Literacy events in the constitution of toddlers’ subjectivities

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How does the subjectivity process happen regarding literacy?

We aim to understand Valeria’s subjectivity process, a twenty-two months old child, regarding literacy in an Early Childhood Education Center in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
Data Sources

- Participant observation two-three times a week during 2017 (42% out of 200 school days) & 2018 (35% out of 200 school days)
- Videos (approximately 500hs)
- Fieldnotes
- Interviews with teachers & families
- Artefacts

Participants: 12 infants & their teachers (7 T in 2017 & 5 T in 2018)
Theoretical Approach

1. Cultural-Historical Psychology

2. • Ethnography in Education
We argue that emotions, cognition and language were tied together in the first literacy event, that was the culmination of a series of literacy events that Valeria participated in since she was a ten-month-old infant.

The second literacy event demonstrates how a toddler can appropriate written language.

Those events demonstrates Valéria as a child interested in literacy making use of this semiotic mediation that revealed the unity between emotion and cognition (Vygotsky, 1932/2018).
Literacy events in the constitution of toddlers’ subjectivities

LITERACY EVENTS 2017 → LITERACY EVENTS 2018 → THE EVENTS HAVE A HISTORY
The process of subjectivity constitution

Perezhivanie in cultural practices makes possible the subjectivity process of infants since it is through them that they attribute senses and meanings to cultural practices, as well as transform them (Neves, Katz, Goulart, Gomes, 2018).
Every day teachers made available on the nursery carpet picture books for the infants.

Valeria and other infants always manipulated these books, initially as any toy: settling and stepping on them, pushing them like a cart, biting, but also flipping through the pages of the books, being involved by the pictures for several minutes.

Valeria’s engagement with the books drew our attention to the differentiation between her and the other infants: Valéria was the first infant to hold a book in an upright position.
Literacy Events in an infants’ room at EMEI Tupi - 2017

04/24/2017 – Story telling

05/22/2017 – Valéria takes a book to “read”.

08/03/2017 – Valéria observes her teacher writing

10/30/2017 – Story telling

11/09/2017 – Story telling in the library
2018 most important literacy events

- 08/02/2018 – Writing on research notebook

- Requesting the notebook and pen (always through gestures).

- Her interest in these artifacts makes her learn how to pronounce their names, such as a notebook and pen, and to understand the social use of these artifacts

- 11/07/2018 – Writing names
Literacy Events in a toddlers’ room at EMEI Tupi – 2018

04/02/2018 – Reading books

04/19/2018 – Story telling

04/19/2018 – Valéria scribbles with a piece of chalk

05/21/2018 – Valéria draws a butterfly

06/15/2018 – Valéria draws on research notebook
## EVENT MAP (02/08/2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Subevents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7h30 a.m</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>Children are welcomed by the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8h a.m</td>
<td>Activities (painting, drawing, toys, music)</td>
<td>Toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diaper change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10h a.m</td>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>Shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing for lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11h a.m</td>
<td>Cafeteria</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12h p.m</td>
<td>Sleep time</td>
<td>Mattresses are placed on the floor of the room so children can lie down and rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13h p.m</td>
<td>Room organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13h10 p.m</td>
<td>Cafeteria</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13h40 p.m</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diaper change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14h30 p.m</td>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>“Writing in researcher’s notebook”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15h30 p.m</td>
<td>Cafeteria</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16h p.m</td>
<td>Activities (painting, drawing, toys, music)</td>
<td>Brushing teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17h p.m</td>
<td>Going home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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First Literacy Event in the beginning of school year (2018)

Fig. 1 Event Writing in the research notebook

- Babies walking by playground
- Valeria saw Ivana in playground
- Valeria show her feelings crying, writing and talking with the researcher
All kids, including Valéria, hug their former teacher, Ivana.

Valéria cries a lot when Ivana leaves.

Researcher talks to Valéria, hugs her & allows her to write in her notebook. Valéria talks while she scribbles circles: “Come back, titia. ["auntie" – teacher]” Slowly, Valéria stops crying.
Researcher draws Valéria’s right hand. Valéria holds the pen using her left hand (“palmar grasp”) & scribbles on notebook.
Maria gets closer & watches Valéria & Mafá.

Valéria keeps on writing and says: "Titia." ("auntie" – refers to her teacher)
Valéria keeps on writing and slowly stops crying. She says: “Come back, ‘titia’, come back”.
Emotions, Cognition and Writing

- It is surprising that Valéria wrote on the researcher’s notebook for approximately 10 minutes.
- Mafá, as a participant observer, not only allowed Valéria to write but also held Valéria in her lap and hugged her.
Emotions and cognition constitute a unit that is socially situated (Bruner, 1990).

Valéria’s drama: entering a new class, in the same school, but in a different classroom, with the same children but with different teachers. Time and Space are “out of order.”

Her emotions/cognition were manifested through her crying and writing.

It seems like writing and being hugged allowed her to “manage” her emotions.
# Event Map (07/11/2018)

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FIG 2. Event Writing names

Playground

Babies walking by playground

Valeria approaches the researcher who was with her field notebook, and asks: *Let me/ write?*

Valeria tells the researcher that her mom taught her how to write names.
Valeria approaches the researcher who was holding her notebook, and asks: 'Let me/ write? The researcher asks, "What are you going to write? ", She replies, "the name / mine".

The researcher asks: what / did you write? and she repeats: the name / mine / Valeria.

Henrique approaches Valeria to observe what she was doing. The researcher asks: Do you know how to write / someone else’s name? And she responds: Lucy looking at Henrique.
Valeria announces that she is writing the name of Henrique and says Lu:::cia / Henri:::que/ looking at her writing.

Valeria looks at teacher, who notices the child’s action. The teacher looks at the researcher who interprets the look as a question about what Valeria was doing with the field notebook. Then the researcher says: She is writing her name. Soon teacher tells Valeria: How beautiful! / Her name / Valeria / praising her writing.
EVENT 2: WRITING NAMES (07/11/18)

2 min 14 seg
Another child approaches. Valeria moves to the right, accompanied by Henrique who watches carefully what she was doing.

3 min 15 seg
Valeria finishes writing names. The researcher’s question: Who taught you to write? and she promptly replies: It was Mom.
EVENT WRITING NAMES (07/11/2018)
Based on the Valeria’s writing (event 2) we claim, with Vygotsky, that there was a conversion of lived experience (perezhivanie) with other infants into symbolism (names written in the notebook) according to social conventions of writing in Portuguese. These conventions can be evidenced by the following activities:

( I ) writing between lines;
(II) the space between the different names of her colleagues;
(III) proximity to the dash of cursive writing;
(IV) conventional direction of writing from top to bottom and from left to right;
(V) the tweezer movement in the use of the pen.

This writing reveals that Valeria not only acquired individual writing skills but transformed them into a human activity, that is, filled with affection for children, for her mother and for herself.
Valeria’s subjectivity constitution and literacy

We can say that the events "writing names" and "writing in the researcher’s notebook" are not isolated episodes. They have a history that begins in the family, they are echoed in school and help us understand a dimension of Valeria’s subjectivity/individuation process (SBCDG, 1992; Vygotsky, 2018). This toddler showed great interest and intimacy with the world of writing and reading from an early age.

Thus, the relation between the literacy events and the constitution of Valeria's subjectivity moves through the speech production process between her and other infants (gestures, cries, speeches, writings), teachers, family, and the researchers.

Written culture is one element that constitutes peer culture.

Cultural practices produced in early childhood centers need to pay attention about this discourses.
Conclusion

From this perspective we think that the process of constitution of subjectivities of infants and toddlers, and in particular Valeria’s process, need to be reflected by the teachers, attributing meanings to the unity between emotion and situated social cognition, in EMEI and family contexts.

Thank you!

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