of meaning, but, rather, a type of imitation of a primitive nature. The relationship with the other presents itself as a key and answer (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006).

Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) illustrates, comparatively, that “between babbling and language, the relationship is the same that exists between scribble and drawing” (p. 7), which denotes interdependence between these elements. In the same way that the scribble is constituted as the rudiment of a drawing, it also represents the drawing itself’s total sense. This same logic is organized around the relationship between babbling and spoken language, in which the first contains the whole meaning of the second.

Before speaking, the child also experiences an appropriation of the rhythm and the accentuation of the language. The child already has all the capabilities to acquire any human language. In language development, a kind of selection of specific aspects occurs: the child goes from a generality – understood by Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) as a wealth of elements – to a certain impoverishment. The child moves from an overall

view to a type of specialization. The senses, previously magnetized primarily in the gestures, also rest in the spoken language, seeking a more objective direction.

Even already mastering the spoken language, the child still has no notion of the sign, like the adult. Even using the same word, the meaning differs due to the child's syncretic vision, in totalities. Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) points out that, "even if the child uses the word of the adult, its meaning is always more fleeting. . . . A single word can serve to designate a whole set of things referring to a similar situation" (p. 13). Language would work, in a way, globally, insofar as a single word can designate several things.

When expanding his/her repertoire in the relationship with the world, the child gives meaning to the words, as the use possibilities are broadened. For Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006), "the linguistic capital cannot be considered as a sum of words: they are, rather, systems of variations that allow an open series of words. . . . It is a totality with open sectors, giving indefinite possibilities of expression" (p. 14). Thus, in language acquisition, we cannot speak about sums and overcoming development stages, but about significant movements present in children's relationship with words and that allow experimentation from intersubjectivity (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006).

Based on this positioning, Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) avoids what he considers an artificial division in "successive stages," stating that

all possibilities are inscribed in the child's expressive manifestations; there is never anything absolutely new but anticipations, regressions, permanences of archaic elements in new forms. In this development, on the one hand, everything is outlined in advance. On the other, it proceeds through a series of discontinuous progress. (p. 15)

It is an acquisition process that takes place through significant *gestalten*, which can be better clarified with the analysis of the acquisition of phonemes and the occurrence of the phenomenon of imitation and restriction to the possibilities available in the world.

Upon hearing others speak, the child listens to sounds and can build relationships with others, inescapably crossed by the cultural dimension. Inserted into culture through language, the child's perceptive movement over objects and the world around them takes place, resuming their sense, grouping sounds and meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006). It is a process in which, little by little, the child begins to understand and incorporate the senses.

In the appropriation of the language, the child will depend on his/her culture since he/she will not learn the language. Instead, the child will restrict his/her expressive possibilities, enabling the appropriation and the direction to the language and the accent where he/she lives.

This insertion in culture occurs through a search for meaning, a need for intersubjective communication, in the child's context (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006).

The language in the child carries with it a potential creator. If, on the one hand, it is limited by units, on the other, it is potentially unlimited in the meaning of things. Even if it can be used in its strictest sense, there is always a possibility for new meanings through relationships with others. The child summons the other through language, and this, as a vital operation, is the means for establishing relationships (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006). We understand that this perspective reinforces a look at the child by recognizing a total capacity that ends up being restricted, advancing beyond the conception of a void that would come to be filled with an existing language.

Considering the adult and the child as having the same language due to their insertion in culture, but in different expressions, Merleau-Ponty directs us to look at language as never fully defined. This allows us to discuss a possibility of approximation between the language of the child and the adult. The child's language has the value of communication but taking place in an organization of totalities, without the projection only on an objective plane (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006). His/her organization refers to a subjective plane (of the meaning) that precedes and transcends logic (Veríssimo, 2011), giving the expressive meaning of language.

In the process of language acquisition, Merleau-Ponty argues that it would not be possible to think of language origin in the child or a chain recognized as purely logical. Instead, in a "march of language towards its most expressive forms, from less expressive forms" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 62). The language is made of meanings in a nascent state, in movement, "it works concerning thought as the body concerning perception" (p. 67). According to Munõz (1998), we do not think and then speak, just as we do not order our bodies to move in space. There is an intrinsic relationship between them; one is the other and vice versa, organized in a plane of a pre-reflexive nature that goes back to the *lebenswelt*.

The language would be developed by the desire to establish communication in the movement of coexistence and recognition of the world's subjects. The meaning is human, and the language is constituted as a way for communication with the other. It requires considering that the child, in his relational journey with others and the appropriation of language in culture, desires to communicate. To understand communication in the child, we must seek its meaning amid his/her mode of communication concerning others.

The child concerning others and the notion of body scheme

Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) invites us to understand how the child establishes his/her

relationships and the constituent meanings of that establishment. For the philosopher, classical psychology approached the theme from the attempt to explain the notions of psyche and kinesthesia (Veríssimo, 2012). The psyche is related to the sets of characteristics and psychological abilities specific to each individual. At the same time, kinesthesia is understood by the body's concept as possessing sensations and an awareness of itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006).

For Merleau-Ponty, the experience of the other is organized as follows: insofar as the psyche of the other is inaccessible and, therefore, an impossible way for the establishment of the relationship, the experience of the other occurs through our body, what we are, and what we feel about him. When we see the other's body, we recognize it through our own body and relate through what we feel in that relationship (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006); it is a kind of body permeability concerning the world and to others (Veríssimo, 2012).

This intercorporeal relationship between our body and that of the other raises, in childhood, two questions: first, the recognition that the child perceives the other early, being, from a very early age, sensitive, for example, to the smile of those who smile at them; and second, the child organizes him/herself in this relationship through imitation, because "he/she makes the gesture according to the image of what he/she sees another person doing" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 306). For the philosopher, in a classic view of psychology, both operations would require the child's understanding of a complicated system requiring access to an inaccessible psyche and a perception of others from the first months of life for him; it does not. The phenomenologist assumes and defends that the child would have other possibilities of globally identifying the alien body.

For Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006), the solution would occur in two terms: the reformulation of the notions of psyche and kinesthesia by the notions of conduct and body scheme. Via the notion of conduct, if the other's psyche is impenetrable, the relationship is established by apprehending the other's conduct: "it will be in your conduct that I will be able to apprehend, find the other person" (p. 307), as well as the meanings of your shares. This behavior of the body of another is apprehended through a body scheme.

From the notion of body scheme, the body is understood as a cluster of sensations and sensory bundles and a system that positions and inserts itself in space (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2001, 1953/2011). Thus, the body is configured as "a scheme including the relationship with my body's position in the environment" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 307). As a body belonging to this space common to others, we perceive our body and the other's, who is also an inhabitant in that space.

The body scheme as a norm and zero-point, as a level and privileged attitude. . . , this as in evidence in the corporal scheme. . . a certain way of assimilating the world, of identifying with it as in the voice, a certain way of assimilating others and of identifying it with them. (Merleau-Ponty, 1953/2011, p. 132)

This relationship, of an intersubjective nature, enables our body and the other's, in space, to constitute and reveal each other as a unit (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006).

In the initial life process, in which the child "organizes his/her body scheme and begins to perceive other people" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 308), contact with the world begins with the call of the human voice, by the speech of the other. This goes on with eye contact, and these processes can be perceived by the reactions visible in babies after the first interactions.

In this process, the child will gradually get to know the other's body. The sensations of what is his/her body and what is the other's are mixed, as well as what is external and internal are also mixed, followed by a differentiation between these, constituting the perception that there is another that perceives his/her body. In a reversible movement, the child understands that his/her body is visible to the other. This gives the idea that "the others' eyes awaken in the child the awareness of not only what is for his/her own eyes, but also what is for the others'" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 322). The child's knowledge and recognition of oneself and others do not occur on the intellectual plane but as a relationship system crossed by the experience dimension. The (inter) corporal scheme has the task of organizing the child's way of being in the world.

Contributions of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy with children

Psychotherapy comprises a process that can have varied objectives, depending on the psychotherapist's theoretical perspective, but that never dispense with the relationship (Freitas, 2009). In psychotherapy with children, this relationship is organized uniquely by the specificities of this intervention and allows the development of coping ways in the face of distressing contexts and situations (Axline 1947/2013; Therense, 2019).

In humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy with children, the psychotherapist is a facilitator in the process of establishing the child's language in what he/she has to say. This represents a "legitimation of the child's role in the face of demands" (Forteski, Borges, Moreira, & Sevegnani, 2014, p. 526) that bring him/her to the

psychotherapeutic process. Even recognizing that other actors participate in child psychotherapy – the family, school, and others that are necessary (Aguiar, 2014; Brito & Freire, 2014) –, the constant search will be to understand the child's language in psychotherapy from the relationship with another specific one, the psychotherapist. It is a type of ideal relationship that seeks to potentiate the child and allow his/her different expression forms through the bond and the relationship itself.

In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, understanding children must start from direct contact with them, as there is an inherent complexity in their relationship with the world and with others. For the phenomenologist, "psychology [of the child] is not a simple note of everything the child does: there are only traces of a dynamic of development resulting from the family constellation, from the social environment" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2006, p. 471). We understand that psychotherapy must be referenced as a context in which the child can communicate about him/herself and have this legitimated language. It is up to the psychotherapist, in this relationship, the availability and openness to the child phenomenon, the constant search to get out of the adult's perception, and the attempt to perceive how the child means things, assuming an understanding and empathic movement (Brito & Freire, 2014) of children's language.

In this sense, the psychotherapist's participation must occur as recognition and affectation of children's language and establishing the encounter in psychotherapy as a possibility of speech. Here, we discuss speech as language and reveal the child's experience in the intersubjective therapeutic relationship due to the possible communicational possibilities. The play, the verbal, the drawings, the various expressive forms, the creations of play dough, clay etc., constitute themselves as language. Using Merleau-Ponty's terms, psychotherapy development would occur as the construction of initial "babbling" and "scribbles." Then there would be a further deepening of "speech" and "drawing" as metaphors to understand the establishment of language in the intersubjective relationship between the child and the psychotherapist. The phenomenological foundation is not based on the interpretation of what the child reveals, but part of the rescue of an immediate contact that reveals meanings that must be understood from the child and his/her lived world (*lebenswelt*).

It is relevant to point out that the context of psychotherapy, concerning the monitoring of experiences, understood as psychopathological (Prout & Fedewa, 2015), can also have the Merleau-Ponty philosophy as inspiration. The child's language about his/her psychopathological condition and the communication of this experience in the intersubjective relationship allows the psychotherapist to recognize him/her in his/her suffering experience. This, in other contexts, can be considered by the adults around him/her as mere symptoms or diagnoses.

In Merleau-Ponty-inspired humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy, the psychotherapist understands the psychopathological phenomenon as transcending symptomatology (Moreira, 2002). It means he/she seeks, in addition to the symptom, the child's mode of functioning, which is sometimes expressed through language and its relations. The psychotherapist, in an attitude of openness and availability in the face of the unpredictable (Brito & Freire, 2014), seeks to approach the child's psychopathological *lebenswelt* experience in the way that he/she can express, in his/her language and his/her relationship with the world and with others. The attitudes of availability and openness to this singular form of communication of the children's experience are established by a two-way work: with the child, in an intersubjective movement of description and understanding of the psychopathological experience, as experienced by him/her; and with adults who relate to the child, in a dialogue about their representations of behaviors, symptoms, and difficulties faced by the child.

We understand that what is communicated by the child at a given moment in his life story represents, as Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) points out, "a momentary state of personal and interpersonal dynamics" (p. 473). In this support, based on the notion of the symptom as the language (Moreira, 2002; Rogers & Stevens, 1977), humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy can constitute a space for expanding the possibilities of communication of acute suffering, experiences, and the meanings of the child, in the intersubjectivity of the relationship, which enhances it for the transcendence of the condition of illness (Moreira, 2002).

Another relevant aspect of this form of participation by the psychotherapist, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (2001/2006), is the redirection of the psychotherapist's attention to the way the child relates to others who are part of his social context. This endorses the participation and monitoring of the family, the school, and other actors that are part of the relational field. In psychotherapy, we understand how important the child's recognition from its intertwining with the world – in which his/her family and other social contexts participate.

Initial and follow-up interviews with families are part of the therapeutic process with children (Aguiar, 2014; Bratton et al., 2015; Brito & Freire, 2014;). As implications of the inspiration in the Merleau-Ponty phenomenology for the psychotherapeutic practice with children, we recognize that the psychotherapist's contact must occur through the suspension of the *a priori* provided in the communication established by the family in the initial and follow-up interviews during psychotherapy.

More radically, the psychotherapist seeks the stable suspension of childhood representation, which can appear in the discourse of those about the child. Thus, the child can have space to communicate his/her lived experience, his/her relations with the world,

others, and the child's relationship established with the psychotherapist. As Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) points out, we understand that this suspension will always be tentative since it is never completed. However, even with the incompleteness, it is a fundamental attitude in psychotherapy, allowing the child's encounter and accomplishing the intersubjective encounter.

For Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006), access to the child's language and the child's relationship with others represents an invitation to the targeted criticism about childhood representation that crosses us. The child phenomenon cannot be understood in an essentialist way, as if it were a "rudiment of an adult" (p. 464), nor as someone who would need, by "nature," the support of the adult at any time. Recognizing the child for his/her way of building language and establishing a relationship with others allows, in humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy, the opening and facilitation of the possibilities of reorganizing and expanding his/her ways of experiencing contact with the world and communicating. In psychotherapy, this can promote openness to childhood recognition in its relational and language potentials, such as dynamism and movement. For Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006), this movement implies advances and discontinuities but never stoppage. This attitude can bring the psychotherapist closer to the child's experience through a relationship of more significant proximity and trust with the child. It represents psychotherapy as a relationship in which he/she can participate more actively.

Merleau-Ponty (2001/2006) emphasizes that the spontaneity and ingenuity that underlie the child's experience of existence must be the first element in understanding language and the relationship with others of childhood. In this perspective, the child is fundamentally intertwined with his/her existence, in a time, space, culture, mutual constitution with the world. Understanding the phenomenon of childhood would be made possible in psychotherapy by unveiling the childhood experience in its dimension of corporeality. This relationship would take place in a perspective that we understand as double reversibility: the first, in recognition of the other by the child, through his/her own experience of the body and the feelings expressed about others; the second, due to the affectation that occurs in the encounter, experienced by both the psychotherapist and the child (Brito & Freire, 2014).

This recognition of the other's gaze enables the child to see and be seen through the experience of body scheme, which can be perceived in psychotherapy as an intervention organized through play (Axline 1947/2013), manifested and expressed in the child's and the psychotherapist's bodies in the clinical setting. The use of space – sitting, rolling on the floor, jumping – highlights, through play, the establishment of communication, bonding, and coexistence in the humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapeutic context.

Final considerations

We understand that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological proposal represents a fruitful contribution to psychotherapy with children. It privileges their understanding beyond stereotypes and crystallized childhood notions and seeks access to the infantile experience as the child itself experiences and means. We opted for the notions of language and the relationship with others because we consider them to be fundamental elements in the discussion about psychotherapy with children. Given the little emphasis given in the literature to qualitative aspects and intersubjectivity dimension, we verified the need to discuss these points and their implications in the intervention with this audience.

In the phenomenology-inspired psychotherapeutic process, establishing a relationship in which the child's *lebenswelt* (lived world) can be manifested through the dimensions of corporeality and intersubjectivity constitutes a relevant way of care and promotion of changes. We highlight the importance of recognizing the child's language through the psychotherapist's attitudes of availability and openness and the interventional possibilities developable in the child's psychotherapeutic context. These attitudes and interventions should privilege access and recognition of the child's experiences. This is based on his/her meaning and understood by the psychotherapist in developing the intersubjective relationship.

Language, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, inspires a clinical practice in which the child can unveil the way he/she perceives the world, others, and him/herself, as well as the languages he/she uses to organize his perceptual processes. The psychotherapeutic relationship enables the child to be different. It promotes a more active participation space for him/her due to the multiple expressive possibilities that he/she can use and allows experiments with languages that can manifest themselves in the relationship with the psychotherapist. The intersubjective relationship becomes an invitation to explore a language experience in its creative potential, which is engagement in the world and constituted by the new and the creative.

The discussion about the child's relationship with others, present in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, invites us to return to the childhood phenomenon that presents itself in the relationship. This is about turning to how the child establishes his/her relationships, who this other would be for him/her. Also, the different forms of language through which he/she communicates with the different others. For the psychotherapist, accessing and understanding this *lebenswelt* is a way of responding to the child's call, in his/her otherness, and in what it presents as a need for him/her to be in psychotherapy. In this relationship, which occurs via the body scheme, the child also relates to him/herself through the psychotherapist's relationship.

The relevance of constant criticism around preconceptions about childhood and the representational perspective of adults about the child, highlighted in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, contributes to a relational, interventional, and communicational development in psychotherapy. Also, it points out the limits inherent to the type of relationship that we establish and allows us to have contact with the child, which will always be an attempt at completion. This completeness will never materialize since the child phenomenon does not end in our representation of childhood.

We consider it essential to continue researching the dialogue between psychotherapeutic theories with children with the Merleau-Ponty philosophy. We do not intend to exhaust the discussion about the intervention with this audience but rather to point out a possibility of dialogue that we understand as fruitful. The development of research, both theoretical and empirical, can contribute to endorsing the fertility of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thinking to improve the theory and practice of psychotherapy with children.

Linguagem e relação com os outros: contribuições da fenomenologia de Merleau-Ponty para a psicoterapia infantil

Resumo: O objetivo deste ensaio teórico é discutir a noção de linguagem e a relação com os outros na fenomenologia de Merleau-Ponty como possível fundamento para a psicoterapia humanista-fenomenológica com crianças. Para Merleau-Ponty, a linguagem se apresenta como experiência viva e intersubjetiva, e o reconhecimento de si e de outrem pela criança não se daria na inteligência, mas pela dimensão experiencial. O psicoterapeuta escuta a criança naquilo que ela tem a dizer e sua participação se dá como reconhecimento e afetação diante da linguagem infantil. A relação se constitui numa dupla reversibilidade: reconhecimento do outro pela criança em sua própria experiência de corpo e dos sentimentos manifestos acerca de outrem; e afetação do encontro vivenciado tanto pelo psicoterapeuta como pela criança. Concluímos que esta proposta representa uma fecunda contribuição para a psicoterapia humanista-fenomenológica com crianças ao privilegiar a compreensão da criança para além dos estereótipos e noções cristalizadas de infância.

Palavras-chave: linguagem, intersubjetividade, fenomenologia, psicoterapia humanista-fenomenológica, ludoterapia.

Langage et relation avec l'autre : contributions de la phénoménologie Merleau-Ponty à la psychothérapie pour enfants

Résumé : Cet essai théorique vise à discuter la notion de langage et la relation avec les autres dans la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty, en tant que fondement possible d'une psychothérapie humaniste-phénoménologique pour les enfants. Pour Merleau-Ponty, le langage est une expérience vivante et intersubjective, et la reconnaissance de soi et de l'autre par l'enfant ne se ferait pas par l'intellection, mais par la dimension expérientielle. Le psychothérapeute écoute l'enfant dans ce qu'il a à dire et sa participation se produit comme une reconnaissance et une affectation face au langage des enfants. La relation constitue une double réversibilité : la reconnaissance de l'autre par l'enfant dans sa propre expérience corporelle et les sentiments qu'il manifeste à l'égard de l'autre ; et l'affectation de la rencontre, vécue à la fois par le psychothérapeute et par l'enfant. Nous concluons que cette proposition représente une contribution fructueuse à la psychothérapie humaniste-phénoménologique pour enfants en privilégiant la compréhension de l'enfant au-delà des stéréotypes et des notions cristallisées de l'enfance.

Mots-clés : langue, intersubjectivité, phénoménologie, psychothérapie humaniste-phénoménologique, thérapie par le jeu.

Lenguaje y relación con otros: contribuciones de la fenomenología de Merleau-Ponty a la psicoterapia infantil

Resumen: Este ensayo teórico tiene como objetivo discutir la noción del lenguaje y la relación con otros en la fenomenología de Merleau-Ponty como una posible base para la psicoterapia humanista-fenomenológica con niños. Para Merleau-Ponty, el lenguaje se presenta como una experiencia viva e intersubjetiva y el reconocimiento de uno mismo y del otro por parte del niño no ocurre en la inteligencia, sino en la dimensión experiencial. El psicoterapeuta escucha al niño en lo que tiene que decir y su participación se lleva a cabo como reconocimiento y afectación frente al lenguaje infantil. La relación constituye una doble reversibilidad: el reconocimiento del otro por parte del niño en su propia experiencia del cuerpo y de los sentimientos manifestos sobre los demás; y la afectación del encuentro, experimentado tanto por el psicoterapeuta como por el niño. Se concluye que esta propuesta representa una contribución fructífera a la psicoterapia humanista-fenomenológica con niños al privilegiar la comprensión del niño más allá de los estereotipos y las nociones cristalizadas de la infancia.

Palabras clave: idioma, intersubjetividad, fenomenología, psicoterapia humanista-fenomenológica, ludoterapia.

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