

Complementary Reflections on *Perezhivanie*

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The relevance of this issue devoted to *perezhivanie* is to place side-by-side some authors who are working with the concept, permitting reflections that are beyond the articles written by each of us. In my comment I want to point out that *perezhivanie* was not just one more concept in Vygotsky's theory; it cannot be discussed separately from the more general representation of Vygotsky in terms of the general theory of psychology in both periods of his work in which the concept was in focus: in *The Psychology of Art* at the very beginning of his work and in *The Problem of the Environment* and *The Crisis at Age Seven* in 1933–1934.

Perezhivanie was, in my view, a concept in transition during those two periods in which Vygotsky focused on it. In *The Psychology of Art*, *perezhivanie* was used together with imagination, emotions, fantasy, and artistic creation as part of Vygotsky's effort to advance a theoretical system able to study the complex emotional life of human beings.

However, that spontaneous enthusiasm of Vygotsky for concepts that emerge from his interest in art, and from the psychical processes related to art, was abruptly interrupted when he joined Kornilov's group in 1924 (Zinchenko, 2012). Despite Kornilov having congratulated Vygotsky for *The Psychology of Art* in a letter sent to him while he was hospitalized in Zakharino hospital in 1925 (Zaversneva, 2016), in 1928, Kornilov criticized Vygotsky by moving away from Marxism in his lecture "The Problem of Will in Marxist Psychology" (Vostmanova, Guseva, & Ravish-Scherbo, 1994).

When he switched to more instrumental and behavioral positions between 1927 and 1931, attempting to advance on the cultural character of the higher psychological functions by the mediation of signs, the pressure of the ideological climate within Kornilov's group might also have influenced this objectivist turn by Vygotsky, despite his new ideas in that period undoubtedly also resulting from his own thinking. This turn was not only theoretical, but also methodological, as was evidenced in his writing from 1928 in *The Science of Psychology*, in which he defended a naturalistic-empirical approach to research that was far from the methodological requirements for the study of *perezhivanie*. Between 1927 and 1931 he disregarded the main concepts associated with *perezhivanie* in *The Psychology of Art*.

At the end of his work in 1933–1934, Vygotsky used *perezhivanie* again within a new group of concepts, such as sense, social situation of development, and a new definition of thinking. As Roth and Jornet note in the summary of their joint paper in this issue, "*perezhivanie* in the light of the later Vygotsky's direction requires, as he articulated in his notebooks, rewriting much of the theory he had established before" (p. XX). However, Vygotsky's definition of *perezhivanie* was criticized by Leontiev in 1937 (1989) and was completely overlooked in psychology during the whole of the Soviet period. D. B. Elkonin (1984) referred only in passing to *perezhivanie* in his afterword to Volume 4 of the *Selected Works of L. S. Vygotsky* in Russian, in which *The Crisis at Age Seven* is included:

Here Vygotsky raised the question of the unit, which contains in itself the unity of the environment and child's personality. The author proposes to take as this unit *perezhivanie*. Among contemporary psychologists this problem has been worked on by one of Vygotsky's disciples, L. I. Bozhovich (1968). (p. 403; my translation from Russian)

This lack of attention to *perezhivanie* in Soviet psychology is an expression of the incompatibility of the theoretical and epistemological consequences that are implicitly associated with the definition of *perezhivanie*, which were deeply contradictory with respect to the dominant and official psychology represented by Leontiev and his collaborators from the 1950s. Nonetheless, Bozhovich criticized the intellectual reductionism of Vygotsky in his definition of *perezhivanie* at the end of his work. Bozhovich (1968) noted,

If the concept of *perezhivanie* developed by him (Vygotsky) brought us closer to the interpretation of the real causes of child development, the subsequent search for the psychological basis of *perezhivanie* that concluded in the concept of generalization, led us back to intellectualist positions. (p. 125; my translation from Russian)

The intellectualization of *perezhivanie* by Vygotsky resulted from the central place he attributed to the child's understanding of emotions in its definition and to the relevance of generalization in the genesis of *perezhivanie* in *The Crisis at Age Seven*. Vygotsky's interest in the unity of the cognitive and affective processes at that moment leads me to conclude that he still did not have the theoretical resources for consequently advancing on the new concepts he introduced in that last period of his work, on their interrelations, and on their theoretical accuracy.

Perezhivanie was used in parallel with the concept of sense. Both concepts overlapped at times, which is another piece of evidence that these new concepts were still in the process of development. Without any doubt, both concepts were related to a new representation of a new general system of psychology that Vygotsky had in mind at the end of his life. According to Leontiev (1992) and Zavershneva (2016), that system was a new representation of consciousness as a system of senses. Leontiev (1992) stated,

If Vygotsky had lived only a few more years, he would surely have concentrated his effort on the analysis of this system [of senses]. And this would inevitably have led to that of which he already dreamt in his *The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology* ... a complete overhaul of the whole conceptual apparatus of modern psychology. ... No simple continuing movement, but a complicated system of senses. (p. 43)

This hypothesis raised by Leontiev has received support from the latest studies by Zavershneva (2016) on Vygotsky's archives.

Bozhovich (2009) understood the need to make progress on the definition of the concept of *perezhivanie* from the point where Vygotsky left it:

In other words, what underlies *perezhivanie*, as we see it, is the world of children's needs—their impulses, desires, intentions, complexly intertwined with one another and interrelated with possibilities for meeting these needs. And this entire complex system of connections, the entire world of a child's needs and impulses, must be deciphered so that we can understand the nature of the influence external circumstances exert on children's mental development. (p. 70; my translation from Russian)

Bozhovich, having been the only Soviet psychologist who paid attention to this concept, advanced in the right direction in her attempt to decipher the processes that, intertwining with one another, form the psychological nature of *perezhivanie*. This is a very contemporary challenge for those who decide to advance the study of *perezhivanie*. In this issue Roth and Jornet state, "*perezhivanie* implies the movement of (intellectual, affective, bodily) consciousness towards consciousness" (p. XX). Like Bozhovich, the authors attempt to advance the concept through a dimension not considered by Vygotsky in his definition, finding support from Bakhtin for this proposal. The topic of dialogue was quite ignored by Soviet psychologists until the 1970s. I think that it is necessary to be clear about the gaps in *perezhivanie* as the term was treated by Vygotsky, and to be clear about what is new in our proposals related to *perezhivanie*, in order to advance new definitions of the concept or to define new paths on the basis of Vygotsky's main concept in that final period of his work.

As a result of the theoretical vagueness of the definition of *perezhivanie* in the very late advances by Vygotsky on the concept, the epistemological and methodological demands related to its study were completely absent from the last period of his work. Vygotsky advanced important methodological

reflections in *The Psychology of Art* addressing the concepts discussed by him in that book. Among his methodological statements in *The Psychology of Art*, this one deserves our attention:

For this reason, I think it is necessary to propose another method for the psychology of art, which needs a clear methodological fundament. Against this proposal, I will frequently object to what is often said in relation to the study of the unconscious: unconscious, by the meaning of this word, is something not recognized by us and therefore not clear for us, and for this reason, it could not become the object of scientific research. Starting from this erroneous premise that “we can study only (and in general can know only) what we directly recognize has no support because we study and know many things that we do not know directly and which we know only with the support of analogies, constructions, hypotheses, conclusions, deductions and so on, in general by indirect ways.” (Vygotsky, 1965, pp. 32–33; my translation from Russian)

In my opinion, *perezhivanie* is that unit that integrates emotions, perceptions, and thoughts, and that also might integrate the “the full vitality of life,” as Vygotsky pointed out in *Thinking and Speech*, criticizing the divorce between intellectual operations and emotions. Or it is a concept that, according to Roth and Jornet (this issue), “denoted self-movement, a developing unity/identity that covers both the “given” and the “something-yet-to-be-determined” (p. XX). Or it has other characteristics or functions as Bozhovich (2009) underlined in the following passage:

Children may therefore strive to once again relate to something they experienced previously that became appealing to them. In this case, *perezhivanie* is transformed for being of orientation to a goal in and of itself and leads to the emergence of new needs—the need for *perezhivaniya* themselves. (pp. 74–75)

Considering all these interrelated meanings that could be related to *perezhivanie*, it is difficult to accept that *perezhivanie* can be studied only by observable emotional behaviors or children’s direct verbal expressions.

Bozhovich and her team advanced not only the theoretical definition of *perezhivanie*, but also the methodological paths for its study. Starting from some of the methodological devices proposed by Lewin and his group, particularly by Tamara Dembo, who wrote what might be the first article about Qualitative Methodology in Psychology, Slavina (1966) conducted interesting research in studying children with intense emotional reactions against failure at school. In that work, the emotional reactions studied were defined as children’s *perezhivaniya*, whose explanation integrates different dynamic emotional states and processes of the children, such as level of aspiration, the social position of children in the school, and some other needs related to their current personality organization. The results of the research by Slavina and other researchers in Bozhovich’s team, such as Neimark and Chudnovsky, on the orientation of personality constituted strong support for Bozhovich’s theoretical definition of *perezhivanie* just presented. It would be important to repeat the work of the Bozhovich group, which is the only work that advances research on *perezhivanie* in such a congruent way.

I expect that this issue of *Mind, Culture, and Activity* represents a first step in advancing new reflections and proposals that permit the continuation of discussion on Vygotsky’s foundational ideas, finding new paths for their development, capable of integrating the advances of Bozhovich and her group on this matter. Many of the foundational and later developed ideas and concepts of Vygotsky, such as *perezhivanie*, have for a long time not received the attention that they deserve.

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