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Loose parts at the playground: Affordances for primary school children

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One way to increase the play value of spaces and diversify action opportunities for children to play is with the introduction of loose parts, also called unstructured materials or play props, because they are open-ended objects or materials without a specific play purpose. The provision of loose parts have already shown significant impact on different health domains. Following James Gibson's ecological approach, this article aims to describe the affordances of a set of loose parts for 8 to 10 years-old children, in an ecological context of free play at the schoolyard. Research took place during a Playwork session hosted by "Associação 1,2,3 Macaquinho do Xinês", an organization that defends and promotes the right to play. Fourteen children participated together with their teacher, two playworkers and the researcher. The behaviors were recorded with a fixed camera and registered in fieldnotes during the participant observation. A previous study focused on the influence of the loose part type on the time, frequency and number of children using them, while the present paper considered the first observed affordance in each 30 seconds segment, in the video record. Data analysis focused in the interaction of children with four types of loose parts: tarpaulin or fabrics, cardboard boxes, plastic crates and flexible plastic tubes. The set of potential and actualized affordances was described afferdances are shared by different types of loose parts. It's expected that actualized affordances would be less diverse when using tarpaulin or fabrics, comparing to other material categories, which may suggest that children perceive distinct openended levels in different materials.

Biography

Joana Vilar Pereira is a PhD. student at Faculty of Human Kinetics, Lisbon (Portugal), in the area of Motor behavior. She is currently studying children's free play from an ecological point of view, considering how can we think and improve outdoor play spaces quality so that children can have diverse opportunities for action, be healthy and develop. She is funded by hte University of Lisbon, with a PhD. grant.