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## **Development and Personality: the role of the environment in early childhood**

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**ABSTRACT – Development and Personality: the role of the environment in early childhood.** Based on the theoretical and methodological considerations of Vygotsky's pedagogical studies, we aimed to discuss the social situation of development in the process of personality constitution, marked by crisis. Taking the case of a three-year-old child considered aggressive, we proceeded to the detailed presentation and transcription of the data, focusing on the intricacies of the social relations waged in the educational context. The analysis explores the relationship between development and personality via signification. It shows that the experience lived by the child in a critical period also felt and signified in a specific context, affects her personality. It allows us to re-dimensioning the idea of the environment as a promoter of development.

**Keywords:** Historic-Cultural Theory. Early Childhood Education. Child Psychology. Development.

**RESUMO – Desenvolvimento e Personalidade: o papel do meio na primeira infância.** Partindo das considerações teórico-metodológicas dos estudos pedológicos de Vigotski, objetivamos discutir a situação social de desenvolvimento no processo de constituição da personalidade, marcada pela idade crítica. Tomando o caso de uma criança de três anos considerada agressiva, procedemos à apresentação e transcrição detalhadas dos dados, enfocando os meandros das relações sociais travadas no contexto educativo. As análises exploram a relação entre desenvolvimento e personalidade, via significação, evidenciando como a experiência vivida pela criança em um *período crítico é sentida e significada* num dado contexto (excludente, coibitivo), afetando sua personalidade – o que permite redimensionar a ideia do meio como promotor de desenvolvimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Teoria Histórico-Cultural. Educação Infantil. Psicologia da Criança. Desenvolvimento.

## Introduction

In the movement of elaboration of Vigotski's<sup>1</sup> ideas, we now find, with the recent translation into Portuguese of his pedological studies<sup>2</sup>, a powerful argumentation on a theme that has been a challenge to the studies and work with children in Early Childhood Education<sup>3</sup>: the development and its relationship with personality.

In fact, the author himself emphasizes in his statements that development “[...] is a process in which the person, from birth goes through the path to the constitution of a personality” (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 131-132); or even: “[...] we will dwell on the general laws of the psychological development of the child or put another way on the general laws of the development of the conscious personality of the child” (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 132). Finally: “[...] the environment plays in the development of the child, with regard to the development of the personality and its characteristics specific to man, the role of a source of development” (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 121).

In this line, for the authors of the cultural-historical perspective, the formation of the psychism is understood as a process of systemic functional revolutions that emerge in each new phase in ontogenesis. The development is dynamic and creative in that it brings out new functional structures from the relationship that the child establishes with the cultural environment. These new formations, for Vigotski, relate to the psychic changes that occur during the development of consciousness - which is only possible to develop because of the increasingly complex relationship that the child establishes with the environment (Vygotski, 2006).

The environment, meanwhile, is variable and dynamic – a complex socio-cultural totality –, and marks the child's development, (trans)forming his/her personality. The child is not passive to the experience with environment, on the contrary, he/she reacts affectively to it, dialectically impacting and transforming it.

These more recently emphasized conceptual elements – the cultural dimension of development, neoformations, the role of the environment and, consequently, the constitution of the child's personality – are complex points in the cultural-historical perspective. They are in consonance with other promising theoretical propositions of Vigotski: the problem of age and the social situation of development.

To discuss them, in this paper, we took a case study and analyzed empirical records of situations experienced by a three-year-old child in a preschool class. The choice of this child was due to the fact that, among other things, being very young and considered in the educational environment as aggressive and difficult. Our goal is to problematize the *social situation of development* experienced by the child in the context of early childhood education, refining the conceptual elements that encompass it: *the role of the environment* and its specificities in the development and in the process of personality formation, considering the *critical age* in which the child is.

For this, we will start from a theoretical reflection about the pedagogical studies developed by Vigotski between the years 1931-1934 and the central postulates that we highlight in the author's *The Collected Works*, particularly volume IV, which deals with Child Psychology. We hope to be able not only to give visibility to Vigotski's elaborations, but also to conceptually refine the notions he brings in these studies, putting into perspective the intricacies of pedagogical work with young children in Early Childhood Education.

## Cultural Development of the Child

The central point of the concept of development proposed by Vygotski (1995) concerns its social and cultural character – which, until today, gives it a prominent place in studies on psychology. Although the author states that development is cultural, he does not ignore its biological character, but analyzes these two factors in a dynamic of interdependence. The author defends a revolutionary perspective that, for him, takes place in the relationship of the subject with its historical and cultural environment. For this reason, he argues that the child's development occurs through the appropriation of cultural goods conquered throughout human history (Vygotski, 1995). But how is it possible to explain this appropriation process?

For Vygotski, as emphasized by Pino (2005), cultural development goes through three stages: 1) Development in oneself; 2) Development for others and; 3) Development for oneself. These stages, dynamically articulated, allow the argumentative defense that human development goes through the other and that the history of the mental functions is a social history. After all, what today is constitutive in mental development of the child occurs, before, through the social relationship.

In seeking to explain how culture acts and not only influences, but constitutes human development, Vygotski (1995) states that development is a cultural process that derives from social relations. The author does not limit himself to describing the process, as it was common in his time, he takes a materialist, historical, and dialectical approach, seeking to explain the psychological functions or systems that make up the human psyche in its historical process of change and transformation. For him, the key to understanding the transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal process lies in the law of general development or the law of conversions of personal relations into psychological functions.

Contemplating the historical and dialectical movement that underlies the Vygotskian referential, we agree with Smolka (1992, p. 328) that: "[...] the notion of internalization cannot be understood without reference to the notion of symbolic mediation, and this is one of Vygotski's basic contributions". Without this, we are in danger of reducing the understanding of the term internalization to a mechanical operation of transposition, from what is external to what is internal; or even, incur in some kind of social determinism.

In an attempt to avoid this reductionist and mechanistic understanding, Pino (2000) reflects on this conceptual proposition, bringing a contribution to the debate:

[...] what is internalized from social relations are not the material relations, but the meaning they have for people. Meaning that emerges in the relationship itself. To say that what is internalized is the meaning of these relations is equivalent to saying that what is internalized is the meaning that the other in the relation has for the self; what, in the dialectical movement of the relation, gives the self the coordinates to know who the person is, what social position one occupies, and what is expected of one. In other words, it is through the other that the self is constituted as a social being with its subjectivity (Pino, 2000, p. 66).

By arguing that it is the significance of relations that is internalized in the process of conversion of social relations into psychological functions, the author draws attention to the dialectical movement of constitution of the social being in the relationship with the other, in and through the process of production of signs and meanings. With this, the author highlights an important issue in the Vygotskian perspective, which we will focus on: the cultural development is understood as the constitution of the social being, of a personality – as Vigotski points out in the pedological texts.

### **Considerations on the Problem of Age from a Cultural-Historical Perspective**

To consider that development is social has important implications in the way of understanding it. On the one hand, it is about understanding it as a result of relationships with the environment, and on the other, the particular way each child acts, thinks, and feels according to these relationships. Therefore, in Vigotski's theoretical perspective, development is not treated in a linear and/or progressive way. Despite tending to a certain teleology, development can take unexpected routes. The idea of stage or predetermined stages of development is discarded in Vigotski because what interests him is the result of these variants in the formation of a certain personality.

However, this does not mean ignoring specific moments given by periodization. After all, a one-year-old differs qualitatively when compared to a seven-year-old, and so on. What does this mean exactly?

This means that the problem of periodization is at the center of Vigotski's pedological concern, due to his interest in the changes that occur at each moment of the child's development. The changes are structural, functional, maturational, and need to be analyzed in terms of the correlation between the environment and the child, in view of the experience lived and meant by the child at a given age.

In this sense, Vigotski states that we have to look for the internal changes in development itself, the turning points that reveal a solid basis for determining the main periods of formation of the child's personality: what we call age.

For the author, thinking about ages implies considering various indicators, biological and/or social, taken as an expression of development and not as a sign or symptom only apparent to the process. According to the author, what guarantees the changes in the development cycle is not the chronological age, but the child's pedological age. "We saw that, according to birth certificates, children can be the same age, but according to their real age, they can reach the same level at different ages" (Vygotskij, 2018, p. 54).

The development process is characterized in Vigotski by the alternation between stable and critical periods that occur from the child's living conditions at different ages (Vygotski, 2006).

These stable periods are longer and the changes in the child's personality do not occur abruptly, they "[...] are changes due to insignificant 'molecular' accomplishments". (Vygotski, 2006, p. 255). The development occurs in a light and gradual manner, often unperceived by the other. However, Vigotski adds that if a comparison was established between the beginning of the stable age and its end it would be possible to see the qualitative and important differentiation of what occurred in development during this period. About this, Vygotski (2006, p. 255) states that: "[...] development is mainly due to microscopic changes in the child's personality that accumulate up to a certain limit and manifest themselves later as a sudden qualitatively new formation of a new age".

Crisis periods, in turn, are shorter, and the child exhibits abrupt changes in personality traits.

In a very short space of time the child changes completely, the basic features of his/her personality are modified. It develops in an abrupt, impetuous way, that acquires, in occasions, character of catastrophe; remembers a course of revolutionary events as much by the rhythm of the changes as by the meaning of the same ones. They are turning points in the infantile development that have, sometimes, the form of acute crises (Vygotski, 2006, p. 256).

The beginning and end of the crisis period cannot be rigidly determined. Its origin is discrete, but it is accentuated until the peak moment. In this context, the changes in the child are very pronounced and the child may experience moments of suffering and intimate conflicts (Vygotski, 2006).

The critical periods are identified by Vygotski (2006) in the following way: postnatal, one, three, seven and thirteen years. Such periods are different in each child, and may present themselves more or less intensely depending on their experience with the environment. The cri-

sis generates instability and can bring about the loss of something that guided the activity until then. About this, Vygotski (2006, p. 257) states: “[...] the child best loses what was achieved before acquiring something new”.

Nevertheless, crisis, for Vygotsky, cannot be negativized, because it is fundamental to understand such turning points in development that reveal the dialectical and revolutionary dimension of the process: the reverse development – meaning the extinction of the old structure – that gives rise to the new aspects of the child’s personality. In this way, rather than a destructive dimension, there is a creative element in the crisis.

Thus, after the critical periods, at each age, we always find a new central formation – in dynamic and functional terms of the psychological system itself - that guides the entire developmental process, reorganizing the child’s personality on new bases. What are the new formations?

The new formations concern a new type of structure of the child’s personality and activity that imply mental and social changes that occur at each age, guiding the child’s development. They assume the central position – central line – in the development process in each specific period. However, they are not the only ones, nor are they isolated. They are joined by other new formations: the new partial formations. These formations are those that cannot yet be observed in their development and are related to the still separate dimensions of the child’s personality. Such new formations – which relate more or less directly to the changes taking place at a particular age – they are, therefore, accessory lines of development.

It is understood that the processes that are main lines of development at an age become accessory lines of development in the following age and vice versa, that is, the accessory lines of development of one age become main in another, since their meaning and specific weight in the general structure of development is modified, their relationship with the new central formation changes. In the passage from one age stage to another its entire structure is reconstructed. Each age has its own specific, unique and unrepeatable structure (Vygotski, 2006, p. 262).

During preschool age, for example, when the predominant psychological function is memory, imagination is the new formation that emerges in the child’s development. Whereas in early childhood, the predominant function is perception, which is linked to emotions, and the new formation typical of this period is language, as we will see below in the data analysis.

Therefore, the dynamics of each age depends on its own functional structure. At each age, a particular structure determines the role and weight of each partial line of development in the formation of personality. That is to say:

In each age period, development does not modify, in its course, isolated aspects of the child's personality, restructuring the whole personality as a whole; in development, precisely, there is an inverse dependence: the child's personality is modified in its internal structure as a whole and the laws that regulate this whole determine the dynamics of each of its parts (Vygotski, 2006, p. 262).

When we problematize these issues, taking Vigotski's pedological considerations, we understand that at each age, not only separate aspects of consciousness – some functions or activities – change, but the entire global structure is transformed. To consider this transformation implies considering centrally the role of the developmental environment in the constitution of the child's personality.

### **The Environment, the Social Situation of Development, and the Perejivanie**

Vigotskij (2018), when discussing the problem of environment in child development, does not elaborate a definition for this concept, but leaves clues that help to move away from the conception of environment only linked to the notion of setting, as a geographical cutout, physical environment or environmental conditions of an organism. Pino (2010), when seeking to unravel this plot, based on the clues presented by Vigotski, tried to avoid possible reductionism in the treatment of the conception of the environment. "By environment in the immediate sense of the word Vigotski means the one in which the child is inserted; it is the environment that surrounds him or her, from the closest and most restricted to the widest and most diverse" (Pino, 2010, p. 748).

Vigotski reasons that the "[...] pedologist studies not the environment and the rules that constitute it, but the role and significance of the environment, of participation, and its influence on the child's development" (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 114). To study the influence of the environment on the child's development is, then, to consider the environment in its role, in relation to the child. In addition, it involves considering the relationship that the child of a given age establishes with the environment in a given social situation.

The fact is that Vygotski (1995) defends the existence of an interdependence between the following factors: the constitution of the child's psyche, his/her social environment, and the global dynamics of each age period. The result of this interdependence, the author called the social situation of development.

At the beginning of each age period, the relationship established between the child and the surrounding environment, especially the social environment, is totally peculiar, specific, unique and unrepeatable for this age. We call this relationship the social situation of development at that age. The social situation of development is the starting point for all the dynamic changes that occur



in development during the period of each age. It fully and completely determines the forms and the trajectory that allow the child to acquire new personality properties, since the social reality is the true source of development, the possibility for the social to become individual (Vygotski, 2006, p. 264).

The social situation of development structures the child's way of life or social existence. Vigotski adds that the role of the environment in development is evaluated according to the following influences: the level of understanding, awareness, and apprehension of what occurs in the environment. Each of these factors acts in a very peculiar way in its relation to the child. A one-year-old child behaves in a radically different way in relation to the environment than a seven-year-old child. The systemic processes of his/her mental functioning broaden according to each age group, and the meanings that are produced in the experience lived also broaden. For this reason, pedological age is a determining factor, as it reflects the way the child understands a given situation (Vigotskij, 2018). In this regard, Marx states: "My relation to the environment is my consciousness" (Marx; Engels apud Vygotski, 2006, p. 253).

Given all this, it is not possible to understand the implications of the environment on development, without knowing the aspects that make up the relationship of the child of a certain age with the environment. This intricate relationship is treated by Vigotskij (2018), who brings a concept that has been widely discussed and addressed in the current debate: *perejivanie*, translated into Portuguese as *vivencia*<sup>4</sup>.

A lived experience is a unit that is indivisibly represented, on the one hand by the environment, that is, what is being lived - a lived experience is always related to something external to the person - and, on the other hand, the way I live it in a unique way, that is, all the personal particularities and those of the environment are simultaneously represented in the lived experience; all the environmental factors, but also those related to the personality from which they originate, all the character traits of that person, their constitutive traits, are related to the event in question (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 116).

We notice how *perejivanie* demarcates a resultant, dialectical unity of the relation between the environment and the child, in a given social situation of development. In this sense, Vigotski points out that the *perejivanie* of a situation in the environment defines how the influence of this situation on the child will (trans)form its personality. This means that we cannot analyze a moment (independent or isolated) disarticulated from the context in which it is produced. The focus has to be adjusted to the moment "[...] refracted through the child's lived experience" (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 113).

To explain this, Vigotskij (2018) analyzed the *perejivanie* of three brothers (at different ages) and their alcoholic mother. When she was drunk, she would beat her children and throw them to the ground.

Faced with the same situation, each of the children reacted affectively in a certain way. The youngest child was afraid, stuttered and had a lot of anxiety; the second, a little older, showed a state of extreme suffering, internal conflicts and ambivalence related to the maternal affections and; the oldest son showed maturity, with early concerns, because he already understood that his mother was sick and, therefore, he should take care of her and the children, becoming the head of the family. With this example, Vigotski tries to discuss how the same environment affects each child in a specific way, depending not only on the age itself, but on the *perejivanie* of each child at a certain age taking into account his/her environment.

Taking Vigotski's elaborations on cultural development, we will turn to the case study of a child in early childhood. Vigotski explains that this age is much studied, because the child's behavior is radically transformed: a) one begins to move dexterously in space and has complexified the functional relationship between perception, emotion and action; b) language (new formation) develops, as well as child consciousness with the expansion of the infant's social relations and; c) the first acts of opposition and protest appear in the child's personality (Vygotski, 2006). Taking these aspects in evidence, we seek to answer the following questions: what effects produced by the environment mark the social situation of the young child's development in the educational context? And how can these effects unfold in his/her development and in the formation of his/her personality?

## Methodology

The choice to guide this research from Vigotski's cultural-historical perspective, is the definition of a posture, a way of looking at the aspects that circumscribe the social situation of a child's development, carefully observing the ways in which the environment will mark his/her development, without losing sight of social relations, his/her history in a given cultural and affective environment that involve and circumscribe these relations. "Hence, historical behavioral research is not something that complements or aids theoretical study, but rather constitutes its foundation" (Vygotski, 1995, p. 68).

The researcher's concern is to follow and analyze the psychological process, paying attention to the functional transformations, without losing sight of the historical dimension of development. Vygotski (1995, p. 68) adds: "[...] behavior can only be understood as behavioral history".

In discussing the pedological method, Vigotskij (2018) states that it is not possible to study development taking it in quantitative terms only, but it is necessary to consider it in procedural terms. After all, studying the role of the environment in the child's development implies analyzing it from the point of view of his or her experiences since it takes into account "[...] all the child's personal particularities which have contributed to determine his or her relations to a given situation" (Vigotskij,

2018, p. 116). From this perspective, it is necessary to understand the relations between the changes in the social situation of development, from the dynamics of the ages and the *perejivanie* that mark the concrete formation of the infantile psychism, considering the emergence of the new: the neoformations (Vigotskij, 2018).

Here, we understand the way of looking at the psychological aspects that constitute the social situation of a child's development, procedurally. What matters is to observe the ways in which the environment marks the development, considering the cultural and affective ambience that involve and circumscribe the social relations that emerge in a given context. Therefore, the detailed description of the phenomena is fundamental to focus on the changing reality, attributing meanings in the course of the experience lived among the research participants.

For the purposes of this article, we decided to construct a case study. André (2013) characterizes the case study from three important aspects, namely: 1) the observation that knowledge is constantly under construction; 2) the meticulous record of the multiplicity of dimensions that involves the case to be studied and; 3) the attention to the aspects of reality that surround the study, which can be meant by different points of view.

Also according to the author, the case study is characterized not as a specific method, but as a type of knowledge that is revealed throughout the research; a puzzle that is gradually being assembled. The pieces of this puzzle can be compared to the multiplicity of aspects that make up the case being researched. Each of these aspects allows us to circumscribe the social situation of the development of the child studied.

### **Considerations about Fieldwork and the Case Study Subject**

The investigation<sup>5</sup> is a cutout of a research conducted (Lemos, 2018) in an Early Childhood Education institution, in a peripheral neighborhood of a municipality in the countryside of São Paulo, in a class composed of 25 children aged two to three years old. Besides the children, there were five other educators: the teacher (Dora), two monitors (Elen and Kelly) and two early childhood education agents<sup>6</sup> (Rita and Sueli) who participated in the activities and took turns during the morning and afternoon periods. The study took place during one semester, with a total of 1 to 3 weekly visits to the institution in the morning shift. Ricardo, the boy in the studied case, had just turned 3 years old when the fieldwork began. His family lived in a context of vulnerability. His parents were separated and he lived with his mother in his grandfather's house. Ricardo, who entered day care shortly after his first birthday, was considered an aggressive and disobedient child.

## **Considerations about Data Construction and Processing**

The research relied on the use of several methodological procedures and instruments for the configuration of the analyses. The construction of the data occurred through: a) records of situations experienced in the researcher's field diary; b) analysis of the class's daily record book<sup>7</sup>; c) analysis of the child's individual report (evaluation); d) reports from the mother and the educators who accompanied the child before and during the research and; e) detailed transcription of the video recordings made in the classroom, from the use of two cameras: one fixed and one movable<sup>8</sup>. Video recordings were made of the children's routine from the time they were welcomed into the classroom until lunch time or after, until the time the children went to sleep, recording: moments in the initial conversation circle, activities with the children in the classroom and playing in the park and sandpit. Amidst the children's routine, several situations of interaction between Ricardo, the educators and the other children were recorded, transcribed and later analyzed.

The information obtained from all these methodological procedures and instruments made up the case study. The data sought to answer the objective of this research, that is: to point out important aspects about the social situation of the development experienced by the child in the educational context of early childhood education (the environment) in the constitution of its development and formation of its personality.

The results of this research were organized in two stages:

- 1) an analytical presentation of the case study articulating the child's individual report, the educators' daily records, the researcher's field diary, and videotaped situations in order to contextualize, from different angles, the environment in which the child was inserted;
- 2) detailed transcription of a videotaped scene with the intention of highlighting adult-child and child-child interactions in the classroom context.

## **Results – Analytical Presentation of Ricardo's Case Study: the educational context**

In the individual report, written by Dora and shared with the family on April 11, 2017, the teacher reported that "Ricardo has shown acceptance and reciprocation manifestations of affection, such as kisses and hugs, however, when he gets involved in conflicts, he hits and bites his classmates and the educators of the sector". In turn, in the educators' daily record book, forty-one occurrences were found (between February and July) with Ricardo's name. Among these situations, only five described positive events, three were related to falls, and the rest were complaints about his behavior. On March 28, 2017 (logbook entry, morning), one of the educators wrote: "Ricardo ran out through

the park, when we brought him in, he threw himself on the ground, hit the teacher with slaps and scratches and threw a toy at Sueli. At the circle, Ricardo bit Maria and disobeyed us several times". The following month, the record indicated that:

Ricardo, after his arrival, tried to run away from the room. When he was stopped by Sueli and Rita, he kicked and tried to hit them. We talked to him explaining that it is not nice to hit people and that we should cherish them. Later, he apologized to the educators. In a space dispute, while we were playing in the back playground, Ricardo bit Dante's nose (Daily Record, morning, April 26, 2017).

Throughout the researcher's field diary entries, informal conversations were reported with the agents and monitors who had worked with the boy in previous years. They pointed out that Ricardo would beat a lot and masturbated frequently. One of the agents, who worked with the boy during the research, also repeatedly commented that Ricardo had a *difficult temperament* and that he *acted with malice*.

In the field diary the record of the strategies used by the educators to contain Ricardo also deserved attention. "Today, the teacher, during the circle, mentioned Ricardo that if he didn't stay seated, he would go to Sueli's lap. But Ricardo demonstrated that he did not want to go, shaking his head negatively" (Researcher's field diary, May 23, 2017). It is worth noting that disobedient children were also placed in a chair in the corner of the room to reflect on what they did wrong. Regarding the boy's behavior, it was recorded, "Ricardo did not like this place; he would get very agitated and aggressive from being put in the chair" (Field diary, June 9, 2017).

Regarding the videotapes – among the several situations captured in the middle of the children's routine – the way Ricardo participated in relation to the other children in his class caught our attention. It was common for the boy to get involved in the games and be ignored by the other children. This was clearly portrayed in a scene that features the game "Are you ready, Mr. Wolf?". Ricardo ran, got involved, played a lot, but was never caught by another child and therefore did not become a wolf. Even when he got close to a child who was catching, they would choose another classmate to become the wolf" (Transcript of videotaping, May 04, 2017).

In a videotaped game of *Tag*, it was recorded that

Ricardo was the "it" child, attempting to tag another. He tagged Manu (a classmate), but she whined that he pinched her (which had not occurred). The researcher, seeing the situation, explains to Manu that Ricardo had not pinched her, but the girl does not seem to listen to the adult and abandons the game. Other children also ignored Ricardo, and when he approached to tag, they would say they were not playing (Transcript of videotaping, May 04, 2017).

The findings reveal that the children had a certain trepidation of Ricardo, believing that he could hit, bite, push, or act inappropriately towards them.

Ricardo's involvement in the activities proposed by the educators was also evident. In the classroom context, specifically, we observed a pattern of Ricardo's behavior in the videotaped scenes: the boy always wanted to participate in the activities, but was constantly curtailed by the educators and became frustrated with the restraints, often demonstrating unexpected reactions such as kicking and screaming, throwing himself on the floor, masturbating. This happens, for example, when the researcher plays magician with the children.

During the game, Ricardo was chosen to be the magician's assistant. He was very excited about the activity (making play dough) and came over to take a closer look. The magician put the ingredients in a bowl and then Ricardo had to stir them until he reached the end point. He got up to add the other ingredients, stirring everything that was on the table. Although the researcher asked him to return to his seat and wait, Ricardo continued to stir the dough. The educators called the boy's attention several times. As he did not obey, Elen said that he would no longer participate in the activity. He began to fight and lash out, crying and kicking everything around him. Finally, Elen decided to remove him from the room (Transcript of videotaping, June 19, 2017).

### **Narrative Scene Based on Videotaping and Detailed Transcription of Adult-Child and Child-Child Interactions Conducted in the Classroom**

Among the total of the transcribed and analyzed videotaped material, articulated with the other investigative documents produced, the recurrence of situations that show the way of participation and involvement of Ricardo in the activities and how he was hindered by adults and other children attracted our attention. The scene selected below portrays one of these situations.

#### **Scene – Animals in the Little Box (May 3, 2017)**

The classroom had the teacher (Dora), 2 early childhood education agents (Rita and Sueli), 19 children, and the researcher. In a square made on the classroom floor, with a yellow strip, Dora sat with the children and presented a red sensory box with some plastic or stuffed animals. After the animal was removed, *by one of the adults*, the children should remember familiar songs that mentioned that animal and sing them. They asked Dora about some animals, showing that they were full of expectation and curiosity. As soon as Rita mentioned taking out the first animal, they shouted: "Oh, I'm so scared! Ouch! Ouch!", but they did not move from their seat. However, Ricardo and Nina could not contain themselves. They advanced, a few times, to reach the box, leaving the yellow strip – which established the limit of the place where they should stay at. Dora warned them, because they had overstepped the limit. Nina insisted on going after the box, but at a certain moment she stops trying and stands further away. Ricardo still resists, trying to get the box. When he hears Dora calling his attention, he returns to his seat, but is soon drawn to the box again. This is repeated a few times, until Dora, lifting the box, speaks

with a more incisive tone: “Ricardo, Ricardo, look... go sit down! Look, you have to sit down!”. Ricardo sits down in front of her and tries to move the box, but Dora wants him to go back to the yellow strip and, looking at him, says: “Guys, with your bottom... on the yellow strip”. Each time an adult took an animal out, Ricardo made a scared face. However, he continued to advance to the middle, still sitting, but singing the song with the children and making gestures. Dora remembers: “Ricardo, oh... but-tocks on the yellow strip”. But he insists and keeps moving closer to Dora. He kneels down and starts to turn his body, until his foot hits the alligator, throwing it farther away. Dora looks at him and says more firmly: “Ricardo, you’re disturbing the game”. Ricardo responds: “Not me!” Other children leave the place and Dora calls for them to come back. Ricardo leaves again, goes to Dora and lies down on her lap. She says something in his ear and, only then, he returns to his seat. When another song starts, he leaves his seat again and purposely pushes the animals with his foot, then jumps on them. Rita says, “Oh, how mean!”. Ricardo keeps walking, dances in front of the researcher, hugs her (as he usually does in other situations), sits down again, but soon goes back to circulating in the middle of the circle. Sueli suspends him by his arms and places him on the yellow strip. She places a chair behind him and sits there with the intention of restraining him. While Dora is singing with the children, Ricardo tries to leave the place, but Sueli pulls him to the yellow strip. Again, he tries to leave, but is pulled once more by her, until he manages to escape by kneeling to the other side of the circle. Sueli then gets up to go towards him, but he is faster and goes to the middle of the circle. At this point, Dora is already ending the game and leads another activity.

## Data Analysis

In the transcribed scene, the way Ricardo participates in the proposed activity is striking: he expresses himself effusively with the other children, when he sees the little box; he sings the songs about the animals; he makes gestures; he shows an expression of fright (when he sees each animal being removed from it); he stands up; he moves around; he tries to get closer to touch it; he sits in the middle of the circle, in front of the teacher, to see the little box up close; he kneels in front of her; he knocks over one of the animals; and, at the end, he pushes them with his feet and jumps over them. His movements, his expressions (oral and corporeal), his gestures denote, in a first moment, involvement, curiosity, and interest in the activity. Here, we can see that his mode of participation goes far beyond a mere contemplative interest; he wants to do, to act, to interact. Why does this occur? What elements can be deduced here?

If we take Vigotski’s elaborations (2006) about early childhood, the moment in which Richard is in his development process, we have to understand that perception, emotion and language are central aspects to be considered. In early childhood, the psychological functions are initially undifferentiated among themselves – perception, emotion, memory, etc. – and gradually begin to coordinate themselves (Vigotski, 2018).



Vygotski (2018) shows how perception, in a first moment, takes a central place, affected by other functions in a state of emergence that, as we have seen, make up the accessory lines of development. In this context, the author states that emotion and perception organize the child's action in this, characterizing the formation of his consciousness which, as we will see below, is resized by the emergence of language - as a new formation. The child in early childhood perceives each object with affective nuances (Vygotski, 2006). The object attracts him/her through affect, one wants to touch everything one sees, to get out of his/her place and explore things: perception is affective. With this, we can understand that Ricardo's modes of participation need to be understood in terms of his affective involvement – attractive force.

However, these modes of participation are meant in a different way by the educators in the context in which they find themselves. They always seem to expect a more passive behavior from the children in front of what they are proposing, after all the little ones should sit behind the yellow line, watching the adults taking the animals out of the box. They also need to wait, one by one, their turn to do something that has been requested, and they should listen and attend promptly to what the educators say. If this did not happen, they often exclaimed: "You are too much today!", "I can't do it like this", "It's too hard!". We can say that, in general, it was quite difficult (not to say impossible) for all children to stand still in front of the teacher's proposed activities. Undoubtedly, to demand this level of self-control from all children between two and three years of age is an expectation that may generate frustration, because it might not be compatible with this moment in the periodization of their development.

It is important to notice in the transcribed scene that Ricardo, in addition to his initial curiosity and interest, also shows impatience when faced with the educators' negatives, a resistance to the established rules: he crosses the yellow line; he gets up; he walks around the room; he sits in the middle of the circle; he knocks over the animals and then deliberately steps on them. This becomes evident as the teacher, as she does with the other children, calls his attention so that he returns to his seat several times. She warns him: "Ricardo, look... buttocks on the yellow strip". He returns to the designated spot, but insists because he wants to touch the animals. He ventures forward to the box, but ends up accidentally knocking one of them over. The teacher then says: "You're disturbing the game". He replies, "Not me". Then he swings around and surrounds the teacher – lying on her lap! Again, the teacher restrains him by saying something in his ear. We don't know what was said, but we see that he goes back to his seat. And when another song starts, he is no longer willing to sing with his classmates as he did at the beginning. He leaves the place again and purposely pushes the animals with his foot and jumps on them. It is interesting to point out here how the boy reacts affectively to this event in the midst of the meanings produced about his ways of participating in activities and games, in the relationships with the children and educators.



Vygotski (2006) states that, at the age of three, the child experiences a new moment, in which the situation of social development, which had been driving the child until then, becomes uncomfortable, generating a crisis. The child – until then placed in a place of greater observation, of a certain passivity in relation to the environment, in terms of its possibilities of action and understanding – starts to want and be able to participate in social practices in a new way. In Ricardo's case, we notice a movement marked by interest and involvement, but also by impatience and resistance. As we highlighted above, he not only reacts to the words of the children and adults around him, but understands better what these words mean and refuses to do what is asked.

Vygotski (2006) discusses the refusal manifested in the child's behavior, placing it within the general scope of the most characteristic signs of this critical age, namely: negativism, stubbornness, rebellion, and insubordination – which make up the critical period. At this point, the author states that it is common for the child to want to do everything alone – regardless of the other – and that in case of impossibility, he/she may protest violently. In the magician's scene, for example, Ricardo, when excluded from the activity, fights and yells, crying and kicking everything around him. Or, even, as we saw in the records, he runs out of the park, throws himself on the ground, hits and throws toys at the educators.

Still on the crisis, Vygotski (2006) mentions a *war* that the child fights with everyone around him/her, as well as the despotism that is revealed in the moments in which one looks for ways to show one's power in relation to others.

In the three-year crisis, the so-called splitting occurs: conflicts may be frequent, the child may even insult his mother, scorn toys offered to him at an inopportune moment, break them out of sheer rage. There are changes in the affective and volitional sphere, which proves the growing independence and activity of the child. All these symptoms, which revolve around the 'I' and the people around him, show that the child's relationships with the people around him or with his own personality are no longer as they used to be (Vygotski, 2006, p. 373).

These signs seem to portray a child who is difficult to educate. But Vygotski points out that all this complexity is deeply related to the child's internal restructuring from the deeper social relationships he/she establishes with the environment. "The crisis is a product of the restructuring of the reciprocal social relations between the child's personality and the people around him" (Vygotski, 2006, p. 375). These processes of change influence the child indistinctly, which leads us to reflect on how this lived experience is *signified* in a given context, affecting their personality. This is important because the problem of meaning, of sense is highlighted by Vygotski (2006) throughout his elaboration on the role of the environment in the child's development process and formation of his/her personality.

For Vygotsky, the three-years-old child has a greatly expanded relationship with the environment, the infant can move around and, most importantly, he/she develops language. Here, the experience with words takes on an important dimension in child development. Ricardo, for example, is able to express his disagreement with the environment, to oppose himself to the adult through words. Let us remember how language becomes the main new formation of this stage:

The main new central formation of early childhood is linked to language, thanks to the fact that the child establishes different relationships with the social environment than the baby, i.e., his attitude to the social unit of which he himself is a part of is modified (Vygotski, 1995, p. 356).

This new formation, for Vygotski, is due to the greater complexity of the child's relationship with adults. After all, it is the adults who push the child to form new processes of generalization and abstraction that are implied in the domain of language "[...] in the word the number of links and representations of the object is greater than in the simple perception of the object" (Vygotski, 2006, p. 360).

Language implies a complex reconfiguration of consciousness, radically altering the child's behavior: "[...] early childhood is, precisely, the stage in which the semantic and systemic structure of consciousness emerges, when the historical consciousness of the existing human being emerges for others and, consequently, for the child himself" (Vygotski, 2006, p. 366).

When we start from this statement, we understand that the child's word is part of a complex whole that relates to the communicative and semiotic universe that surrounds it. Then, we are forced to recognize that the way Ricardo is spoken about and what is said about Ricardo affects him, means something to him and, in some way, constitutes him. In relation to this, in Ricardo's case, it also strikes us how he is named and his actions and expressions are signified (by the other children in his class and by the educators). The children ignored him during the game, showing fear and distrust. As we saw in the highlighted accounts, Ricardo was considered by the educators as a child with a *difficult temperament* and who *acted with malice*. At the end of the transcribed scene this is deflated: at the moment Ricardo kicks the animals Rita says: "oh, how mean".

Here, it is importante to go back to the ideas that Vigotskij (2018) deepens in his *fourth lesson*, when he emphasizes that it is not the element of the environment in itself – taken independently from the child that must be analyzed – but its meaning, what is revealed from the child's *perejivanie* as a result of the influence of the environment on his development and personality. Finally, how does this play out in Ricardo's case?

In an initial and preliminary reading, we could say that Ricardo is a difficult and maladjusted child. He kicks, bites, hits, throws himself on the floor, and often disrupts the class. Some might even suggest

that Ricardo needs to be adapted to school, after all there is something wrong with him. In 6 months, the boy had 41 negative occurrences in the educators' records.

Focusing only on the boy distances us from the theoretical perspective assumed in this article. After all, his attitudes cannot be analyzed, as stated above, in an isolated way, but within the context in which they are (re)produced. The environment in its relationship with the boy, here, is the focus of interest because it reveals the *social situation of development experienced by Ricardo and signified in a web of complex relationships*.

As Vygotski (2006) points out, there is a relationship that is established between the child and the environment that surrounds him/her that is unique, peculiar, specific, unrepeatable at each age; this social situation of development, as we have seen, is the starting point for all the dynamic changes that occur in the development each age period and determines the trajectories that allow the child to form new aspects of his own personality, since "[...] social reality is the true source of development, the possibility that the social becomes individual" (Vygotski, 2006, p. 264).

In this line, we can start from Vygotski's statement that the environment is promoter of development. But in what sense can this be taken in Ricardo's case?

In *The Fourth Class*, Vigotskij (2018) brings in the notion of a *prism* to denote how the influence of the environment on the child/person does not simply reflect its essential aspects, but refracts them. In the movement of reflection and refraction, pedology turns to:

[...] that prism that reflects the influence of the environment on the child, that is, pedology must find the relationship between the child and its environment, the lived experience (*perejivanie*) of the child, in other terms, how the child becomes aware of a given event, gives it meaning, and how it reacts affectively to this particular event (Vigotskij, 2018, p. 115).

In our analyses, we tried to explore a certain movement of reflection and refraction in Ricardo's development evidenced by his different ways of participation and involvement in the proposed games and activities; and, at the same time, the educators' way of acting and the children's reception, mostly cohibitive and excluding.

This is partly reflected in the exclusion of the other children who are afraid to play with him, partially, in the harsher gestures he expresses based on the situations put into perspective here. As we have argued, the way the educators refer to him to the other children, how they act with him and assign meaning to their actions and reactions, crosses, affects and constitutes him.

It is in this movement that Ricardo gives meaning to what he has experienced, reacts affectively to events, and signifies them, thus de-

veloping and shaping his personality. We cannot say how Ricardo feels or which route his development will follow, nor how his personality will be. But we can consider the marks that become explicit in this process: aggressiveness, inhibition, exclusion, etc. And, more than that, we can glimpse how the marks of the lived experience are being introjected in him – a boy of only three years old!

### Closing Remarks

The challenge taken on in this text was to analyze the development process in its relation to personality, taking into account Vigotski's elaborations. To do so, we brought to the discussion concepts formulated by the author in his pedagogical texts: age, crisis, and the role of the environment.

We took the case of Ricardo, in a study, to problematize the *social situation of the development* experienced by the child and signified in the educational context of early childhood education seeking to highlight: the specificities of the environment and the particularities involved in his development process and in the formation of his personality.

We do not delve, here, into the contradictions and complexities surrounding the constitution of personality in Vigotski's work, but we present the problem. Beyond that, we put it in perspective by taking it in its relation to *signification* and emphasizing the issues surrounding the social constitution of child development in the school context. With this, we deepen some of the important questions about the problem of the meaning of the environment and the sense highlighted by Vygotsky (2006; 2010; 2018) throughout his elaboration on the role of the environment in the process of child development and formation of his personality. We see, then, how the experience with the word assumes a prominent place in child development: the experience lived by the child in its development process – in a period of crisis! – is *felt* and *signified* in a given context. This affects your personality in the process of constitution.

The analyses, which unfolded from a set of data constructed throughout the research, revealed how the child affectively reacts towards an ambience by reflecting and refracting it, what permits resizing the idea that the environment promotes development. Ricardo's case makes us problematize the way(s) in which the environment affects him. After all, the educational environment has led the boy to experiences that are marked by exclusion and restraints that, in turn, are part of his aggressive behavior. We understand that it is not one of the personality disorders so vaunted in current educational environments, nor an innate personality trait that defines the child a priori. The fact that it is in the midst of the senses and meanings of what happens to him is highlighted that a feeling of inferiority and wounded self-love is (re)produced, marks and constitutes him – something like the feeling of loss of value. that Vygotsky (2018) tells us about, even though we have reservations about his statements.

However, this issue cannot be seen in isolation. It is even more delicate when we think about the education of very young children, bringing to the surface all the problems that involve pedagogical work and its relationship with child development and the formation of children's personalities.

In this sense, it is important to highlight, finally, what happens in the meanderings of daily practice that implies the concreteness of the working conditions of teachers. We cannot ignore the architecture of the equipment used for early childhood education, as well as the relationship between the number of places and the number of children per room, and the number of children per educator. Moreover, we cannot close our eyes to the general problems that afflict education in general – wage and training gaps, public policy and management obstacles – and remain silent about how these conditions affect the way educators make themselves available pedagogically and affectively in this vital work with young children.

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## Notes

- 1 When writing this paper, we have opted to use the spelling “Vigotski” in the body of the text. However, in the citations, the spelling follows the writing pattern found in the titles.
- 2 Vigotski's pedological studies were brought together in a collection of seven lectures on the foundations of pedology delivered by him shortly before his death. This collection was published in Portuguese in 2018. In 2010, the first Portuguese translation of one of these lectures was published – *Fourth lecture: the problem of the environment in pedology*. Vigotski (2018) explains that pedology is the science that studies child development within the intersection between different fields of science.
- 3 First step of the Basic Education, according to the proposed in the Law nº 9394/96.
- 4 In Brazil, the term *perejivanie* was translated as *vivência*, as proposed by Toassa and Souza (2010) in one of the publications of the Dossier on Vygotsky published by the journal *Psicologia USP* in 2010. However, there are still debates about the problems surrounding this translation. Authors such as Delari Jr. and Passos (2009), Sawaia e Magiolino (2016), Capucci e Silva (2017), Lemos (2018) assume to keep the term *perejivanie*, without translation, as we will do here.
- 5 The ethics committee approved the research, obeying the criteria of ethical care with research in Human and Social Sciences, among them the signature of the free and informed consent form (ICF) by the educators and guardians and the alteration in publications of the names of the participants with the purpose of preserving them.
- 6 In 1991, the municipality passed a law that restructured the job plan, and the former position of Daycare Assistant became Childcare Monitor. In 2007, there was another change in the plan, and the position of Child Day Care Agent was created, requiring a high school degree. It is important to emphasize that those

who entered the competitive examinations before the enactment of this last law continued to be called Child Day Care monitors.

7 The daily records contained accounts of the main occurrences experienced by the class during a certain period of the day. They were made at the end of each shift by the educators who had been with the class. The purpose of this document was to share with the other co-workers what had happened during the previous shift.

8 Two cameras were used in the research. One fixed, on a pedestal, and a compact action camera attached to the researcher's head that captured images of the situations from her field of vision.

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