

**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 cultural-historical psychology. Edited by Mariane Hedegaard and Marilyn Fleer, the book portrays several empirical situations highlighting the child's perspective in the transition processes that, occurring from a very early age in childhood, promote the restructuring of their social relationships, what 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 Fleer, 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 Fleer, 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.*

Understanding *how* development takes place through the relationship between teaching and learning is a theme that permeates the studies of all those linked to the cultural-historical tradition in Brazil, having psychological or pedagogical phenomena as their objects. The book *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions*, edited by Mariane Hedegaard and Marilyn Fleer, is intended to be part of this collective effort to scientifically understand and systematize the processes of human development, focusing on the discussion about the *transition* processes. The book was published in 2019 in Great Britain by Bloombury Publishing, as part of the series *Transitions in childhood and youth*. In it we find contributions from authors from six countries - Australia, Canada, Chile, Denmark, England and Sweden.

Cultural-historical psychology highlights that the process of development of human beings takes place within material and symbolic conditions, objectified in the different social modes of activity from which persons 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 individuals. 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 progressively 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 child) to the *motives* not yet appropriated of *another* activity.

The concept of *transition*, which structures the work published in 2019, seeks to explain this movement of potential transformation of persons as they insert themselves into a *new activity* or *practice* that proposes new objectives and motives for their action in the world. This concept seeks to apprehend the process of rupture or crisis that results in *neoformations*: substantial changes in the way the child 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 book *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 motives, tensions can be produced and “in some cases crises can result in ruptures” (HEDEGAARD; FLEER, 2019, p. 2), as he or she faces new possibilities of participation and new responsibilities involved in tasks that demand capacities not yet developed, and that challenge the previously established standards of action/interaction. The chapters gathered in the book edited 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 book challenges us, in particular, to think about the idea of *transition* by proposing to broaden the scope of analysis present in classical cultural-historical psychology works, focusing on crises or transitions between the ages. Several chapters of the book focus on the analysis of the transitions between the different practices and institutional contexts in which children participate within the same age 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 age periods (for example: the entry into an institution of early childhood education; the transition from early childhood education to elementary school 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 called up to think about the passages (or *zig-zag*) between the family context, the school/daycare space, off-school educational activities and other institutional practices that can compose the child's routine, thus expanding the classical meaning of this concept. Then, transition can be understood as the movement or the passages between the different *activity settings*, organized from the motives that guide a person's actions within each institutional practice. As an example, we would have: the transition from playtime to homework; the transition from homework to dinner time; the transition from home to school context; the transition from playtime to teacher-led learning.

One of the quite instigating questions that the book 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 previously and/or simultaneously experienced 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 motives that guide them: if at home the focus is generally on the result of this action (getting ready to go out), at school the focus is on the acquisition of autonomy of the child. When the children gain experience in a new social situation, mastering its values, rules, etc., they become capable of using this experience to compare and differentiate what is important and valued in each of the institutional practices in which they participate. 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 transition concept scope is expressed 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 might, on the other hand, blur the difference between alterations or passages within the routine of the child and those which effectively results in *transformation* of his/her activity, i.e., the transition between the *motives* already appropriated by the subject to those not yet appropriated.

Referring the dialectics between quantity and quality, we can understand that the process of transformation in the way the child perceives, feels and acts in the world constitutes 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 child: we can only 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 direction proposed by the book, we consider it important to preserve the qualitative difference between micro-transitions within an age period and the transitions as restructuring of the child activity and, therefore, linked to psychic neoformations. Nevertheless, 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 to learn the conditions from which subjects' appropriate new motives for carrying out their actions. This is because such situations present us with concrete circumstances in which children 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 and by previously appropriate ones.

Potentially, when children begin to act in a new practice or in a new activity within that practice they encounter 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 children are confronted become new *motives* for their actions, guiding and directing their active relationship with the world. Therefore, we would argue that it seems more precise to use the concept of transition to designate *this* more specific process: the development of capacities and abilities that allow the child to be in this *other* activity in an autonomous and conscious way.

The motive, for cultural-historical psychology, is intrinsically related to social needs, which includes needs that already exist and those that may come to exist. For a new motive to be instituted for the person, it is necessary for her to *appropriate a motive-object* (LEONTIEV, 1983) that becomes significant and personally important, therefore capable of *guiding* and *directing* all her actions 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 child's action in a certain activity and what are the *intentions* and *expectations* that mediate his or her engagement in these practices?

The researches presented in this book allow 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 readers the exercise of moving their thought in the relationship between the uniqueness, particularity and universality of the phenomenon. In that sense, we highlight the richness of empirical data and the diversity of contexts portrayed in the book, 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*”, published in 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. A point that we evaluate as an important contribution of the authors to the Brazilian audience, which appears in this new publication, is the indication that the research 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 personal sense of the experiences lived, elucidating the connection that is woven between the motives that guide the child's actions 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 initiated.

Another contribution of *Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions* deserves to be emphasized considering the challenges still to be faced by us, Brazilian researchers, in the process of appropriation and development of conceptual and methodological tools within cultural-historical tradition: 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 leading activities that guide 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 book, 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 elementary school. The theme is approached by several chapters, which highlight the organizing motives in each of these institutional practices, seeking to analyze or stress which motives are potentially in transition for the child at the end of pre-school and early elementary school. Some questions arise: are these motives *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 elementary school is a transition between the *guiding motives* of play and those of study (DAVIDOV, 1988), which necessarily involves ruptures, effort and eventual frustrations for the child. The reader of "*Children's transitions...*" is presented with an interesting reflection: the search to provide a smooth and placid passage from early childhood education to elementary school brings, at times, the risk of blurring the differences that exist between the institutional practices of these educational stages, and which must be recognized and preserved. According to the book, 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 audience: the need to recognize the organizing motives for children's learning in each institution in which they participate and that should guide the teaching practice in these institutions.

Children always start a new practice and/or activity with some expectation of what is demanded from them, but it seems especially important to consider – as stated by 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 children become aware of the motives and demands that the social trajectory places (or can place) on their performance in the

world, which implies that we, as teachers and psychologists who lead the educational processes, need to *know* the *motives* present (in potential) in the new activities in which the child will act, as well as become aware of the *motives* from which he or she begins engagement in the new activity.

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

Nonetheless, as the author follows, “to what extent the child's activity will be adequate and, consequently, to what degree the significance of an object or phenomenon will appear to him, that is, another problem” (LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 167, emphasis added by the author). Such a problem 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.

The book, dedicated to children's transitions in daily life and in institutions, reinforces 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 these children, together with the adults who work with them, can build realistic expectations about the new societal space they 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 child's activity through the expectations (intentionalities, motives) that are already references to the child's performance in the world. What we want to emphasize here is the very concept of “social development situation” (VYGOTSKI, 1996), which shows that *children create conditions for their own learning* from the conditions (motives, objectives) that they find in the practice in question.

This process of appropriation of different activity-motives from which persons create *expectations* about 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 the individual's development, as formulated by Vigotski in his theory on human

development (VYGOTSKI, 1995; 1996; 1997), implies the recognition that this process is necessarily mediated 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 others”, or “following teacher's orders”. For cultural-historical psychology researchers, knowing the world in which we live and act also means projecting *new possibilities of social relations* for this world, which implies assuming, together with Leontiev (1983, p. 180), that our acting consciously with the *transition* processes in our society must be oriented towards the 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 men”, i.e., that individuals base their lives on the lives of others, on their well-being. “The end of this path, in Gorky's words, is man converted into man of humanity”. It is within this political and theoretical scope in relation to the understanding of human development that we place the contributions of “*Children's transitions in everyday life and institutions*” to Brazilian readers.

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