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Vygotsky's concept of emotion: the indissociability of affective and cognitive aspects in human development

Conceito de emoção em Vygotsky: a indissociabilidade dos aspectos afetivos e cognitivos no desenvolvimento humano

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Abstract

Objective

This article presents a diachronic review of Lev Vygotsky's concept of emotion and its significance in understanding human development.

Method

The article has a theoretical methodology and emphasizes the importance of situating the analysis of emotions within the context of human work and the meanings attributed to it.

Results

Vygotsky's innovative approach transcends the traditional dichotomy between emotion and cognition, emphasizing the integrated nature of human experience. His concept of higher psychological functions highlights the cultural-historical context in which these functions are developed, forming the basis for projecting collective social interactions into individual psychological processes. The author argues that emotions are fundamental to personality development and self-regulation, shaped by cultural influences.

Conclusion

While Vygotsky did not provide precise definitions of emotion and feeling, his work underscores their dynamic and transformative nature. Emotions, as dynamic elements of personality, contribute to the construction of the individual's psychological life and influence social interactions.

Keywords: Cultural-historical psychology; Emotions; Human development; Vygotsky, Lev Semenovitch, 1896-1934.

Resumo

Objetivo

Este artigo revisa o conceito de emoção de Lev Vigotski e sua relevância no desenvolvimento humano.

Método

Este artigo assume uma metodologia teórico e ressalta a importância de situar a análise das emoções no contexto do trabalho humano e nos significados atribuídos a ele.

Resultados

A abordagem inovadora de Vigotski vai além da dicotomia tradicional entre emoção e cognição, destacando a natureza integrada da experiência humana. Sua concepção de funções psicológicas superiores enfatiza o contexto sociocultural em que se desenvolvem, projetando as interações sociais coletivas nos processos psicológicos individuais. O autor argumenta que as emoções desempenham um papel essencial no desenvolvimento da personalidade e na autorregulação, influenciadas por fatores culturais.

Conclusão

Embora Vigotski não defina emoção e sentimento com precisão, seu trabalho destaca sua natureza dinâmica e transformadora. As emoções, como elementos dinâmicos da personalidade, contribuem para a construção da vida psicológica do indivíduo e influenciam as interações sociais.

Palavras-chave: *Psicologia histórico-cultural; Emoções; Desenvolvimento humano; Vygotsky, Lev Semenovich, 1896-1934.*

The issue of emotions has great importance in the productions of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Throughout his works, the author repeatedly approaches this theme from different perspectives, contextualizing its historical path (Vygotsky, 1999) and relating it to aspects such as children's creativity (Vygotsky, 2004), art (Vygotsky, 1974), scenic performance (Vygotsky, 1974), the pedagogical process of teaching-learning (Vygotsky, 1997a), and the education of children with disabilities (Vygotsky, 1993).

The way Vygotsky (1999) conceives emotions and the role attributed to emotional elements on the human psyche and development configured an innovative approach in his time, transcending and surpassing the traditional schism between emotion and cognition. The concept of emotion developed by Vygotsky (1999) allows an integrated and comprehensive understanding of the human being, which considers him in his totality – that is, a being that is, at the same time and in proportions of equal importance, a being that acts, thinks and also feels.

The Vygotskian concept of higher psychological functions expresses the dynamism of the human psyche. It refers to acquisitions that are not biologically given but instead built and developed by man in his interaction throughout his historical development. In contrast to the elementary psychological functions (such as attention, perception, memory, etc.), the higher functions (such as logical memory, voluntary attention, concept formation, and emotions) are linked to the cultural-historical context of human production. In this sense, the concept of function highlights that humans do not apprehend social relations in themselves but rather the functions of these relations (that is, the particular significance that he attributes to them), which are internalized and go on to constitute higher functions. Thus, from the Vygotskian perspective, psychological functions constitute the projection in the private sphere of collective social interactions.

After almost 100 years of Vygotsky's reflections, the essentiality of the author's contributions still persists. Faced with the urgency of reflecting on this theme - in a society in which emotion is still despised and considered an element to be "tamed" and subjugated by reason - we present a review of the concept of emotion in Vygotsky, conducted diachronically through the resumption

of the theme throughout his works. The text begins with the Vygotskian critique of traditional approaches to emotion. Also, it explores the author's pointed relationships with other psychological processes, such as cognition, imagination, and the development of creative activity. In this way, it is possible to glimpse Vygotsky's monist conception, which incorporates emotion as one of the higher psychological functions, characterizing it as a fundamental and characteristic element of the human species, providing particular ways of meaning, and resignifying its presence in the world.

Critique of Traditional Theories of Emotion

Vygotsky's (1999) refusal to consider emotions as dichotomized or minor aspects of the human psyche and life are felt in his criticism of the traditional psychological approaches of his time. The author denounced that both dominant currents at the time – naturalism and idealism – were moving away from an accurate understanding of the nature and function of emotions on human development.

The naturalistic approach, spread mainly by the theories of James, Lange, and Cannon, defended the innate origin of emotions, relating emotional expression to the human phylogenetic legacy. Although developed independently, William James and Carl Lange's contributions comprised the postulates known as the "James-Lange theory". According to this physiologically based theory, emotions are biological components to preserve the species. From this perspective, emotions are considered mere reflex instincts mediating the communication between body and mind, promoting the organism's balance and protection from external stimuli.

The James-Lange theory goes back to the thesis advocated by Descartes, who divided human nature into two distinct elements: body and soul. For Descartes, the connection between the two occurred exclusively through the pineal gland, this being the psychophysiological mechanism through which human passions (also known as "animal spirits") could affect the body's movements and actions (Vygotsky, 1999). According to Descartes, affections are entirely dependent on the human will and, therefore, can be completely dominated. For him, passions are passive psychophysical processes that express the dual nature of the human being in its bodily and spiritual dimensions.

For Vygotsky (1999), the James-Lange theory clearly had a Cartesian inspiration, emphasizing the psychophysical parallelism between bodily and emotional processes. However, at the time, this theory was usually associated with the postulates of Spinoza, who proposed a monist conception between mind and body in opposition. While Descartes argued that emotions were subjugated to the body, James and Lange established a peripheral emotional theory. Although James defended emotional activation through the vasomotor system and Lange postulated the action of the internal organs in this conduction of stimuli, for both, emotions were purely physical elements without any connection to psychological processes. Vygotsky (1999) considered that such a conception removed emotions from consciousness and human psychological development, gradually eliminating them from the historical scene.

According to the James-Lange theory, human development tends to overcome animal remnants progressively; therefore, this position considers emotions as a human epiphenomenon, ruling out any possibility of development (Vygotsky, 1999). According to Ribot's understanding, reproduced by Vygotsky (1999), emotions are considered a state within another state because they would exclusively serve instinctive physiological connections and would be completely separate from all human psychological life. Thus, human affective reactions are believed to be mere remnants of animal evolution (Vygotsky, 1999).

Still of a naturalistic nature, Cannon's research, developed from the James-Lange theory, relocated emotions from the body to the brain, more specifically to the thalamus. Cannon demonstrated that the same emotion could have different expressions and that some emotions could persist even without any evidence of bodily expression (Vygotsky, 2017). With this, emotions could no longer be exclusively classified as reflex or instinctive reactions, but would be related to human brain functioning. A new category of emotions emerged, the higher emotions, which were not destined to disappear due to phylogenetic evolution and were considered distinct, not explained by the naturalistic theories of James, Lange, and Cannon. In this way, the researchers found a convenient alternative for what could not be corroborated within their epistemological conception. They established two types of emotions: superior emotions, of spiritualistic character, and inferior emotions, purely physiological (Vygotsky, 1999). For the author, this dichotomy between the two classes of emotions – higher and lower – divides the human being itself, completely distancing it from concrete reality.

The blatant dichotomy between the two classes of emotions proposed by the James-Lange theory did not go unnoticed by scholars of the time. Sigmund Freud was one of the first researchers to adopt a different stance and emphasize the dynamic force of emotional life, that is, to effectively consider the psychological nature of emotions (Vygotsky, 1999, 2017). The author highlights the originality of Freud's contributions by stating that emotions undergo modifications throughout human development and can only be understood in the dynamic context of life. However, according to Vygotsky's (1999) conception, although this understanding allowed relating emotions to the other psychological processes that make up personality, Freud considered emotional changes only within the biological limits of naturalism.

Vygotsky (1999) distinguishes between two conceptions of emotions: the physiological approach, which locates the emotional elements in peripheral or brain mechanisms and isolates them from any relationship with the human psyche, and the psychological view, which incorporates emotions into the other psychological processes. The author points out the equivocation of both theories, which, by positioning themselves at opposite ends, cannot explain or understand human emotions in their entirety, that is, considering the psychophysical wholeness of the individual in his environment. These two distinct lines of research represent, according to Vygotsky (1999), the historical clash between two fundamental currents of philosophical thought: idealism and materialism. This question, by the way, had already been addressed by Vygotsky (1997b) in his work entitled "The Historical Significance of the Crisis in Psychology". For the author, the dispute between the materialist and idealist currents resulted in an irreconcilable split in psychology, weakening both its theoretical basis and its methodological application.

While materialists advocated for explanatory psychology that ignored issues related to subjectivity, idealists promoted descriptive psychology that dismissed the importance of sociocultural aspects in forming the psyche. The result of these positions was a Psychology that neglected the integrality of human psychological functioning (Vygotsky, 1997b). The author denounces the existence of two psychologies and points out the impossibility of developing an actual science in this situation. He stresses the need to create unique psychology from a Marxist perspective, overcoming fragmentation and being genuinely scientific. For Vygotsky (1997b), this psychology did not consist only in the reproduction of Marxist assumptions, but in the development of a theory of its own, that applied the principles and methods of dialectical materialism to psychology (Martins, 2020). It is essential to emphasize the relevance of Marxist theory in Vygotsky's work, not as an ideological reproduction but as a guiding inspiration for developing theoretical concepts and practical methods specific to psychology (Martins, 2020; Ratner, 2020; Rivero, 2018).

According to Vygotsky (1997b), the crisis indicated the need to build a unified psychology capable of understanding the human being in all its facets as an integral being, transcending the mind and body dichotomy proposed since Descartes and personified, in his time, by the several theories of emotions. In opposition to dualism, Vygotsky (1987, 1997b) advocated a monistic conception that would replace partial views (which considered emotions as purely physical phenomena or as exclusively psychological states) and consider the psychophysical identity of emotions.

Beyond the Biological: The Cultural-Historical Understanding of Emotions

Vygotsky (1987, 1997b) proposes a monistic, materialistic, dialectical conception as a response to the crisis in psychology (Dafermos, 2018; Smolka, 2021). Vygotsky's position reveals his broad and integrated understanding of the human being, in which biological elements are inextricably related to sociocultural and historical aspects in all areas of human development and interaction, including emotional expression. Therefore, emotions are considered the objective expression of subjective experiences, highlighting their psychophysical character and recognizing that body and mind, subjectivity and objectivity, are dynamic and complementary elements of the same process.

Vygotsky's monistic conception is influenced by Spinoza (1994), and the contributions of the Dutch philosopher on the question of affections aroused great interest in Vygotsky, to the point of dedicating his work "Teoría de las emociones" to the thinker (Vygotsky, 1999). According to Spinoza (1994, p. 154),

By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.

Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion.

From this Spinosan conception, Vygotsky (1997b) develops the notion that the awareness of affect can transform it. That emotion does not assume a universal manifestation but always reveals itself in historically and culturally situated contexts. In this way, affect imprints marks on the body and the mind, mobilizing (or paralyzing) human activity. This notion allows us to glimpse a comprehensive understanding of the human being, simultaneously cognitive and affective, in which the power to act is linked to the ability to affect and be affected by his social environment. The environment and how individuals attribute meaning to their reality are essential factors, marking the differentiation between their perceptions and affective experiences (Toassa & Oliveira, 2018).

Spinosan monism influenced the development of the Russian psychologist's work, especially regarding the emotional and cognitive inseparability of the human being. In consonance with this meaning, Vygotsky (1993) reiterates that the cognitive and emotional elements are neither isolated nor mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are inseparable aspects of consciousness. Cognition and affect are a fundamental amalgam of the human constitution. Emotions affect thinking at the same time that they are affected by the development of cognitive processes. Emotion and thought are neither separate nor opposed but integrated and manifested in various forms of human expression. For Vygotsky (1993, 1999), emotions go beyond phylogenetic inheritance, acquiring new functions in human development. It is not just a matter of the complexification of lower emotions, that is, the development of elementary emotions shared with other members of the animal species. Human emotions are of a qualitatively different order, being inserted in the context of each social subject's cultural and historical development.

Vygotsky (1997a) does not rule out the contribution of biological elements, especially on psychological functions; he even states that “the instinctive root of emotions in the most primitive, most elementary feelings is especially clear” (p. 132). Thus, emotions act as a system to prepare the organism, which predisposes it to action. Under this understanding, emotions constitute a system of reactions that mobilize the organism. However, the biological factor is not the determinant of the emotional system: the way emotion drives the behavior of each individual is affected not only by his phylogenetic inheritance – which would make all people faced with the same stimuli have the same emotional reaction. Hence, Vygotsky (1997a) reaffirms the subjective character of emotions.

The element that differentiates how each person feels and is affected by emotions is, precisely, its historical-cultural character; that is, the way each social subject understands and experiences his or her own reality, allowing its expression in a specific time and space. Emotions, therefore, are dialectically mediated and constituted by a culturally and historically situated subjectivity. Vygotsky (1997a) emphasizes the dynamically active character of emotions, giving vivacity to interactions; in this way, emotionally colored behavior imprints particularly unique characteristics on man, mobilizing him subjectively and concretely. In this way, Vygotsky (1999, 2017) opposes traditional views, denouncing the a-historicism that prevents them from conceiving any possibility of emotional development. By minimizing the importance of emotions and relegating them as isolated epiphenomena instead of recognizing the centrality of their participation in higher psychological processes, the psychology of emotions of his time essentially moved away from effective human psychology (Vygotsky, 1999).

For Vygotsky (1993), however, it is not enough to recognize the inseparability between thought and emotion: it is necessary to go beyond mere description or classification and establish the connections between both, understanding the functional links between these elements. It is, therefore, about understanding them in their dynamic development; that is, related to the nexuses and links they establish in each concrete situation, in their entirety, as a dynamic process. This way, emotional expression is modified and transformed along with human development, progressively moving away from instinctive physiological reactions. For Vygotsky (1999), it is essential to understand the relationship between these transformations and psychological development, which allows us to understand the functional significance of emotions.

The dynamic character of emotions accompanies and affects the development of all higher psychological functions – at the same time, the emotional elements are also dialectically affected. Based on the understanding that all emotion is a function of the personality (Vygotsky, 1999), creative imagination and artistic expression are intimately and inextricably related to emotion. Vygotsky (1974, 2004) indicates the approximation between the processes of imagination and fantasy with emotion. The author points out that the processes of imagination and emotion affect each other. In this way, fantasy allows for the realization of emotional expression – that is, imagination constitutes an internal language for emotions (Vygotsky, 2004). At the same time, however, emotion can also be activated by processes of imagination; thus, even fanciful situations that do not correspond to reality can arouse emotion – as is the case of fear experienced intensely but generated by the incorrect perception of a shadow (Vygotsky, 2004).

In creative activity, as in all areas of human activity, Vygotsky (1987) emphasizes the importance of emotion. The author emphasizes the central role of emotions in man's creative activity, permeating and constituting life itself. For the author, no creation is an exclusively intellectual process since both cognitive and emotional aspects are complementary and inseparable in human

life. The crystallized imagination in the form of a new creation always results from the joint action of the affective and intellectual elements that make up the complex human psyche. Imagination and fantasy are the basis for creativity and allow the transformation and production of new elements. The union between emotional and rational aspects makes creative activity progressively richer and more complex as subjects become aware of these processes and can master them abstractly based on cultural and historical experiences (Vygotsky, 2004). The inseparability between the processes of imagination and emotion once again highlights the amalgam of the cognitive and affective processes of the human being, for both factors – intellectual and emotional – are equally essential to the act of human creation (Vygotsky, 2004).

Referring to artistic expression, Vygotsky (1974, 1999) points to aesthetic emotions aroused through artistic experience, both through the creation and enjoyment of art. These emotions are experienced only indirectly through images of fantasy and imagination. This subjective mobilization of emotions, caused by the aesthetic reaction to art, materializes the inseparability of the cognitive and emotional elements, simultaneously involving thought and emotion (Vygotsky, 1974).

The concept of catharsis allows us to understand that the aesthetic experience promoted by art provides a qualitatively new way of experiencing emotions – which leads, in turn, to the re-signification of each individual's actual experiences. Therefore, art configures an external and social form of re-elaboration of internal and subjective emotions; just as a technical instrument can extend man's reach in certain areas of knowledge and science, art configures an extended social feeling or, in the author's terms, a technique of feelings (Vygotsky, 1974). The different forms of artistic creation and expression lead, in turn, to different ways of feeling and experiencing emotions. In theater, the emotional contradiction concretized in catharsis is aroused by the actor's interpretation. The apparent paradox is that stage acting allows the artistic amplification of emotions that, although interpreted, are not experienced by the actor. The actor's emotional duplicity is revealed by the fact that while the audience is touched emotionally by the performance, the same is not valid for the performer (Vygotsky, 1974). Thus, the theatrical performance exemplifies, once again, how catharsis is experienced in the various forms of artistic expression, providing means of internal transformation and subjective re-signification of the concrete experiences of each individual (Martins, 2020). The central characteristic of emotions is, for Vygotsky (1999), its developmental and historical aspect, which accompanies the qualitative transformations experienced by each person throughout life. Emotions are understood as a process not only of the complexification of already existing structures but of the emergence of new elements that transform the entire psychological system of the individual. In other words, higher emotions are not mere recombinations or refined modifications of elementary emotions (instinctive reflexes) but something new that requires a particular scientific approach (Vygotsky, 1999).

Recognizing the essential participation of emotion in human thought processes, imagination, and creation leads to the valorization of emotional elements in all contexts of human learning and development, especially during educational activities inside the school (Vygotsky, 1997a). Considering that the emotional and volitional dimension is essential to learning, Vygotsky (1997a) reinforces the active and dynamic nature of emotions, acting as a powerful organizer of thought, which must be perceived and educationally harnessed to promote each student's learning. Thus, the psychological function of emotions is outlined as promoters of the organism's internal balance and mobilizers for action; as a dynamic source whose psychological function unfolds from its functional migration, establishing new connections and resignifying experiences in the social singularity of each person.

For Vygotsky (1999), between the genesis and manifestation of emotions, there is the history and culture of each individual in his society. The position adopted by the author facing the issue of emotions breaks definitively with the traditional Cartesian-inspired theories of emotion. By considering the inseparability between cognition and emotion and the situated character of emotional elements, Vygotsky (1999, 2017) repositions the issue of emotions from the point of view of the real subject. This human being cannot be divided into parts but must be understood in his wholeness. In advocating the dynamic nature of emotions, Vygotsky (1999) recognizes the functional migration of these emotions, which transform and establish new relationships with the other components of the psyche, establishing an inseparable relationship between body, cognition, and emotion (Clot, 2018).

The dynamic nature of emotions allows them to mobilize and transform as the organism develops, linking them to higher psychological functions. In this process, affective and cognitive elements interrelate, and new forms – not just modified forms of the primary emotions – emerge, establishing inter-functional relationships that organize the entire consciousness system. The emergence of these relationships implies, in turn, the creation of new links and connections between functional systems, which is precisely the main characteristic of human psychological development. However, the emergence of new forms does not invalidate the essential nature of emotions. Thus, biological and cultural development have a common root: the dynamic function of emotions in organizing, subjectively or concretely, human behavior (Vygotsky, 1997a). In this way, emotion becomes a vital source of development, which materializes the indivisibility of human consciousness. Emotion takes different forms in its interconnection with other psychological processes and plays an active role in forming personality (Dafermos, 2018). By recognizing emotion as a function of personality, Vygotsky (1999) values the active participation of emotions in every stage of human development; the complexity of higher emotions allows them to express subjective psychological states experienced in each individual's various experiences.

In understanding the cultural-historical character of emotions and the affective-cognitive unity in psychological development and human relations, it becomes vital to understand the concepts of emotion, feeling, and affect. Although Vygotsky (1999, 2017) did not clearly distinguish these terms, the Russian equivalents of emotion, feeling, and affect appear at different points in his work. Notably, the term “emotion” is the most frequent, having been chosen as the title of Vygotsky's (1999) work explicitly devoted to this theme. The discussion about the concepts of emotion, feeling, and affect in the context of Cultural-Historical Psychology still requires further study. For this article, we have chosen to use the term “emotion”, widely employed by Vygotsky in his works. Although the terms “emotion,” “feeling,” and “affect” are used interchangeably, we emphasize that the originality of Vygotsky's contribution lies in the understanding that emotion is not an appendix of the psyche to be controlled or ignored. We believe that the central issue lies, beyond the conceptual problematization, in the understanding of emotions in the context of higher psychological functions, and it is on this aspect that we direct our attention – on the inter-functional inseparability between emotions, thoughts, needs, wills, and attitudes of each concrete subject (Vygotsky, 1999). Therefore, for Vygotsky (1999), the only way to understand the role of emotions in psychism is to recognize their dynamic development in the particular and concrete context of human experiences.

Affective-Cognitive Unity: The Question of Experiencing (*Perezhivanie*)

The dialectical oneness between affective and cognitive aspects that manifest themselves throughout human development was also addressed by Vygotsky (1994). When problematizing child

development, the author emphasizes the importance of the social context. For Vygotsky (1994), this context is not just a passive setting but an essential, dynamic, and active factor that influences and drives development.

Vygotsky (1994) points out that throughout development, not only the child is transformed, but also the environment. However, the key is not to analyze these elements in isolation but to look for their dynamic connections (Vygotsky, 1994).

The analysis of the relationship between the environment and the psychological development of each person shows the differences in perception and reaction to the various situations experienced in everyday life. Especially in moments of conflict and crisis, it is possible to observe that even people with a very similar social context can attribute different meanings to these moments, which, in turn, influences how each individual deals with such situations (Faria & Camargo, 2023). The author illustrates the discussion with the case of three brothers who, faced with physical and psychological abuse by their mother, have quite different reactions. Although the situation is the same for the three children, Vygotsky (1994) indicates that the age difference results in different levels of understanding of reality. This awareness of the situation – that is, the relationship that each child establishes with the concrete event – is the element that modifies the way they feel, interpret, and act in the face of the critical event.

The fundamental aspect that characterizes the implication of lived events and the particular impact of those events on each person's development is the *perezhivanie*. Vygotsky (1994) defines *perezhivanie* as the element that integrates the personal awareness of what is experienced and the external phenomenon. Experiencing is not an exclusively emotional experience but involves a complex network of various psychological processes and individual characteristics, which include emotions, cognitive processes, memory, and volition (Veresov, 2019). Although the Western tradition tends to consider it as an exclusively emotional phenomenon, Vygotsky (1994) presents a more comprehensive concept to define *perezhivanie* in child development, stating that it expresses the level of understanding, becoming aware of, and attributing meaning to events that occur in the environment (Vygotsky, 1994). Therefore, *perezhivanie* is a manifestation of subjectivity that is not only restricted to emotional attitude but involves components of representation, subjective interpretation, and the person's awareness of certain events in his social environment (Veresov, 2019), expressing how he becomes aware, assigns meaning, and relates affectively to a particular event (Vygotsky, 1994).

Vygotsky (1997b) defines awareness as the ability not only to think, but also to become aware of the thought process. Therefore, awareness concerns individual subjective experiences and the environment, transcending thought or perception; it is, therefore, a relationship of understanding or knowledge (Toassa, 2020). From a cultural-historical perspective, the central element of the process of awareness is the attribution of meaning and the acquisition of concepts about one's affections (Faria & Camargo, 2023; Fleer et al., 2020; Marques, 2020; Toassa, 2020). Inspired by Spinoza, the Vygotskian concept of consciousness also emphasizes the transformation of affections into power for action in its constant interaction with the other higher psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1997b).

For Vygotsky (1997b), becoming aware of oneself is a social process. In this sense, understanding the psychological subject's lived experiences is a process in which language plays a central role (Faria & Camargo, 2023; Toassa, 2020). The understanding of consciousness is linked not to an internal personal reality isolated from the environment but as an element directly influenced by social interactions. This concept has its roots in Marxist assumptions (Ratner, 2020). Like consciousness, the concept of experiencing also takes on a social nature – emphasizing that the

environment is perceived and assigned meaning differently by each person, based on their individual elements (their subjective constitution in their environment, their psychological characteristics) and social elements (previous experiences, learned cultural modes, etc.). Hence, experience incorporates social and individual elements, constituting a unit of analysis that makes it possible to understand human consciousness (Vygotsky, 1994).

It can be understood that the environment plays an essential role in the dynamic dialectical relationships established by the subject. The social element ceases to be secondary and takes on a fundamental function, ceasing to be just a setting and becoming a promoting source of development (Vygotsky, 1994).

Understanding the role of the environment in human development brings us back to the question of experience, for it is through experience that each person appropriates social elements, giving them new meaning. In this way, the experience represents the unity of internal and external elements, expressing the interaction between affective and cognitive aspects. It reveals how each person affects and is affected by their own reality. According to Vygotsky (1994), the influence of the environment on each person varies according to the relations he established with this environment – that is, his experiences. Experience is, therefore, the prism through which each person reflects reality, understanding it in a particular way in the light of the cultural and historical elements that shape his subjectivity and his concrete existence.

The prism analogy that Vygotsky (1994) used to understand how experience enables the apprehension and unique signification of the social environment contrasts with the traditional psychological conception. The author proposes, instead of the model of a mirror that only reflects and faithfully reproduces the original image, the figure of a prism that refracts reality, allowing a qualitatively new apprehension and a transformation of the image, made concrete through experience (*perezhivanie*). As such, the prism metaphor reveals the dialectical relations between the environment and the individual, indicating how the same social environment affects the unique developmental trajectories of different individuals in particular ways (Veresov, 2020).

According to the cultural-historical assumptions, the concept of experience emphasizes the dialectical inseparability between the social and the individual, between affect and cognition. The experiences constitute the understanding of the world, which in Vygotsky is always the integration between thinking and feeling, between acting and being affected, evidencing his monist conception of reality.

Concluding Remarks

The issue of emotions is a central theme in Vygotsky's work, being addressed both as an object of reflection and as a tangential theme in his discussions. According to the author, emotions express fundamental meanings for personality development, which are shared culturally, contributing to emotional development and self-regulation. There is no single or universal way to express emotions because they acquire new meanings in each cultural context. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the contribution of cultural elements as symbolic productions that leave their mark on the emotional expression of each social subject.

Although Vygotsky did not provide precise definitions of the concepts of emotion and feeling, his concern with the issue of affect and emotion pervades his entire work. In agreement with the author, we understand that emotions acquire their specificity due to the sociocultural and historical development of the human being. Thus, emotions are dynamic processes that continuously

develop and transform themselves, like the other higher psychological functions, whether in a concrete and objective way or as a subjective experience.

Vygotsky assigns a new place to human emotions. Each person's emotional experience allows for a qualitatively new understanding of reality – a re-signification of the social into the individual that occurs in a unique and particular way in each experience. Thus, by removing them from the “exile” and abandonment of an “agonizing tribe” and breaking with the confinement of “one state within another state,” the author establishes the place of emotion in personality as a central element in human psychological development. Since emotion is allied inextricably to other psychological functions, it plays an essential role in the constitution of personality and the construction of the psychic life of each individual, dialectically influencing their relationships and interactions in the social environment. In this way, emotion configures a dynamic element of the human personality, enabling new ways of feeling the world and feeling in the world.

Vygotsky points out that understanding the role of emotions in human development requires considering the possibility of emotional development and its historicity. The author points out that in the development of emotional life, the changing location of the psychic function in the system also determines its meaning. In this sense, he proposes a materialist approach that seeks to explain the origin and function of emotions in their interaction with other psychological processes that make up mental life. Thus, it is essential to consider the work activity to understand how emotions affect and are affected in the concrete relationships that each individual establishes in his or her daily life. Therefore, understanding emotions requires an analysis situated in the context in which they are produced and manifested, inevitably leading us to examine human work and the meanings attributed to this activity.

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