



Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação

ISSN: 2446-8606

ISSN: 1982-5587

Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho

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Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação,  
vol. 15, no. 4, 2020, October-December, pp. 2115-2125  
Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21723/riaee.v15i4.13847>

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## CHILDREN'S TRANSITIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS

### CRIANÇAS EM TRANSIÇÕES NA VIDA COTIDIANA E NAS INSTITUIÇÕES

### NIÑOS EN TRANSICIONES EN LA VIDA DIARIA Y EN LAS INSTITUCIONES

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**ABSTRACT:** The book *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions*, first published in 2019, addresses children's transitions in/between institutional practices in the light of the principles of historical-cultural psychology. Organized by Mariane Hedegaard and Marilyn Fler, the work portrays diverse empirical situations highlighting the child's perspective in the transitional processes that, occurring from a very early age in childhood, promote the restructuring of their social relationships. This potentially holds the possibility of forming new affective-cognitive capacities. The emphasis on the child's perspective and the institutional dimension in the analysis of the leading activities are pointed out, in this review, as important contributions to Brazilian scholars of this theoretical tradition. We discuss the expansion of the scope of the concept of transition, including “horizontal” passages of microgenetic level, arguing for the transformation of motives and their intentional organization in educational processes to be retained as core aspects of the problem of transitions in development.

**KEYWORDS:** Periods of development. Cultural-historical psychology. Transitions. Child's perspective.

**RESUMO:** Apresenta-se a obra *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions*, de 2019, que aborda os processos de transição das crianças em/entre práticas institucionais à luz dos princípios da psicologia histórico-cultural. Organizada por Mariane Hedegaard e Marilyn Fler, a obra retrata diversas situações empíricas dando destaque à perspectiva da criança nos processos de transição que, ocorrendo desde muito cedo na vida infantil, promovem a reestruturação de suas relações sociais. Esse processo guarda, em potencial, a possibilidade de formação de novas capacidades afetivo-cognitivas. O destaque à perspectiva da criança e à dimensão institucional na análise das atividades-guia são apontados, nessa resenha, como importantes contribuições aos estudiosos brasileiros dessa tradição teórica. Pondera-se a ampliação do escopo do conceito de transição, incluindo passagens “horizontais” de nível microgenético, demarcando-se que a transformação dos motivos e a organização intencional destes nos processos educativos são os aspectos nucleares da problemática das transições no desenvolvimento.

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Periodização do desenvolvimento. Psicologia histórico-cultural. Transições. Perspectiva da criança.*

**RESUMEN:** *Se presenta el libro Niños en transiciones en la vida diaria y en las instituciones, de 2019, que aborda los procesos de transición de los niños en/entre prácticas institucionales a la luz de los principios de la psicología histórico-cultural. Organizado por Mariane Hedegaard y Marilyn Fleeer, el trabajo retrata diversas situaciones empíricas que destacan la perspectiva del niño en los procesos de transición que, desde una edad muy temprana en la infancia, promueven la reestructuración de sus relaciones sociales. Esto proceso pone potencialmente la posibilidad de formación de nuevas capacidades afectivo-cognitivas. En esta revisión, se señalan como contribuciones importantes para los académicos brasileños de esta tradición teórica el énfasis en la perspectiva del niño y en la dimensión institucional en el análisis de las actividades rectoras. Se discute la expansión del alcance del concepto de transición, que lleva a la inclusión de los pasajes "horizontales" de nivel microgenético, demarcando que la transformación de los motivos y su organización intencional en los procesos educativos son los aspectos centrales del problema de las transiciones en el desarrollo.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Periodización del desarrollo. Psicología histórico-cultural. Transiciones. Perspectiva de lo niño.*

The reflection on *how* the process of development of subjects takes place through the relationship between teaching and learning is configured in a theme that permeates the studies of all those who are linked to the historical-cultural tradition in Brazil, whether with the phenomena as their object psychological or pedagogical phenomena. The book *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions*, organized by Mariane Hedegaard and Marilyn Fleeer, inserts itself in this collective effort to scientifically understand and systematize the processes of human development, choosing as the focus the discussion about the *transition* processes. The work was launched in 2019 in Great Britain by Bloombury Publishing, composing the series *Transitions in childhood and youth*. In it we find contributions from authors from six countries - Australia, Canada, Chile, Denmark, England and Sweden.

The historical-cultural psychology of development shows that human formation takes place within material and symbolic conditions, synthesized in the different social modes from which subjects produce and reproduce their lives. This understanding of the social or social relations (VYGOTSKI, 1995; 1996; 1997; MARX; ENGELS, 2007) sustains the position, defended by the authors of "*Children's transitions...*", that each society proposes possible trajectories of development for the subjects. These trajectories, synthesized in different human activities and materialized in different institutional practices, potentially hold the possibility of forming new capacities in the subjects. This is how, in their life path, the child is being

integrated into new institutional practices, which present new and specific *demands* and *motives*, expressed in the form of expectations, rules and values. Such a movement necessarily implies moments of transition from the *motives* of a given activity (already appropriated by the subject) to the *motives* not yet appropriated of *another* activity.

The concept of *transition*, around which the work on canvas is structured, seeks to synthesize this movement of potential transformation of subjects as they insert themselves into a *new activity* or *practice* that proposes them new objectives and motives for their action in the world. This concept seeks to capture the process of rupture or crisis that results in *neoformations*: substantial changes in the way the subject perceives, feels and acts in the world. From the point of view of its rationale, the theory of transitions is based on Vigotski's idea of *social situation of development* (VYGOTSKI, 1996) and on the concept of *motive* according to the meaning proposed by Hedegaard (2014) taking from Leontiev.

The fundamental premise around which the work *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions* is organized is that the transition between one institutional practice and another leads to the restructuring of the child's relationships with his or her life context, because the previous way of relating with people and the environment does not meet or does not suit the new demands. Therefore, when the child enters a new social practice that presents him/her with new objectives and reasons, tensions can be produced and “in some cases crises can result in ruptures” (HEDEGAARD; FLEER, 2019, p. 2), as he/she faces new possibilities of participation and new responsibilities embedded in tasks that demand capacities that he/she does not yet have, and that challenge the previously established standards of action/interaction. The chapters gathered in the book organized by Hedegaard and Fleer demonstrate that the transition to new institutional practices, occurring very early in a child's life, constitutes a central phenomenon for the concrete understanding of child development.

The work challenges us, in particular, to think about the idea of *transition* by proposing a broadening of the scope of analysis present in classical historical-cultural psychology, focusing on crises or transitions between the ages. In this direction, several chapters of this work focus on the analysis of the transitions between the different practices and institutional contexts in which children participate within the same period of their development.

One of the central positions defended by the authors is that the transition can occur both in a “vertical” sense, with the entry into new institutional practices, traditionally linked to the transition to new periods of development (for example: entry into an institution of early childhood education; the transition from early childhood education to primary education etc.),

and in a “horizontal” sense, from the different institutional practices in which the child participates regularly, on the same day or in the same week. The book as a whole proposes that the notion of transition should also be summoned to think about the passages (or *zig-zag*) between the family context, the school/daycare space, the counter-school activities and other institutional practices that can compose the child's routine, thus expanding the classical meaning of this concept. We could then understand as a transition the movement or the passages between the different *activity settings*, organized from the motives that guide the subjects' actions within each institutional practice. As an example, we would have: the transition from playtime to homework; the transition from homework to dinner; the transition from home to school; the transition from playtime to teacher-led learning.

One of the quite instigating questions that the work raises when walking this path refers to how the activity in one institution intersects and influences the activities of the child in another. By entering a new system of social relations, the child has the possibility of becoming aware of the objectives that are materialized there, through the contrast and reflection on the relationships experienced previously and/or simultaneously in another context in which the child participates. The activity of getting dressed, for example, is carried out both at home and at school and can, in both contexts, share the same external aspects, having, however, different reasons that guide them: if at home the focus is generally on the result of this activity (getting ready to go out), at school the focus is on the acquisition of autonomy of the child. When the child gains experience in a new social situation, mastering its values, rules, etc., it becomes capable of using this experience to compare and differentiate what is important and valued in each of the institutional practices in which it participates. Some of the chapters in the book illustrate, in this sense, the tension that takes place between the family and school context when the child moves between practices that are guided by different values and objectives.

The broadening of the reach of the transition concept is expressed itself in the principle that “children are *always* in transitional processes” (HEDEGAARD; FLEER, 2019, p. 207, our emphasis). Although this elasticity of the concept has the merit of calling attention to the countless alterations, changes and passages from one action to another that the child experiences or faces during the same day, it may, on the other hand, shift the centrality of a specific type of change, alteration or passage in the activity of the subject and that effectively results in *transformation* of his/her conduct: the transition between the motives already appropriated by the subject to those not yet appropriated.

Using the dialectics between quantity and quality, we can understand that the process of transformation in the way the subject perceives, feels and acts in the world is configured as a qualitative leap that necessarily occurs from the gradual accumulation of experiences, including these different passages, changes or daily transitions between institutions or between activities in the same context. In fact, we do not “see” the phenomenon of *transition* as we follow the daily life of a subject, what we can do is capture “manifestations of transitions” (whether daily or institutional) as *potential moments* to apprehend the phenomenon of *transition* in its concrete aspect.

In possible dissonance with the movement proposed by the work in question, we consider it important to preserve the qualitative difference between micro-transitions within an age or period of development and the transitions as restructuring of the subject's activity and, therefore, linked to psychic neoformations. Without any difficulties, we understand that the various empirical situations portrayed and analyzed in *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions* constitute an important and necessary methodological action for us to learn the conditions from which subjects' appropriate new motives for carrying out their actions. This is because they present us with concrete situations in which subjects engage in specific objectives in a given activity, sharing or contesting certain values within themselves, guided both by the motives present in these new activities as a whole and by previously appropriate reasons.

Potentially, when the subject begins to act in a new practice or in a new activity within that practice he encounters new demands, which express a certain set of objectives and motives of the practice in question. The *problem of the transition*, therefore, is to apprehend *how* these demands with which the subject is confronted become new *motives* for the subject, guiding and directing his action in the world. It seems to us, therefore, to be more precise to use the concept of transition to designate *this* more specific process: the development of capacities and abilities that allow the subject to be in this *other* activity in an autonomous and conscious way.

The reason, in historical-cultural psychology, is intrinsically related to social needs - needs that already exist and those that may come to exist. For a new motive to be instituted for the subject, it is necessary to *appropriate a motive-object* (LEONTIEV, 1983) that becomes significant and important for him and, therefore, is capable of *guiding* and *directing* all his action in the world. We are trying to emphasize, then, that the theory of *transitions* fundamentally marks the *process of transformation of motives*. But to *access* this process we need to analyze “potential manifestations” of this transition: what are the *objectives* and



*contents* proposed for the subject's action in a certain activity and what are the *intentions* and *expectations* that refer the subjects who initiate their engagement in these practices?

The research presented in this book allows us to follow this concept of transition *through* different empirical situations, treated and analyzed throughout the eleven chapters. The particular cases do not appear simply as “examples” or “illustrations” of the concept, but as expressions of what Ilyenkov (2008) calls “an analysis of the particular”, seeking to highlight in the empirical material the movement of expression of the genericity of the phenomenon studied (in this case, *the transition*), which in turn allows the reader the exercise of moving his thought in the relationship between the uniqueness, particularity and universality of the phenomenon. By the way, we highlight the wealth of empirical data and the diversity of contexts portrayed in this work, a result that is built through a diverse and rich range of data collection procedures, including observations and film recording of the school context; ethnographic cut participant observation; interviews with children, teachers and family members, shared teaching planning between teachers and researchers; monitoring of children's routine over 24 hours.

The research compiled in this collection sets in motion methodological principles summarized in a previous joint work of the organizers, the book “Studying Children: a cultural historical-approach”, de 2008. There, Hedegaard and Fler (2008) state that the scientific study of children's development implies identifying the institutional practices in which children participate, understanding the demands and expectations that are placed there in potential, investigating the activities that are dominant within these practices, and examining how children act in these activities considering their intentions and motives. Something that we evaluate as an important contribution of the authors to the Brazilian public, and that appears in this new publication, is the indication that the researches on educational processes and development seek to apprehend, together with the social and institutional dimension, the *perspective of the child*. This means taking into account the children's intentions that are expressed in the various activity scenarios and the production of personal sense of the experiences lived, elucidating the connection that is woven between the motives that guide the child's conduct and the demands placed by institutional practices - remembering that the objectives and motives that we want to place for the children and those that are effectively materialized in the activities do not always coincide. In the specific case of the study of transitions, the authors point out, in the introductory chapter of the collection, the importance of apprehending the expectations and intentionalities that children bring from other practices and activities to those that are inaugurated.

Another contribution of *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions* that deserves to be punctuated considering the Brazilian context and the moment in which we, researchers linked to the historical-cultural tradition, find ourselves in terms of appropriation and development of theoretical-conceptual and methodological tools, is the emphasis on the *institutional dimension* of human activities and the concept of *demand*, giving visibility to what is provided and requested of children in the institutional arrangements in which they participate and which materialize the *motives* that guide a given activity. We understand that this path brings concreteness to the study of the guiding activities that mark the periodization of development, minimizing the risk of an abstract analysis of child development, in which the activity of the child appears detached from material, social and symbolic conditions.

In the work in question, this perspective aggregates relevant reflections in relation to the transition between pre-school age and school age, analyzing situations that express moments of transition from the institution of early childhood education to primary school. The theme is approached by several chapters, which highlight the organizing motives in each of these institutional practices, seeking to analyze or highlight which motives are potentially in transition for the child at the end of pre-school and early elementary school. Some questions arise: are these reasons *intentionally* organized for the child to engage in a process of rupture that leads to the acquisition of neoformation? To what extent *does promoting the development of play and study activity* present itself as a conscious object (motive) on the part of adults who act in these institutional practices?

The transition from early childhood education to school is a transition between the *guiding motives* proper of the activity of playing and those of study (DAVIDOV, 1988), which necessarily involves ruptures, effort and eventual frustrations of the subject in formation. The reader of "*Children's transitions...*" faces an interesting provocation: the search to provide a smooth and placid passage from early childhood education to elementary school brings, at times, the risk of obsnubilating the differences that exist between the institutional practices of these educational stages, and which must be recognized and preserved. One of the defenses throughout the book is that the idea of supporting this transition does not mean that activities in kindergarten and primary school should coincide. If the elementary school does not present anything new, what is the point, after all, of talking about transition or even preparing the child for this transition? We want to highlight here a debate that appears throughout the book and that is particularly relevant to the Brazilian public: the need to recognize what are the organizing reasons for children's learning in each



institution in which they participate and that, therefore, they should also be advisers for teaching practice in these institutions.

The child always starts a new practice and/or activity with some expectation of what is or is hoped of it, but it seems especially important to consider - and this is one of the defences of the authors of *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions* - that although these transition processes can take place in a more or less spontaneous way, simply by “inserting children into new practices”, we should take responsibility for intentionally organizing such processes. It is necessary, for example, to create special mechanisms so that the subjects become aware of the motives and demands that the social trajectory places and/or can place on their performance in the world, which implies the need, as teachers and psychologists who act with the educational processes, to *know* the *motives* present in potential in the new activities in which the subject will act, as well as to know the *motives* from which this subject begins his engagement in the new activity.

To affirm that the transition to primary education is a *potential* for the development of the subject (it potentially contains a certain social trajectory in relation to the reasons that *imply neoformations or new competencies for the subject's action in the world*), means to recognize that to appropriate a new objective-motive the subject needs “[...] to carry out a practical or cognitive activity in their regard that responds *adequately* (which does not necessarily mean identical) to the activity they embody” (LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 167, emphasis added by the author).

But, as the author follows, “to what extent will the child's activity be adequate and, consequently, to what degree will the significance of an object or phenomenon appear to him, that is, another problem” (LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 167, emphasis added by the author), a problem that is closely related to our capacity to apprehend and analyze the relationship between the *demands* effectively present in the activity and the *expectations* (initial motives) from which the children engage in the activity in question.

This work dedicated to children's transitions in daily life and in institutions reaffirms that no transactional resource and/or pedagogical effort is capable of preparing children for *all* the potential changes they will face in the new institutional practice that marks the new age period, and that the important thing is to ensure that this child, together with the adults who work with him, can build realistic expectations about the new social space he will integrate, fully experiencing the possibilities of development that each institution can promote.

The new demands that children encounter in a practice or activity are, at first, only vaguely known to them, and they only begin to play an *effective* guiding role for the subject's

activity through the expectations (intentionalities, motives) that already refer to the subject's performance in the world. What we want to emphasize here is the very concept of “social development situation” (VYGOTSKI, 1996), which shows that *the child creates conditions for his/her own learning* from the conditions (motives, objectives) that he/she finds in the practice in question.

This process of appropriation of different activity-motives from which subjects create *expectations* of their own activity in the world is marked by historically conditioned *social expectations*, involving class, gender, race and ethnic relations, for example. The historical condition of development of the subject, as formulated by Vigotski in his theory on human development (VYGOTSKI, 1995; 1996; 1997), implies the recognition that this process is necessarily crossed by a *political and ethical direction of personality* formation. Thus, it is not a secondary issue for the child's development processes that he or she, for example, guides their study activity by the expectation of “being better than the other”, or “following teacher's orders”. Knowing the world in which we live and act means, for the authors of historical-cultural psychology, also projecting *new possibilities of social relations* for this world in which we will continue to act, which implies assuming, together with Leontiev (1983, p. 180), that we act consciously with the *transition* processes of the subjects in our society must be oriented towards the movement of formation of another sociability among us, so that the “main objective motive [can] be raised to a category that is truly human and not alienated to man, but that bases its life on the lives of others, on its well-being [...]. The end of this path, in Gorki's words, is man converted into man of humanity”. It is within the construction of this political and theoretical scope in relation to the understanding of human development that we place the contributions of this work for Brazilian readers.

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### How to reference this review

NASCIMENTO, C. P.; PASQUALINI, J. C. Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions. **Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação**, Araraquara, v. 15, n. 4, p. 2115-2125, out./dez. 2020. e-ISSN: 1982-5587. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21723/riaee.v15i4.13847>

**Submitted:** 20/06/2020

**Revisions required:** 05/07/2020

**Accepted:** 02/08/2020

**Published:** 30/08/2020

