

Guest editors' introduction to the special issue

Perezhivanie and subjectivity within a cultural-historical approach: Dialogues between Australia and Brazil

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The ongoing task of understanding and using the cultural-historical theory developed by Vygotsky, as well as its subsequent formulations by other theorists, is a difficult and delicate, though ultimately rewarding, process. The difficulties owe to the social, cultural, political, linguistic, and temporal chasm that separates Vygotsky from modern-day researchers seeking to use his theoretical framework for understanding an array of issues relating to learning and development in contemporary society. As we look back on the theoretical and philosophical contributions to and developments of cultural-historical theory since the 1930s, post-Vygotsky, we are invited to better understand it.

As guest editors of this special issue, we were given the opportunity to contribute to this theoretical challenge by consolidating different perspectives on the concepts of *perezhivanie* and *subjectivity*. *Perezhivanie* was only briefly discussed by Vygotsky in his first major work, *The Psychology of Art* (1971), though he returned to the concept in the last years of his life with the knowledge and conceptual system developed in his “instrumental period” during the intervening years. This concept has, as it is often said, been overlooked in mainstream psychologies both in the Soviet Union and in the West, but has gained particular attention over the last decade. A cultural-historical understanding of *subjectivity* emerged in the 1970s when Soviet psychology began to address “new” issues such as consciousness, communication, subjectivity, and more complex representations of culture and society. Much of the conceptual development of *subjectivity* owes to work by González Rey, who elucidated the concept’s ontological, epistemological, and methodological consequences. Both concepts, in different ways, redress the neglected and central role of emotions in human experience, providing a theoretical alternative to the instrumentalist understanding of the relationship between the environment and human development.

This special issue of IRECE is the result of an ongoing international collaboration between groups of researchers interested in further developing the concepts of *perezhivanie* and *subjectivity*, led by Fernando González Rey in Brazil, and Marilyn Flerer and Nikolai Veresov in Australia. Our mutual interests, and personal and academic affiliations have given rise to productive discussions exemplified in two symposia: the first at the University of Brasília (“I International Australia-Brazil Seminar: Current unfolds of Vygotsky’s work: The concepts of *perezhivanie*, emotion, and subjectivity”, January 16-18th, 2014), and the second at Monash University Peninsula, Melbourne (“*Perezhivanie* symposium”, February 2-3rd, 2015). The seeds of this issue were sown in particular

discussions during the latter, where there was a growing sense that the various ideas we had developed over the two years required an outlet where they could be formally consolidated.

The two symposia gathered together both research groups, as well as researchers who had independently come to use *perezhivanie* and/or *subjectivity* in their work, so that they could share their differing perspectives on the concepts. Together, we collectively sought to illuminate: the theoretical content of the concepts; issues for discussion that would have otherwise remained hidden; and the broader philosophical, epistemological, and methodological consequences of both concepts. The aim of this issue is thus to provide a basis for continuing those discussions and promote further research and theoretical development.

This issue is organised into two parts, providing a snapshot of the theoretical directions that participating researchers from the International Society for Cultural-historical Activity Research (ISCAR) Australasia and Brazil regions have taken with regard to Vygotsky's work on *perezhivanie* and later developments of subjectivity.

The articles in Part 1 come from Australia and deal directly with the concept of *perezhivanie* in early childhood education. Though two of Vygotsky's works, "The problem of the environment" (1994) and "The crisis at age seven" (1998) appear to define the *perezhivanie* concept, the content of this concept, its relation to other cultural-historical theoretic concepts, and how it is to be operationalised in research, is far from clear. A first hurdle, for example, appears when trying to translate *perezhivanie* into English—"emotional experience" is used in most of the translations of Vygotsky, but there is simply no adequate equivalent term. Even in Russian, the common meaning *perezhivanie* differs greatly from its more technical application in theories of art and theatre (e.g., in the work of Tolstoy, Stanislavsky, and earlier work by Vygotsky). A second issue pertains to the role of emotion in Vygotsky's new concept—are affect and cognition two interlinked systems that mutually inform each other? Or is affect in some way a more fundamental component of human mental functioning? More fundamentally, to what phenomena does *perezhivanie* refer, exactly? Finally, of course, is the issue of using the concept in research: how, and to what, can the concept be applied? What is its place in a methodological sense? And how can *perezhivanie* be made manifest in or for analysis?

Michell provides an introduction to the concept of *perezhivanie*, and through a deep interrogation of links between works at different points of Vygotsky's academic career, argues for a characterisation of the concept that is more cognitive than commonly understood. Following this conceptual discussion, **Fleer** examines *perezhivanie* as a methodological tool, and in the context of early childhood research, argues for a set of principles to guide the design of research methods. These principles provide the means by which the phenomenon of *perezhivanie* can be analysed and understood through the *concept* of *perezhivanie*.

The next two papers build on the *perezhivanie* through links with other theorists. Drawing links between Vygotsky's *perezhivanie* and Dewey's *experience*, and their respective writings on art and drama, **Davis and Dolan** examine the nature of child educational drama through the lenses of both the child and the educator, and discuss the role that metaxis (double subjectivity) plays in development. Extending work that begins with Zaporozhets' writings on *soperezhivanie*—the co-experiencing of emotions that can be found in joint activities such as play—**March and Fleer's** study of 25 children during a fairy tale festival in a childcare group examines the contribution of co-experience in group contexts to a children's emotional development.

The final three papers of Part 1 use *perezhivanie* to examine issues that arise for families as they transition to foreign cultural contexts. **Adams** investigates the conditions through which children form new friendships in culturally foreign contexts, and uses Vygotsky's concepts of the ideal and real form to theorise the role of parents in this process. Using *perezhivanie* with narrative analysis, **Babaeff** makes visible and examines the subjective configurations of parents to understand how these inform the manner and extent to which they maintain their heritage (i.e., home) language and culture for their children in a different country. Finally, **Fleer, Adams, Gunstone, and Hao** examine the role of emotion in the playful learning of science concepts by children, where cultural differences between home and school may otherwise make this learning difficult.

The articles in Part 2 come from Brazil and are based on the Theory of Subjectivity within a cultural-historical approach, as developed by González Rey. Inspired by a moment in Soviet Psychology that took place in the 1970's, as well as by Vygotsky's later ideas and concepts, such as *perezhivanie*, social situation of development, and sense, González Rey advanced the concept of subjectivity, proposing a new ontological definition to the study of human processes. Subjectivity is understood as symbolic-emotional processes and formations, which have a generative capacity through human experience, and allow individuals and social groups to emerge as subjects of human practices. In this sense, González Rey's work integrates Vygotsky's idea that the fragmented study of psychological functions should be overcome, and at the same time, provides an opportunity for advancing the definition of psychological system that was not made clear in Vygotsky's work.

This and other issues are discussed by **González Rey and Mitjans Martínez**, who emphasise the relevance of the concepts of *perezhivanie*, and social situation of development for advancing such a definition of subjectivity as well as a new approach to human development. Following this, **Patiño and Goulart** present Qualitative Epistemology as a platform of thought for advancing the study of subjective phenomena, explaining its fundamental principles and its scientific legitimacy.

The following papers address theoretical considerations based on research in the fields of education and mental health. **Campolina and Mitjans Martínez** focus on the concept of social subjectivity in understanding educational innovation processes of a school in Brazil. Next, **Bezerra and Costa** articulate the fields of education and health through studies using Qualitative Epistemology and Theory of Subjectivity. They criticise the pathologisation present in both education and health services, and highlight the importance of enhancing subjective productions geared towards human development. Finally, **Coelho** challenges the cognitive-linguistic approach to Vygotsky's work, pointing to the value of the concept of subjective sense as a theoretical alternative to advance understanding of learning processes and language use. Through a constructive-interpretative methodology, she examines two early childhood teachers' subjective dynamics of being *enchanted* with singular aspects of their professional lives. Together, those papers contribute to the understanding of subjective process involved in educational and health experiences, in opposition to rationalist and fragmented approaches. **Mok** concludes the special issue with a discussion of issues and challenges that remain in relation to *perezhivanie* and *subjectivity*.

To conclude this introduction, we would like to thank the editors-in-chief of IRECE for their support of this special issue. We would also like to thank all of the contributing authors, most of whom also participated in the peer review process for their colleagues on the other side of the world, and also researchers from the Monash and University of Brasília PhD communities who

assisted with reviews and editing. The concepts of *perezhivanie* and *subjectivity*, as well as Vygotsky's work more generally, remain unfinished, requiring careful consideration to not only preserve the legacy of his work, but also to translate his ideas into modern research contexts. This unfinished character of these concepts is evidence that science is both historic and processual. To reflect critically upon these concepts is also a means by which we can create new theoretical tools and develop new ideas in response to current social challenges. We hope that this issue generates further discussion and development of those concepts, and the role they play within Vygotsky's broader theoretical framework.

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