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## **Study on Emotions and Feelings in Early Childhood Education**

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**ABSTRACT – Study on Emotions and Feelings in Early Childhood Education<sup>1</sup>.** This study aimed to investigate the role of the pedagogical process on the development of emotions and feelings in the preschool age, based on the analysis of the child's school activity. This research involved observations in the classroom and an interview with the responsible teacher, in order to analyze the extent to which the pedagogical activities mobilized the emotional aspects of children and contributed to their affective-emotional development. The results showed that being recognized by the teacher in the collective is emotionally more significant than the nature and success of the task execution. It follows that understanding the dynamics of emotions in the concrete school life of pre-school children is essential for pedagogical planning that aim the emancipation of subjects.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education. Cultural-Historical Psychology. Emotions.

**RESUMO – Estudo sobre Emoções e Sentimentos na Educação Infantil.** Este estudo investigou o papel do processo pedagógico sobre o desenvolvimento das emoções e sentimentos na idade pré-escolar, a partir da análise da atividade escolar da criança. A pesquisa envolveu observações em sala de aula e uma entrevista com a professora regente, a fim de analisar em que medida as atividades pedagógicas mobilizavam os aspectos emocionais das crianças e contribuía para seu desenvolvimento afetivo-emocional. Os resultados demonstraram que ser reconhecido no coletivo pela professora é emocionalmente mais significativo que a natureza e o sucesso da execução da tarefa. Conclui-se que compreender a dinâmica das emoções na vida escolar concreta das crianças em idade pré-escolar é imprescindível para o planejamento pedagógico que vise a emancipação dos sujeitos. **Palavras-chave:** Educação Infantil. Teoria Histórico-Cultural. Emoções.

## Introduction

The relationship between emotional processes and school education has gained a significant dimension in the contemporary scenario. The debate about the way in which the affective-emotional sphere of the activity acts in the teaching-learning-development process has permeated several spaces and has been evident even in the mainstream media. The initiatives installed after the *International Public Policy Forum: educating for 21st century skills*, held in São Paulo in 2014, are noteworthy. The forum defined socio-emotional competences as necessary in teaching in order to guarantee the “success” of children and adolescents. This debate culminated in two main actions: the installation of a pilot project in Rio de Janeiro State to implement school evaluations to measure the development of socio-emotional competences and the incorporation of socio-emotional skills in the new National Curricular Base (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular*).

It is evident, thus, the need to discuss the role of education on the development of the emotions and feelings in early childhood. Despite proving to be hegemonic, the theory of competences is criticized, mainly for coming up against the reedited and widely problematic dichotomy between reason and emotion. Overcoming such dichotomy is a historical challenge proposed by Vigotski<sup>2</sup> and other researchers who take on historical-dialectical materialism as their method of investigating and understanding psychology.

Seeking to contribute to this debate and to join efforts with researchers who have been addressing the problem of affections from a cultural-historical perspective (Gomes, 2008; Toassa, 2009, 2014; Magiolino, 2010), this article presents the results of a research that had as its object the relationship between pedagogical activity and emotions and feelings of preschool children. The text retrieves propositions elaborated by classic authors from the Vigotski School and other more contemporary authors to elaborate a brief synthesis of the development of emotions and feelings in general and in preschool age as well as it presents, in sequence, the methodological procedures of the research, its main results and conclusions.

## Historical-cultural approach to the development of emotions and feelings

Lev S. Vygotsky revisited several themes dear to psychological science, among them the philosophical, political and scientific debate about human emotions and feelings. As Wortmeyer, Silva and Branco (2014, p. 286) rightly point out, the author did not properly develop a theory of emotions or affects, but “[...] this theme permeates different moments of his production, in which it is signaled the fundamental importance of the topic for studies in Psychology”. Also according to the authors, even though this is an unfinished road in the Vygotskian work,

the author “[...] established important milestones, which help to mark the investigative path in this challenging territory” (p. 286).

Among the several possible ways to approach the problem of emotions and feelings in Vygotsky’s thought, we will choose as a starting point to resume his conception of human development, which highlights the cultural genesis of complex psychic processes, including the affective function.

The cultural-historical theory of human development has as its premise that the human being appropriates culture from the social activity that he performs; in this process, the psychic functions are developed and requalified, acquiring new structures, establishing themselves as superior psychic functions. According to Vygotsky (2012), the explanation of the higher forms of human conduct cannot be found in organic dispositions, nor in the mere interaction between cultural and biological forms, but in the clash between these developments:

Both development plans – the natural and the cultural – coincide and merge with one another. The changes that take place in both plans intercommunicate and in fact constitute a single process of biological-social development of the child’s personality. As organic development happens in a cultural environment, it becomes a historically conditioned biological process. At the same time, the cultural development acquires a very peculiar character, which cannot be compared to any other kind of development, since it is produced simultaneously and jointly with the process of organic maturation and its support is the dynamic organism of the infant in the process of growth and maturation (Vygotski, 2012, p. 36)<sup>3</sup>.

The peculiarity of the cultural development in the course of development is decisive to understand the process of complexification of mental functions in general, and in particular of emotions and feelings, as we will see. The higher mental functions are not the product or mere expression of organic activity, but they obviously do not dispense with it, since the human psyche is the body itself functioning, which has as its main attribute the connection of vital processes to the nervous system<sup>4</sup>.

With Vigotski (2004b) we understand that, in addressing the problem of emotions and feelings, we must consider the importance of the biological radical of emotion, but not reduce and restrict its expression to organic changes. According to Costa and Pascual (2012, p. 629), our author was critical both of the position that reduced emotions to “[...] nothing more than processes of an exclusively biological nature, restricted to organic functioning”, as well as conceptions that “[...] they ignored the bodily dimension” of feelings.

The cultural-historical explanation of the human psyche focuses on the cultural development that takes place within the concrete social relations of life in society, as it is social relations that provoke the development of properly human capacities. The understanding of the his-

torical and social nature of the human psyche resides, for this theory, in the qualitative transformations of natural processes (marked by an immediate and fusional relationship of the being with the environment) into *artificial* processes, mediated by *signs*, which, when retroacting on the functions psychic abilities enable the development of volitional behavior and, ultimately, of conscious activity.

Signs constitute, according to Vigotski (2004a, p. 93), “artificial tools aimed at mastering the mental processes themselves”, which contain socially constructed meanings and intentionality. Signs appear and play an essential role in the cultural development of the human psyche as a means of communication and influence on other subjects and on oneself. The higher forms of behavior, mediated by signs, are instituted on the *interpsychic* plane, when establishing external relations with the social reality, and, through internalization processes, become the subject’s *intrapsychic* plane (Vygotski, 2012). The process of internalization of signs represents, ultimately, the possibility of mastering one’s own conduct to achieve the objectives of the activity in which the subject is engaged, with such cultural devices having decisive importance for affective processes.

The internalization of cultural signs engenders interfunctional rearticulations between the various psychic processes, which means that the action mediated by signs causes transformations not only in isolated functions, such as perception, attention, memory, etc., but in the *interfunctional* system as a whole. New relationships are established between the psychic functions, which start to act together, generating new combinations through a complex system. Thus, emotions are subject to such restructuring and requalification processes from the first year of life and mainly from the acquisition of language, which makes it possible to consciously regulate emotional manifestations in the psyche (Martins; Carvalho, 2016).

Therefore, understanding the complex interfunctional articulations promoted by the signs brings to the analysis the development of the affective sphere of the psyche. By establishing new connections with other psychic (cognitive) functions, through learning, affective functions also acquire new, more complex structures. Machado, Facci and Barroco (2011, p. 649-650) emphasize, in this sense, that emotions, in Vygotsky, “[...] appear as weaving together other psychological phenomena, such as imagination and thought, but not as epiphenomena or auxiliary phenomena”, which means that they are not simply triggered by the actions of the subject, but participate in the very genesis of actions. Sawaia and Silva (2015) highlight, in this context, the link pointed out by Vygotsky between emotion and imagination and the participation of affective elements in creative activity. Therefore, emotions and feelings are understood as a product and, at the same time, a regulatory element of human activity, connecting “[...] to each of the other psychological functions in the structure of consciousness” and specifying, in the course of development, as a *motivating element of personality*, as explained by Gomes (2018) by situating and contextualizing the analysis

of affective processes in the categorical system activity-consciousness-personality.

Vigotski (2004a) explains, for example, that our affections act in intricate articulation with the concepts that form our consciousness. He exemplifies this thesis with the analysis of the cultural construction of jealousy, demonstrating that the same feeling may have different contents depending on the political, historical and ideological place to which the woman belongs. Thus, the analysis of the affections cannot lose sight of the interfunctional relations produced by cultural meanings:

In simple terms, our affections act in a complicated system with our concepts, and those who do not know that the jealousy of a person related to the Mohammedan concepts of women's fidelity are different from those of another related to a system of opposing concepts about the same thing do not understand that this feeling is historical, that in fact it changes in different ideological and psychological means, despite the fact that there is undoubtedly a certain biological radical, under which this emotion arises (Vigotski, 2004a, p. 127).

This excerpt presents essential foundations for the deepening of the conception of the development of emotions and feelings from the perspective of historical-cultural psychology: the biological radical *in unity* with mental and ideological components is evident. It is clear that, in Vigotskian analysis, thought participates decisively in the formation of feelings, highlighting the *social content* of affective formations.

Magiolino (2014) emphasizes that in one of his latest works – dedicated to the psychology of the actor – Vygotsky “[...] takes up the problem of the (trans)formation of emotions to place it in a historical perspective that brings, among others, related to social class and ideology”, pointing out the need to create a complex system of ideas, concepts, images in order to give meaning to the expression of emotions.

If Vygotsky “[...] did not elaborate a definition on the terms that relate to the affective domain – emotions, feelings, passions, affection” (Tassoni; Leite, 2011, p. 80), his formulations indicate paths that have been explored. by continuators of his work in search of relevant differentiations for the understanding of affective-emotional development. Aware that a consensus has not yet been established among contemporary researchers in this regard, we adopted, in the present study, the understanding of emotions as a product of the evolution of species and the basis of the affective-emotional sphere of human activity, closely linked to sensations and satisfaction. of organic needs, while feelings are understood as affective formations that arise and change in the course of the historical development of humanity, depending on man's living conditions, his relationships and needs.

For Martins and Carvalho (2016), emotional reactions are expressed in the body, in speech and in thought in an intense and pro-

found, but circumstantial way, while feelings have a more prolonged and constant character, “[...] since they do not result only from positive or negative traits apprehended in isolation, but from the correlations between them”. The authors consider that Vygotsky evidenced the historical-cultural nature of feelings, which are, therefore, closely linked to the historical meanings of objects and phenomena of reality and are formed in the unity between emotional manifestations and thought.

Machado, Facci and Barroco (2011, p. 651) warn, however, that one should not attribute a social-historical character only to feelings, because “[...] emotions, although more associated with organic phenomena, are always and inevitably reactions of a social being, linked to the social demands of each historical period of humanity”. The requirement that arises when assuming the differentiation between emotions and feelings is not to treat both in a dichotomous or fragmented way, but in unity, because “[...] the prevalence of given feelings can induce emotional manifestations, or emotional commotions if do followed by certain feelings” (Martins; Carvalho, 2016, p. 709). Therefore, both emotions and feelings become more complex in the subject’s activity and, at the same time, regulate it, according to objective and subjective conditions. The notion of affective process, on the other hand, encompasses the entire dimension of the emotional sphere and constitutes a unit with cognitive processes, with emphasis on thought and language.

In summary, we have that the affective dimension of the psyche conquers more complex structures through the internalization of cultural signs and the establishment of connections with other psychic functions, being marked by the dynamics between emotions and feelings and changing according to the historical-ideological context.

In view of the above, placing emotions and feelings in the structure and dynamics of social activity is fundamental to understand the historical and cultural determinations such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., which assume a substantive importance in the development process of consciousness, from the first year of life.

Being established that feelings are constituted and altered according to the ideological and psychological context and that the affective functional process conquers more complex structures through the internalization of the signs of culture and the establishment of connections with other mental functions, the *affective-emotional development of the child* is placed as a problem for scientific investigation, whose relevance is evident when considering the consequences of the historical-cultural analysis of this problem for educational practice.

## Emotions and feelings in preschool age

In this research, we chose as focus of analysis the affective-emotional development in preschool age, whose relative age parameter ranges from three to six years old, approximately. As noted before, the psyche is developed in active relation with the reality, that is, on the basis of the *activity* that conditions and provokes its structural complexi-



fictionation; thus, in order to approach the development of emotions and feelings in preschoolers, we will take as an orientation axis the activity that guides the formation of new abilities of the psyche in this period.

In this perspective, the *activity* is the central category to explain the process of the development of the human psyche, because it is *in the activity* and *through it* that the child relates to reality and her mental processes are developed. However, there are different activities that play different roles in the development of the psyche. The ones that reorganize and stimulate the development of psychic neoformations in a given period of the psychic development are called *leading activity*. In each period, a leading activity driven by certain socially and historically constructed reasons is constituted.

Therefore, the periodization of human development based on historical-cultural psychology does not correspond to immutable and universal stages or steps of development, but to a theoretical analysis that situates the gradual structural transformations of the child psyche within the child-society relationship, highlighting living conditions and education as fundamental determinants of the development process.

Children of preschool age in societies with a high degree of development of the productive forces are not incorporated into productive work, or should not be<sup>5</sup>, since they still do not have the necessary abilities that this activity requires. Nevertheless, social relations continue to create in the child the need to participate and be placed in the activities of adults, to understand the social relations established in the productive sphere prohibited to childhood.

According to Leontiev's analysis (2012), the specificity of the social place occupied by preschool children determines their interest by the adult world. From the point of view of the development of the psyche, the transition between early childhood and preschool age is marked precisely by the tendency to independent activity and the desire to *do what the adult does*. The child feels this need, but does not dominate (nor can dominate) the bodily and mental operations required to act with objects from the adult world, coming to channel her desire for insertion in social practice through the playful representation of social roles in protagonist games.

The *role-plays* are precisely the guide activity of the preschool period, which means that the development of the mental processes more decisive in this period will be fundamentally driven by the staging of the adult world in a playful context. According to Elkonin (2009), this activity intensely and more directly mobilizes the affective-emotional sphere of the child psyche, because inside the child deals with the problem of the senses and motives that regulate the human activity and the relations among people. The fundamental content of the protagonist game played are human relations, norms, values and (implicit) principles that govern them. In other words, in the course of the protagonist game, the child assimilates and elaborates models of the relationship among people.



Elkonin (2009) discusses the changes resulting from the acquisition of a new meaning for the objects used by the child and for their actions as children's plays develop as a game of social roles. When the doll becomes a child and the girl and/or the boy become parents, the acts of care (bathing, feeding, etc.) become the child's responsibility due to the assumption of the role, which is pertaining to parental activity. This process mobilizes and recreates certain emotions in the child's psyche (depending on the concrete relationships that surround the child and the values and models seized by her in these relationships), acting on the emotional dimension of the subjective image of the reality forming in the child psyche.

Conducted by the guide-activity of the period – the role-plays – the psyche of the preschool child advances in the formation of the bases of higher mental processes, reaching an embryonic voluntary and conscious mental functioning. One of the fundamental aspects of psychic restructuring that enables this advancement was identified by Alexander Zaporozhets, a researcher linked to the Vigotski's School, who specifically studied the development of the emotions and feelings in early childhood. Based on his investigations, the author demonstrates the fundamental role that emotions play in the formation and realization of the motives for children's activities, identifying that, at preschool age, affections change places in the *temporal structure of the activity*, becoming anticipated as an *emotional image* that mediates the course of a given task. This process is directly related to the increasingly collective character of children's activity, as we will explain below.

Preschool age is the moment when the child assimilates a world that is wider than the manipulation of objects, starting to reproduce human actions with them, and, therefore, gets involved and establishes relationships with people more consciously aware of the affections caused by them. Zaporozhets (2002) explains that the change of place of the affections in children's activity structure occurs because, when attempting to perform tasks not only necessary to herself but to other people around, the preschool child begins to have concerns and feelings related to the impact that her actions will have on herself and on the group. His empirical investigations show that evaluations (positive or negative) about the activity of children of preschool age directly interfere with their interests and subsequent ways of carrying out the same activities. According to Leontiev (2012, p. 60):

A child recognizes her dependence on the people who are directly around her. She has to take into account the demands, in relation to her behavior, of the people around her, because this really determines her personal, intimate relationships with those people. Not only do their successes and failures depend on these relationships, but also their joys and sorrows are involved in such relationships and have the power of motivation.

Thus, at the beginning of preschool age, the child can already make a positive or negative emotional assessment of the results of her

actions, and this gradual awareness allows the child to progressively control her own conduct in such a way that the emotions and feelings start to function, more decisively, as regulatory elements of behavior.

Until the transition from early childhood to preschool age, affection appears as a positive or negative emotional assessment of the situation that is the result of the child's actions. Thus, the child tends to redirect her behavior *after* receiving/perceiving a negative response from the adult or the collective of children. Gradually, the emotional processes advance, creating the possibility of anticipatory emotional correction, appearing before the action, as an emotional anticipation of the possible consequences and of the (imaginary) situation that can be generated when/if the action is completed (Zaporozhets, 2002). This means that the feelings start to anticipate and regulate the development of certain task.

It is through the new and varied actions carried out by children that the knowledge about themselves and their abilities strengthen, and "pride, self-satisfaction, autonomy, insecurity, hesitation, joy for success and other higher human feelings arise" (Liublinskaia, 1971, p. 377). What enables the appearance of generalized emotions and higher feelings, even incipiently, is the qualitative leap in the mental interfunctional system resulting from the internalization of signs, responsible for generating the functional rearticulations, as discussed previously, with emphasis on language acquisition.

Being a protagonist in a role-play requires that the child be able to understand the rules of conduct that are internal to social roles and to subordinate her conduct to them, renouncing her immediate desires or impulses. Speech, in addition to helping to subordinate the child's actions to the rules of play, will also be a new way of expressing, naming and gradually becoming aware of her desires and emotions. Bearing in mind the relationship between the development of role-playing and mental functions, especially language, is important to understand how the process of emotional anticipation is built in childhood. The content of the emotional image of reality that is constituted in the child's psyche and starts to act as a mediating element of its conduct is directly related to the concrete conditions of life and education of the child, which are reflected in its activity.

In summary, the discussion presented so far highlights the importance of the preschool period of development for the (trans)formation of the affective-emotional sphere of the psyche and, at the same time, the importance of the affective-emotional processes for understanding the specificity of neoformations that take place in this period of development. From the discussion presented before, we highlight the very notion of *development of the affective-emotional sphere of the psyche*, which takes place in the course of children's (social) activity having as a basis the relationship with language and other mental functional processes.

We also highlight the social and ideological *content* of the developing emotional processes in early childhood, which has as its deter-

mination the children's experiences within the concrete conditions of life and education. Considering this framework, we conducted a survey that looked at the relationship between the pedagogical process and the development of emotions and feelings in preschool age from the analysis of the child's school activity, presented below.

### **Methodological procedures and characterization of the research subjects**

With the objective of investigating the role of the pedagogical process on the development of emotions and feelings in early childhood education, we conducted a field research that had the child's *school activity* as a fundamental axis of investigation. This methodological choice is based on the theoretical understanding of the activity as a fundamental mediation of the child's relationship with the social world that mobilizes and causes the formation of mental processes (considered in their form and content).

The study was carried out in a municipal school for early childhood education in a city in the interior of the State of São Paulo, with an estimated population of 370,000 inhabitants, an HDI (measured in 2010) of 0.801 (very high) and 59% of the population distributed among classes C, D and E (with monthly income between BRL 300.00 and BRL 2,200.00). The school was located in an old and peripheral neighborhood of the city, offering part-time attendance.

The research involved two methodological procedures: classroom observations and an interview with the class teacher. The research project was duly appreciated and approved by the University's Ethics Committee via Plataforma Brasil and all ethical precautions were guaranteed. After completing the research, the authors returned to the school and presented the results to the teacher.

The observations were done with a class composed of 20 children aged 3 to 4 years old and the respective responsible teacher. An on-site field diary was recorded and an observation report was drawn up immediately after each session. After two pilot sessions, nine consecutive days of classes were observed, each one lasting three hours and thirty minutes, totaling thirty-one hours and thirty minutes of observations (31h30'). In one of the observation sessions, the responsible teacher exercised her right of absence and the group was conducted by a substitute teacher.

The observations aimed to identify the pedagogical activities proposed by the teacher and the affective-emotional involvement of the children with them, in order to comprehend: the nature, content and structure of the activities proposed for the children; the emotional involvement of children in the (different) activities proposed and conducted by the teacher; the existence (or not) of pedagogical interventions that contribute to the development of children's affective-emotional processes. The aim was to verify: whether there would be a difference

in children's emotional involvement according to the type/nature of the proposed activity (playful, productive, etc.); whether the teacher would carry out pedagogical interventions promoting the articulation between emotions and feelings with the other mental processes, favoring the child's gradual awareness of her affective processes and forging the possibility of emotional anticipation (as discussed in the theoretical foundation); the social and ideological content of the teacher's interventions aimed at the children's emotional manifestations.

The indicators for observing and recording the affective-emotional mobilization of children in different activities involved the content of the verbalizations (in the children's interaction with the teacher, among the children themselves and self-directed verbalizations) and the children's body manifestations (psychomotor agitation, apathy, aggressive behaviors and facial expressions that indicate emotional states). The researcher remained an observer of the activities, only participating in situations in which she was requested by the teacher or by a child in specific cases.

As a strategy for systematizing the data, after completing the collection, *observation protocols* were filled out for each session, which contained the following items: tasks proposed by the teacher; instructions given by the teacher to perform each task; children's reactions after the task was announced; teacher's interventions during the execution of the task; children's conduct during the task; circumstantial episodes.

After the observation phase, the researcher conducted the interview with the teacher. Based on theoretical assumptions and observation data, the interview was elaborated in a semi-structured manner with four main questions that guided the others, which emerged during the interview, with the intention of investigating the teacher's understanding of the following questions: to what does she attribute individual differences in terms of the experience and expression of human emotions and feelings; what is the role of emotions and feelings in education; how do children's emotions and feelings permeate classes; and whether education can contribute in any way to the affective-emotional development of children. The interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed.

## **Presentation and analysis of results**

The preschool observed had four classrooms, of which only three were used for the daily classes and the fourth was used for specific activities, containing shelves with some old toys and a tube-type television set. The school maintained a rotation of use of the spaces, which governed the time and place for the standard routine of the classes. The children in the observed class were received in a small room filled with cardboard boxes; the space for possible use was a large rug and two benches, where the teacher sat and placed her material. In the first half hour of class, the reception actions took place: checking the calendar, prayer and storytelling. For the next thirty minutes, the group could use

the patio for activities that required body movements. Subsequently, there was a thirty-minute period when snacks were served. After the snack time, the children went to the park and spontaneously played for about an hour. The group ended the class day with activities that were productive (drawing, painting, modeling, etc.) and conducted in another room with tables, chairs, chalkboard and rug, lasting approximately one hour. At the end of the class, the guardians picked up their children at the door of this last room, called the *routine room* by the teacher.

When the classes were observed, every day was marked by many dispersals and fights among the children and scolding by the teacher. In general, it was found that the teacher started the tasks without offering clear instructions to the children about *what* to do, *how* to do it and *why* do it. This seemed to generate difficulty in understanding for most children, resulting in dispersal of the group after a few minutes, as it can be seen in the excerpts from the following field journal<sup>6</sup>:

After everyone is seated, the teacher takes a box with wooden cubes and draws a letter, says the letter aloud and an object with the corresponding initial and tells them to put a little piece (from another game) on the letter of the badge, if there is one. Each one has a badge with their respective name written on it. Many children try to identify the letter on the piece (from the other game) on the table, instead of looking on the badge. After six rounds, the teacher calls the attention of a child because she is talking and messing with the small pieces on the table. At this moment, the child says that she does not know what to do, because there is no letter in the pieces. With that, the teacher realizes that many are doing the same – trying to find the letters on the pieces, when they should just mark the drawn letters on the badge – and ends the game saying that she needs to get beans so they can play bingo (Session 1).

In the next task, the teacher called a student and they talked away from the group for a moment. They came back singing a song. The teacher asks the class to queue up and one at a time to pass between her and the student. When the music is over, the teacher and the student hold the child between them and the teacher tells the child to go out and sit down. After approximately six rounds, the children stop lining up and the game is over. At the end of the game, two children beat each other up and the teacher scolds the one who hit first. The child looks down and cries. The group looks closely at the scene (Session 7).

These situations marked by the absence of initial explanations about the task to be carried out by the children appear as a pattern of the teacher's action, which constitutes a history of *negative* affection on the children in relation to most of the tasks proposed by her, as they produce feelings of confusion and turn into fights and side conversations. These situations have an impact on the child's affective-cognitive development, since preschool aged children are not yet able to organize their activities autonomously, therefore requiring instructions, guidance and praise from the adult.

Based on the analysis protocol, we registered the proposition of 29 tasks (not counting the park activity, which consists of a spontaneous not conducted action). Of this total of tasks, eight of them involved

most children at the beginning, that is, the children seemed willing to perform the tasks and looked at the teacher while she explained the procedures. However, only in three tasks did the class manage to stay until the end, all of them concentrated in session 2 and coordinated by the substitute teacher.

The teacher asks the class if they like stories and everyone responds, agitated, that they do. The teacher took a book and told the story of a group of caterpillars that decreased, during the story the teacher created a suspense atmosphere for the children to try to guess what was happening with the caterpillars that were disappearing. At the end, when the children saw that they all turned into butterflies, they opened a smile and laughed a lot. Few children did not participate during the entire storytelling (Session 2).

We identified two major determinants that substantiate such lack of interest and will be discussed as follows. The first refers to the absence of actions mediated by the responsible teacher, and the second to the weakness and fragmentation of content in the tasks.

The absence of mediation was decisive to produce a negative affection towards the proposed task, expressed in the child's lack of interest and abandonment of the task by seeking other occupations, such as hitting classmates. Affective involvement with school tasks depends on understanding the purposes and building a sense of the activity for the child, as well as the possibility of achieving or not accomplishing what was requested. In the situations observed, it was found that children do not learn to organize their actions according to the purposes previously determined to be accomplished, which would be a fundamental achievement of the preschool period. The observation of the class conducted by the substitute teacher reinforces the conclusion that the teacher's mediating actions are more determinant for the children's emotional engagement in the task than the nature of the task, considering the activities observed.

In a research carried out by Tassoni and Leite (2011, p. 80) in a private school in the city of Campinas, in which they also sought to "[...] identify the affective manifestations in the interactive dynamics of the classroom, their influences on learning and in the students' relationships with the objects of knowledge", the central role of the teacher in mobilizing the affective-emotional sphere of the subject-learners was highlighted:

The data showed that the figure of the teacher, his performance, his personal characteristics, his way of relating, ways of acting and speaking produce feelings and emotions that interfere in the production of knowledge in the classroom, affecting the relationship of students with the content, with the school, with the teachers themselves and with themselves. The quality of mediation evokes emotional experiences that determine the type of influence the environment will exert on cognitive development (p. 79).

The methodological procedures of this research included observation, video recording and discussion with students about situations experienced in the classroom in classes of the last years of each level of education, including early childhood education, having shown, in the analysis of the results, that children six-year-olds already identify pedagogical mediation as a promoter of learning and the teacher's commitment to enable them to learn ("I liked it because the aunt helps us. We learn how to do it"; "She talks well, explains well. She helps, she talks about my work. It helps, because she gives us some ideas") (Tassoni; Leite, 2011).

The weakness of content in the tasks also seems decisive to explain the students' lack of interest and dispersal. In the proposed tasks that were observed, the teacher prioritized the procedures and the production of something, exploring little of the social function of the objects and phenomena that permeated the tasks. As an example, we refer to the storytelling, which was repeated practically every day, but in none of the observed days was the content of the story discussed and/or problematized with the children. There was a high turnover of tasks during the days of observation, but they were disconnected from each other, and none of them proposed to bring articulation with a concrete experience of the children. The moments when the children related to their own life, such as, for example, when they started to tell a story lived outside school, were usually disregarded by the teacher, who asked for silence so that they could return their focus to the task proposed by her.

As previously described, emotional anticipation is an important achievement in the development of emotions and feelings in childhood and is only achieved when the activities become more complex, when the challenge proposed by the task requires this ability from the child. In the observed school context, the tasks were limited to isolated actions and lacked content, not constituting an organized activity. In this sense, it can be considered that the emotions and feelings produced in this process are alien to the authentic motives of the activity for the child.

It is possible to observe a heterogeneity in the development of the children, which seems to result from the inequality in the quality of mediations received in the family and community contexts. The teacher's action seems to corroborate the reproduction and maintenance of this inequality, as, in situations where the class is divided into groups to perform tasks, the teacher invests more time and energy in the instructions for the most developed groups of children. There is a group of children who have more pronounced difficulties in following tasks, and throughout the observation sessions, this was the group that systematically received less pedagogical attention. It is necessary to note that these children are mostly black, and there were no black children among the group of the most developed in the class. The precarious socioeconomic condition is also a predominant trait among these children.



The teacher distributes the instruments and says that they should line up for each one. The instrument that each one will play was chosen according to the child's skill level. Children who do not normally do the tasks or are not very participative in the classes stayed in the rattle group, which would be played throughout the music, without any instruction. The coconut shell group was made up of students who were already able to follow instructions. The triangle group had the most participative and involved children in the classes, and it was the group that received more mediation from the teacher during the music rehearsal. Both the triangle and the coconut shell groups faced a musical score, and the teacher intervened to teach the reading of the score. After rehearsing the song six times, the teacher assessed the subgroups by instrument for the whole group, and said in a "friendly" tone that whoever belonged to the rattle group was because they couldn't do it, the coconut shell group was ugly and the triangle group was beautiful (Session 3).

Praising during the performance of tasks was a strategy rarely used by the teacher, even with more developed students, but when it was carried out, generated significant results in building the pride and satisfaction of the children themselves. They were always pleased by the praises, which made them get involved in a more attentive way: *"During the counting of numbers of the month, one of the boys got the number of the day right and the teacher praised him; he gave a big smile"* (Session 3). The child's success in the activity - achieving what the teacher proposes - seems to be a determinant of the child's emotional involvement with the teacher and, at first, is more significant than the very nature of the activity in question. Before making and analyzing the observations of this research, the hypothesis that the emotional involvement of the children would depend on the nature of the activity was considered. However, the analysis of the data reveals that the children's involvement with the tasks depends fundamentally on the quality of the adult's mediation, in this case, the teacher.

As described before, Zaporozhets (2002) notes in his research the importance of positive or negative assessments of the child's accomplishment of a task as something fundamental for its execution and subsequent ways of carrying it out. In the observation sessions, it was possible to see that the children seek praise and recognition of the teacher, especially when they are performing tasks that require more concentration, those performed in the routine room. The child's joy is evident when she receives a compliment for her accomplishments, noticeable in her words, facial expressions and body excitement, as seen in the following situation:

During the task, the children take the portrait for the teacher so she can see it. The teacher makes more specific comments about some portraits and about the others, of those who have more difficulty, she only replies that 'it is good'. After the praise, the children came back smiling to their tables (Session 6).

In the aforementioned research by Tassoni and Leite (2011), the verbalizations of six-year-olds who resent criticism and the lack of support from the teacher stand out ("I don't like it very much when she talks

about my work, when she has some something wrong. Because I get sad and I can't think. She doesn't speak when I can't think"), but also recognize the teacher's affection as a promoter of well-being at school ("The [teacher] always cares. It's good. Everything that pleases is good").

On the other hand, the teacher's most recurrent resource for controlling the behavior of children during the execution of tasks were threats and scolding, fourteen in total and present on every school day:

Upon arriving, the teacher scolded them for a long time, talking about the letters she would write to the parents, and that she didn't want children making a mess, etc. During the scolding, the class was silent, many children lowered their heads (Session 5).

The teacher ended the game after having scolded the group many times so that the children would remain seated on the stairs (Session 6).

The teacher places a cardboard box pretending to be a toilet in the courtyard with the children and returns to pick up other materials. A child looks at the make believe "toilet" and says "Look, a potty!", sits on it and tears the whole box. The teacher comes back, scolds the child and leaves her isolated from the park and her classmates, who observe her. The teacher glues the torn parts and places the box (the toilet) besides the shower to simulate a bathroom next to the dollhouse in the park, but none of the children gets close to the playthings (Session 9).

In this situation (Session 9), the gap between the reason for the child's activity and the reason for the teacher's pedagogical activity is evident. While the child (with quite pronounced learning difficulties) is affected by the objects in front of her and tries to use them in the context of her social function, still without playful elements, yet with the potential to become a fragment of the role-play, the teacher handles the incident by punishing the student. The scolding was for one student, but as a consequence it served as a threat to the rest of the group, since no child approached the playful objects while playing in the park. In this and other examples, *the absence of a positive model of activity* is evident. Although children experience the daily life of a home every day, it is not natural for them to be able to play house; they need an intentional mediation to build playful action. In addition to the scolding given explicitly, other forms of control and threat are used by the teacher, for example, through the contents of the stories she tells.

Then the teacher says she had an idea: she was going to open the story box; one of the children says she wants the story of "Filomena, the one who was lazy". The teacher looks at the researcher and says that it is a Latin American folk story, about a very lazy woman, Filomena, who was too lazy to get out of bed and told her husband she had a lot of pain; that made him do all the housework until the day he got a beating stick. After telling the summary of the story, the teacher calls the group and goes to the classroom; there she opens the box of stories. [...] At the end of the proposed task, the teacher asks the class to help store the books correctly in the box, in the right place, and that she would take the beating stick for those who did not help tidying up, making the children scream and laugh (Session 1).

After playing in the park, in the routine room, the teacher says she will take the beating stick if the group is not silent (Session 4).

One of the children draws attention for having the most learning difficulties in the class, and is the one who receives the most scolding from the teacher. During the scolding, the teacher often tells the other children to stay away from those who make a mess, in this case, to stay away from J. It is noticeable that the children slowly respond to the teacher's commands to reprimand J. and move away from him, reproducing a relationship of repulsion and stigmatization toward this student, a fact that corroborates what Mukhina (1996, p. 190, emphasis added) asserts: "The child shows a tendency to imitate the adult, to learn from him to evaluate people, events and things". In the park, in the period of the class in which the teacher does not propose activities and allows children to play spontaneously, it was possible to observe a formation of subgroups among children by affinity and the reproduction of stigmatization practices among children became more evident:

The teacher welcomes the class with a kiss on the cheek and a good morning. A student arrived and sat at the opposite end to where the other children were sitting, and they said right upon his arrival, 'now J. is going to irritate us!' (Session 4).

The boys played boat and needed to arrest J., who was always the 'monster' (Session 3).

The situations mentioned exemplify the use of signs in the relationships between peers, used to alert and control the conduct of other children based on the meanings and social values presented by the adults/teacher. That's how J. becomes the monster that will piss everyone off. The external (interpsychic) forms of controlling the behavior of the other are appropriated by the children and are constituted on the intrapsychic plane, as part of their own personality. This is an important and necessary process for the development of the conduct domain, but the data made it evident that there are ideological contents that participate in this process. The models of human relationship permeated by such content and their appropriation by preschool children are expressed in disputes and *segregation*, which are felt and perceived by themselves, causing anger and suffering. In the excerpt below, we observe a situation of marginalization of a child, who uses the orientation always reiterated by the teacher of *not being selfish* to name the situation experienced:

A small group played house making, but not everyone was accepted into the group; one of the girls told the teacher that the game was selfish and started to cry saying that she had no friends (Session 2).

Another aspect to be emphasized is that the planning, interventions and the entire organization of the space and the class are notably divided by gender. This demonstrates how education has helped to intensify the social division of gender, contributing to the reproduction of the hegemonic model of relations between genders and provoking specific feelings of what it is to be a boy and to be a girl in this society:

The teacher takes attendance every day using two different notebooks, one blue with the boys' list and notes and the other pink with the girls' list and notes.

One of the girls' tables gets pink clay from the teacher; another group says that they also want pink clay, and the teacher says that they should not be selfish, because each day a different table gets pink clay. One of the boys asks a girl at the pink clay table what she is doing and she says she is making a doll; the boy makes a disgusted face and steps away from the table (Session 5).

After their snack time, the teacher asks the group to stay on the stairs before entering the park and they sit divided between boys and girls; today was the day for the girls to enter first, and one of the boys enters with the girls and soon gets reprehended by the girls themselves, who ask if he wore a dress. The boy stops and returns with the other boys (Session 5).

Children of preschool age live a moment of *doing what the adult does* and even imitate the most likely behavior of the adult model in different situations. During the observation, it was noteworthy the fact that one of the children who excels in terms of learning reproduced an extremely "adult" speech. She tells another child who got hurt while running in the park that "*she had already warned not to run because someone was going to get hurt, but nobody trusted her*" (Session 8). The child who verbalizes this reprehension is also the child who runs in the park, but repeats the teacher's commands and gradually internalizes the rules and controls the classmates:

At the end of the activity in the park, one of the girls hits her head on an iron rod and starts to cry a lot. The teacher asks a student to go get ice in the kitchen. The student brings the ice and many children make a circle around the injured child asking her to calm down because the pain was going to pass. The girl who brought the ice, in the circle, says that she had already warned not to run because someone was going to get hurt, but nobody trusted her (Session 8).

At the same time that the children scold each other, they also help each other, revealing, therefore, two models of relationships that are in dispute: solidarity and denouncement.

The teacher released the group to wash their hands and sit on the patio stairs to wait for the cake. On the stairs, the children sit all tight together, talk, touch and beat each other. The three groups of the school get together in the courtyard and everyone gets involved singing "happy birthday to you". While waiting for the teachers to serve the cakes, two children argued and started to cry; the children around mobilized themselves to know what had happened and asked them to calm down. They stopped crying and started talking again (Session 3).

All of these situations reveal, to some extent, that the signs used by adults/teacher become mediators of children's relationships with each other and are gradually being used to control their own behavior. When a child signals, expressing fear, that J. is going to *irritate the group*, even though at that very moment J. was quiet, we see that the emotional image of certain situations starts to anticipate the very realization

of the children's actions. In these episodes, children reproduce social norms and values (such as obedience and subordination) first with the other and then for themselves. The process of emotional anticipation is fundamental from the point of view of the development of the psyche; however, the analysis of the content of the signs that are present in the relationships between peers, which lead to the development of an increasingly anticipated subjective image, reflect values and oppressions that are present in the current society. A boy looking disgusted at the sight of a pink clay doll expresses how the emotion (disgust) is being developed through some meanings and values of the social gender division installed in our society. Therefore, the basis of the emotions that emerged and were built in child-child relationships at school is in the relationships that the child establishes with the teacher and other adults, which convey the ideological determinations that historically constitute this society.

From the analysis presented here, we found that there is no education focused on the *development* of emotions and feelings. The teacher makes use of this mental process to be able to manage the class and deal with the daily routine of the classroom. Threats and punishments become frequent and work as strategies for external control of students' conduct. Fear becomes a quick and effective "pedagogical resource" to silence the group. Vigotski (2003) highlights the deleterious impacts of this practice on the development:

'Punishment educates slaves'. This old rule is absolutely correct in psychological terms, since *punishment does not really teach anything but fear and the ability to guide behavior exactly by fear*. And because it is the easiest and most incapable teaching means, punishment has a quick effect, without worrying about the inner education of instinct. Considering the child's natural rejection towards pain, it is extremely easy to frighten her with a beating stick and thus force her to abstain from a bad habit; however, this does not suppress the habit, on the contrary, instead of correcting a bad habit, it introduces a new one: subordination to fear (Vigotski, 2013, p. 114, emphasis added).

In this sense, we find it possible to affirm that the teacher makes an *instrumental use* of emotions and feelings, especially negative ones, to be able to contain the children's agitation. This hypothesis is corroborated by the data collected in the interview, since the emotions and feelings cited by the teacher are always negative examples, that is, emotions appear as a problem to be solved, either by the school, or by parents and/or family, as we can see in the excerpts below:

[...] So let's suppose, when one hits the other there, depending on the child I make him take care of his friend. I say, 'look!', I say this, 'your friend is *sad* because you hit him, he's *crying*, if someone hits you like that, would you like it? He also has *pain* and *feelings*'.

[...] I also think that the way the father deals with the mother can also contribute with some things, I think that influences, because the small child, through knowledge, you know, that I see, that I have heard, that we study a little sometimes, that the child does not have the profile to deal with certain *emotions*, with certain *anxieties*, she is learning.

From the moment the child is born, she already has a little *emotion*, right. The *insecurity* when she is alone in her little room and no one will pay attention.

There was no moment in the interview when the teacher cited examples of positive emotions, which could be built at school, or which integrate the teaching-learning process to some extent. Dealing with emotions and feelings appears as a perspective of “fixing” what the child already brings and hinders her learning and behavior (anguish, pain, insecurity, sadness, etc.). This discovery leads us to the emphasis made by Wortmeyer, Silva and Branco (2014, p. 287) to the criticism that Vygotsky makes, in the work *Pedagogical Psychology*, of the pedagogical ideal of “[...] act towards the repression and weakening of emotions”, conceived as unnecessary or even harmful elements in the human behavior system. It is an ideal derived from a biologizing conception that defends the thesis of the uselessness of emotions in the evolutionary process of the species, to which Vygotsky opposes affirming the positivity of emotions for their effect of making behavior more complex and diverse (Wortmeyer; Silva ; Branco, 2014). The results of the research regarding the teacher’s conception of the development of emotions and feelings seem to indicate that this is not perceived as a superior psychic process to be developed, but as a problem to be managed at school.

## Concluding notes

The analysis of our results reveals that the child’s affection in relation to school tasks are mainly determined by the emotional involvement they establish with the teacher. This finding highlights the developmental age in which the children are, that is, the need to have an adult activity as a reference for their actions. Being recognized by the teacher, at this time of development, whether by facial expressions, praise etc., seems more important than the success of the task. This research shows that the teacher is a significant reference for the children, and the way she assumes this role directly impacts on how children recognize their abilities and feelings about themselves and about others. We observe, in this sense, that the class seems to be quite heterogeneous in terms of affective-cognitive development, because while some children are already able to emotionally anticipate a conflict situation, others need to go through them to then feel the emotion, which seems to reflect the unequal access to measurements in the out-of-school context and that is perpetuated by school practice.

Emotional processes, in unity with social values, are decisive in the formation of the child’s personality. According to Blagonadzhina (1960, p. 355, emphasis in original) “an emotional reaction is only mo-

tivated by what directly or indirectly serves to satisfy the needs of the subjects and is linked to *social demands*". Hence, our data need to be understood within the whole societal system of relationships, since the determinations of the current society permeate and justify all the relationships found in the school dynamics. The practices detected in the school, such as the social division of gender, the education through fear, the reproduction and maintenance of inequality in teaching, are not characteristics of the singular individuals accessed by this data collection, nor of this school unit, but they are particular expressions of the general determinations of the relational web of capitalist society.

Thus, it is important to place this research in the midst of a capitalist society, in which the production and reproduction of life are anchored in the exploitation of work. Therefore, the characters in this research and their relationships singularly reproduce expressions of the "social and historical trends of their time or mankind". This happens because the control and maintenance of the practices and values of a capitalist society do not occur only in productive relations, but at all levels of sociability. A society originated from the private appropriation of the products of social work, competition and individualism, that is, from individual disputes to achieve a supposed well-being, has as main result (political, economic and psychological) oppressive relations instituted as a way of social structure. We can mention sexism and racism as structural oppressions of a capitalist society, which produce situations of violations and oppressions from the classroom to the tax system<sup>7</sup>. These data demonstrate that oppressions play a social role within the bourgeois sociability, ranging from the production of social inequality in the economic field to the development of the feeling of inferiority in the psychological field. Fear is an element of control present not only in the educational process, but also in the different spaces in which power relations are necessary to ensure historically the submission of the working class (Castro, 2012). Finally, the teaching inequality identified in the research also has its social function in the production of school failure, which starts in early childhood in the sense of blaming children individually for learning difficulties based on diagnoses, as an expression of the pathologization process and medicalization of life (Patto, 2000).

Therefore, understanding the results of this research based on the most universal determinations of our time leads us to realize that it is not by chance that the news and educational programs related to emotions and feelings in school education focus on the development of *emotional skills*. In this perspective, the school fulfills the role of conditioning emotions demanded by the world of work (in which workers are increasingly underprivileged and in precarious situations) and, at the same time, preventing impulses of rupture of the social order.

Ultimately, it contributes to the reproduction of social relations in the capitalist mode of production. For this reason, the hegemonic conception of the development of emotions and feelings present in the



school corresponds mostly to the interests of the class that benefits from capitalist barbarism.

At the same time, contradictorily, the school is shown to be a social space in which ethical-political disputes are produced, which can be observed in situations in which children show solidarity and exercise mutual empathy and support, as well as in the experience of positive affection for the tasks and school contents that the substitute teacher manages to produce with the children.

As we have seen, the relationship between teaching and emotions has been object of systematic investment in terms of research, knowledge production and ideological dissemination, seeking to promote the formation of subjects that are adaptable to changes in the world of labor, who accept patiently and kindly the flexibilizations and precarious working conditions. Understanding these questions and the current social function of the school, in particular its role on the development of emotions and feelings of preschool children, is indispensable in order to think about new emancipatory collective social relations.

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## Notes

- 1 This research was sponsored by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP).
- 2 We chose the spelling “Vigotski” in the body of the text, but in the quotes we followed the spelling of the works.
- 3 All other quotes translated from the works in Spanish are the authors’ responsibility.
- 4 Decisive contributions on the material radicality of the psyche can be found in contemporary neuroscience, endorsing the historical-cultural conception. Damásio (2004), for example, demonstrates how the evolution of the biological apparatus allowed the human being to represent *mental images* of the states of the body and feel them through a highly complex nervous system. See: Damásio (2004).
- 5 In Brazil, the number of children and adolescents between 5 and 17 years of age is superior to 42 million; among these, 8% are still subject to labor (DIEESE, 2010).
- 6 The situations that will be presented are the reports prepared after each observation. The session numbers correspond to the day observed in chronological order.
- 7 According to data from the Institute of Socioeconomic Studies (Salvador, 2014), proportionately, black women are those who have the lowest income and pay the most taxes in Brazil.

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