

## An everyday and theoretical reading of *perezhivanie* for informing research in early childhood education

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### Abstract

The concept of *perezhivanie* has received increasing attention in recent years. However, a clear understanding of this term has not yet been established. Mostly what is highlighted is the need for more informed theoretical discussion. In this paper, discussions centre on what *perezhivanie* means for research in early childhood education. *Perezhivanie* as a phenomenon is discussed in relation to *perezhivanie* as the unity of emotions and cognition, *perezhivanie* as a prism (Veresov, 2014), *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis (Bozhovich, 2009), and *perezhivanie* as a double subjectivity in play/art (Davis et al., 2015). The latter theoretical reading re-introduces one of Vygotsky's (1925/1971) earliest conceptions of art and play from *The Psychology of Art*. Through an analysis of how others have discussed the concept from the perspective of an everyday reading and a theoretical analysis, this paper takes up the challenge of conceptualising *perezhivanie* in relation to research. Four design principles underpinning a research method to investigate children in early childhood settings are introduced: the child's perspective, an indivisible unit of relations, differing *perezhivanie*, and levels of consciousness. Together, these principles for research provide a more nuanced reading of this concept, and contribute to the current discussions found in the literature where some clarification is needed.

### Keywords

*perezhivanie*; early childhood; research; emotions; play; development

## Introduction

As has been noted by Vasilyuk (1984), the concept of *perezhivanie* is difficult to translate into English, and as a result this term is increasingly being used without translation in journals and books written in English (e.g., Baumer, Ferholt, & Lecusay, 2005; Ferholt, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2011). However, a close analysis of this term across the literature would suggest that this word has been used in a number of different ways (see Blunden, 2010, 2014; Robbins, 2007; Veresov, 2014, 2015), potentially leading to confusion rather than clarification of what the concept of *perezhivanie* means, and how it may be used in research. According to Vasilyuk (1984) an everyday expression of this term in Russian suggests that it is a complex word to translate. In “colloquial speech the verb *perezhivat*’ can mean ‘to be alarmed, worried, upset’; ‘to suffer mental torment’; ‘to undergo some trial and survive it, having overcome the difficulties and troubles involved’, ‘to experience a state or feeling and then outlive or vanquish it’, and many other things” (p. 9). However, a “scientific usage takes only one – here *perezhivaniye* means the direct sensation or experience by the subject of mental states and processes” (p. 9). It is the latter reading that appears to be in dispute. A study of the term *perezhivanie* is needed broadly for psychology and education, but also for early childhood development where a more nuanced understanding of the relations between the child and her/his environment during play is urgently needed.

The aim of this paper is to bring together insights into how the term *perezhivanie* is being conceptualized and used by scholars and, through this, gain a better understanding of *perezhivanie* for early childhood education research. By discussing an everyday reading and a conceptual exposition of *perezhivanie*, this paper explores the complexity and the power of this term, in what González Rey (2014) has identified as important unfinished work of Vygotsky in the last period of his life. By drawing out the differing dimensions in relation to what this means for research in early childhood settings, this paper moves from methodology to method and through this seeks to make this concept more accessible for the field.

To achieve the aim of the paper I begin with a brief discussion of both the everyday use of the term *perezhivanie* and a scientific explanation. This is followed by an example of everyday interaction between children and teachers, where the concept of *perezhivanie* is used for analysis so as to illustrate the power of this concept for examining the relations between play, learning, and development. In the final part of the paper is presented four design principles for research, where it is argued that new insights into researching preschool play are possible when the concept of *perezhivanie* is examined both as an everyday phenomenon and a scientific explanation. The key argument is that *perezhivanie* must be viewed as a relational whole in research.

## The concept of *perezhivanie*

Vasilyuk (1984) has defined *perezhivanie* as “the direct sensation of experience by the subject of mental states and processes” (p. 9). Ferholt (2010) has described the concept of *perezhivanie* as an illusive phenomenon that can be captured as an “intensely-emotional-lived-through-experience” (p. 164). These two definitions discuss the concept of *perezhivanie as an experience*. Veresov (2014) has described this way of conceptualising *perezhivanie* as focusing on the phenomenon of *perezhivanie* rather than on *perezhivanie* as a concept with content. Vygotsky (1994) himself has outlined the importance of experience when he stated that: “*in an emotional experience [perezhivanie] we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the emotional experience [perezhivanie]*” (emphasis in original; Vygotsky, 1994, p. 342). In the context of existing research, emotional experience as an everyday reading of *perezhivanie*, reflects both the

process of experiencing something, and specifically what that something is that is being experienced. Yet Vygotsky (1994) stated that: “the emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] arising from any situation or from an aspect of his [sic] environment, determines what kind of influence this situation will have on the child” (pp. 239-240). Accordingly, influence would appear to be a key term in *perezhivanie*. An everyday reading of *perezhivanie* as an emotional experience brings to our attention what is happening in the environment, and how the situational characteristics are being experienced by the child (see Smagorinsky, 2011). However, the relations between these appear to be missing in this everyday reading. The experience, and what specifically is being experienced, are both represented as an important reading of the concept of *perezhivanie* as a phenomenon. This dimension of the term *perezhivanie* that is discussed by Vygotsky, and foregrounded by scholars such as Vasilyuk (1984) and Ferholt (2010), is presented in Table 1, where a summary of how it has been used in the literature is given.

Ferholt (2015) gives an everyday example of *perezhivanie* in use by preschool teachers. Her work shows clearly how everyday understandings are important, and also how scientific readings of the concept opens up more possibilities:

Most preschool teachers do not need to be told that the ‘fullness of life’ is what matters most to the children in their classrooms, to themselves, and even to the majority of the guardians of the children they teach. Over the past decade, I have introduced the concept of *perezhivanie* to many preschool teachers and many have told me that they were already thinking about this phenomenon. However, these same teachers have asked me to explore this concept further in our research and teaching projects together. They value *perezhivanie* in their practice and they appreciate that a theory of *perezhivanie* may be able to help them to strengthen this aspect of their practice. Perhaps such a theory could also help to refocus the field of preschool didactics away from individualism (p. 57).

The everyday reading of *perezhivanie* can be likened to Vygotsky’s (1987) conception of everyday concepts in his relational model of everyday concepts and academic or scientific concepts as discussed in Volume 1 of the *Collected Works*. At an experiential level everyday concepts are enacted in everyday practice, they are often represented as an experience, and as actions that are not guided by concepts, but rather they are represented as an everyday practice only. *Perezhivanie*, when conceptualised in research as a phenomenon, captures this important lived-through-experience. It can be argued that *perezhivanie*, when used in research to examine the phenomenon only, is being used in an everyday sense of this term. But this does not mean it is not important. Vygotsky’s conception of everyday day concepts, make up an important dimension of concept formation. It is important, but on its own it is not enough.

In line with Vygotsky’s use of the term everyday concepts, it becomes necessary to also pair this term with the scientific or academic concept in order to give a more holistic view of development. In the context of what the term *perezhivanie* means for research, a theoretical reading of this term is also needed. Research that stays at the everyday level could potentially miss key outcomes, and theoretical possibilities for the study being undertaken.

**Table 1**

An everyday and scientific analysis of how the concept of *perezhivanie* is used in the literature

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Features</i>	<i>Source</i>
Perezhivanie as an everyday concept	<i>Word analysis of perezhivanie</i> <i>Perezhivanie as a lived experience or phenomenon</i>	Blunden, 2014; Vasilyuk, 1984 Ferholt 2010; 2015; Ferholt & Lecusay 2010; Quiñones & Flear, 2011; Vasilyuk 1984
Perezhivanie as a theoretical concept	<i>Perezhivanie as a unit of consciousness</i>	Conscious awareness of emotions: Damasio, 2003; Davis, 2015; Holodynski, 2013 Unity of emotions and cognition: Chen, 2015; Daniels, 2008; Flear, 2010, 2013; Roth, 2008; Vadeboncoeur and Collie, 2013
	<i>Perezhivanie as a prism</i>	Problem of the environment - unit of personal and environment: Vygotsky, 1994
	<i>Perezhivanie as a unit of analysis</i>	Adams and March, 2014; Bozhovich, 2009; Bredikyte, 2010; Brennan, 2014; Ferholt, 2010; Hakkarainen, 2010; Quiñones & Flear, 2011
	<i>Perezhivanie as a double subjectivity in play/art</i>	Davis, 2015; Davis et al., 2015; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Michell, 2015; Smagorinsky, 2011; Vygotsky, 1966, 1925/1971; Yaroshevsky, 1989

There are other readings of the term *perezhivanie* that can be found in the literature and some of these are also summarised in Table 1. These other perspectives are now examined. In line with Veresov's (2014) elegant conception of *perezhivanie* as phenomenon, prism, and dynamic unit of consciousness, it can be argued that a scientific reading of the concept of *perezhivanie* encompasses those other dimensions of this concept that are not always drawn upon to inform research. It is suggested by Veresov (2014) that what has dominated the research literature, has been the use of the term *perezhivanie* to capture the intensely-emotional-lived-through-experience of the research participants under study. What has been missing has been research that uses *perezhivanie* as a concept to guide analysis and the study design. That is, a scientific reading of the term *perezhivanie*. Yet a scientific reading of this term remains contested, and has been noted by González Rey (2014), Vygotsky's own writing is full of contradiction. González Rey (2016) points to *perezhivanie* as:

- the unit that integrates all the personal characteristics and all the environment characteristics,
- a unity of intellectual processes and emotions, and
- a unit of consciousness.

The key ideas that appear to emerge in the literature and which are the focus of the critique of this paper, draw upon these contradictions, and seek to present *perezhivanie* as a concept where the unity of emotions and cognition are discussed; *perezhivanie* as a prism is drawn out; and *perezhivanie* as a double subjectivity in play and the Arts is introduced. These interpretations are also summarised in Table 1 and are discussed in turn.

### *Perezhivanie as a unity of emotions and cognition*

*Perezhivanie* as a unity of emotions and cognition has been presented in Vygotsky's writings, and has been used by a range of scholars. What is evident is that *perezhivanie* as a theoretical concept has been discussed in relation to the unity of emotions and cognition in the Arts (Smagorinsky, 2011), in science education (Fleer, 2013; Roth, 2008), in play and everyday life (Quiñones & Fleer, 2011), in relation to creativity and imagination (Ferholt & Lecusay 2010), in the development of emotions (Chen, 2015), and generally as an important concept in the work of Vygotsky (see Roth, 2008). This reading of *perezhivanie* has also been picked up in recent work by Daniels (2012), when discussing motives and the social situation of development, and in the work of Fleer and Hammer (2013a), when examining the relations between emotions and cognition in terms of emotion regulation. Though the concept of *perezhivanie* was not explicitly named by Daniels, or by Fleer and Hammer, previous and subsequent writing does capture this unity of emotions and cognition through the concept of *perezhivanie* (see Daniels, 2008; Fleer & Hammer, 2013b).

According to Vygotsky (1994), "any event or situation in a child's environment will have a different effect on him [sic] depending on how far the child understands its sense and meaning" (p. 343). What is key here is how the theoretical reading of *perezhivanie* highlights how emotionally charged situations are not just experienced, but that a level of consciousness of the situation is foregrounded. Vygotsky (1994) argued that "whatever the situation, its influence depends not only on the nature of the situation itself, but also on the extent of the child's understanding and awareness of the situation" (p. 343). In discussing the problem of the environment, Vygotsky (1994) carefully examined the relations between emotions and cognition through illustrating how the same children in the same situation can be experiencing the environment differently, because of how they consciously relate to that same environment. Vygotsky (1994) noted that, "if children possess various levels of awareness, it means that the same event will have a completely different meaning for them" (p. 343). In introducing the concept of the child's social situation of development, Vygotsky (1994) was able to show the relation between the child and environment where consciousness or awareness of the situation mattered. It is this latter feature that has been used in the theoretical analysis of Daniels (2012) and Fleer and Hammer (2013a), but also can be found in the work of Holodynski (2013) on emotion regulation (e.g., his concept of miniaturization). Although the literature that highlights the use of *perezhivanie* in relation to the unity of emotions and cognition, or affect and intellect, has focused on the unity of these, what is key for research using the concept of *perezhivanie* is the dynamic unit of consciousness.

Through paying attention to and conceptualising study designs to include a dynamic unit of consciousness, researchers can better understand the levels of awareness of children in group settings that characterise early childhood education. This point is taken up further in the latter part of this paper.

### *Perezhivanie as a prism*

Another dimension of a scientific reading of the concept of *perezhivanie* relates to Vygotsky's use of the term prism when discussing this construct. For instance, Vygotsky (1994) wrote that:

finding the particular prism through which the influence of the environment on the child is refracted, i.e., *it ought to be able to find the relationship which exists between the child and its environment, the child's emotional experience [perezhivanie], in other words how a child becomes aware of, interprets, [and] emotionally relates to a certain event. This is such a prism which*

determines the role and influence of the environment on the development of, say, the child's character, his psychological development, etc. (emphasis in original, p. 340).

Using the metaphor of the prism helps make concrete the relation between the environment and the child's particular social situation of development. The unique prism appears as an important dimension in Vygotsky's work. The idea of a prism gives a way of making visible in research an important and unique relation that exists between each child and the environment. Vygotsky (1994) notes:

That is why from the methodological point of view it seems convenient to carry out an analysis when we study the role the environment plays in the development of a child, an analysis from the point of view of the child's emotional experiences [*perezhivanie*] because ...all the child's personal characteristics which took part in determining his attitude to the given situation have been taken into account in his emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] (p. 342).

The prism helps capture the idea of *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis. This is discussed further in the next section. Unit of analysis and dynamic unit of consciousness should be considered together.

#### *Perezhivanie as a unit of analysis*

What is the smallest relational unit that makes up the whole of the child's personal characteristics and the environmental situation that s/he becomes increasingly aware of? How in early childhood research can we determine the unique prism through which the influence of the environment on the child is refracted? Vygotsky (1994) draws attention to the importance of *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis when he wrote, 'in science the analysis into elements ought to be replaced by analysis which reduces a complex unity, a complex whole, into its unit...unlike elements, these units represent such products of analysis which do not lose any of their properties which are characteristics of the whole, but which manage to retain, in the most elementary form, the properties inherent in the whole' (pp. 341-342). The use of *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis can be found in the work of Adams and March (2014) where they specifically re-examine science learning environments in order to determine both the personal and environmental characteristics that support science learning. They examine how a child becomes aware of, interprets, and emotionally relates to the science events. Their work examines the unique prism through which the influence of the science environment on the child is refracted. Chen (2015) has also used *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis in the context of the development of emotions, where she elaborates a *collective unity* of affect, intellect, and act, which reflect both child-family and environment. Bozhovich (2009) suggests that in Vygotsky's conception of *perezhivanie* the affective relationship that a child has to her or his environment is the basis for the unit of analysis. She suggests that in order to study what affect the environment has on the child, more needs to be understood about the nature of the child's experience. However, she argues that Vygotsky did not elaborate what was meant by experience. Understanding what Vygotsky meant by experience would help better define what is meant by the unit of analysis.

Bredikyte (2010), Ferholt (2010), Hakkarainen (2010), and Quiñones and Fleer (2011) each make reference to *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis. *Perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis or as a theoretical concept for better understanding the prism through which the influence of the environment is refracted, has not been extensively used in research (Brennan, 2014).

### Perezhivanie as a double subjectivity in play/art

Mok (2015), in discussing the concept of *perezhivanie* for research in second language acquisition has, like Grainger Clemson (2015) and Michell (2015), argued that Vygotsky's theoretical work on this concept was inspired by Stanislavsky. Mok (2015) has argued that Stanislavsky's definition of *perezhivanie* as variously translated into English draws attention to the difficulty and therefore confusion surrounding the meaning of term for non-Russian speaking academics. As a director in Russian theatre, Stanislavsky put forward the idea of the living theatre which Michell (2015) has shown through his analysis of Vygotsky's reviews of dramatic productions, significantly influenced his early thinking. Michell quotes Vygotsky's definition of Stanislavsky's ideal living theatre as:

an ability not just to pose before the audience, but live on the stage, a genius to apply his own inner world to perform as opposed of wearing a mask of the stage (Vygotsky, as cited in Michell, 2015, p. 25).

Key here is Vygotsky's re-conceptualisation of Stanislavsky's binary of "playing the role" and "living on stage" that has relevance for research into play-based settings where children both act out being "something" whilst also coming to understand the rules and roles associated with this performance but in the real world (Elkonin, 2005; Vygotsky, 1966). Michell, in quoting Vygotsky's critique of a performance also draws attention to meta-framing in drama that is akin to play frames and meta-communicative language in the longstanding early childhood literature on play (Bretherton, 1984):

The actor is not playing a character portrayed by the author, not a human being, but a stage image, created for this play, without merging with it, staying always beyond and above it (Vygotsky, as cited in Michell, 2015, p. 25).

This early work of Vygotsky, particularly that from *The Psychology of Art* (1925/1971), set the stage for the development of the concept of *perezhivanie* in Vygotsky's later writing (González Rey, 2011). In the contemporary context of the Arts, scholars have increasingly drawn upon this concept to progress their research (e.g., Davis et al., 2015). For instance, in the research of Ferholt (2010, 2015), an expansive presentation of children and researchers role-playing is presented using the concepts of playworlds (Lindqvist, 1995) and *perezhivanie*. This research draws attention to *perezhivanie* as a lived phenomenon in the Arts and a great deal of discussion and examples are devoted to showing the emotional dimensions of playing out the role of a witch in the role play of the *Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. By way of contrast contrast, playworlds as elaborated by Hakkarainen (2010), is viewed as transitory narratives that create new conditions akin to "Vygotsky's genetic experiment" (p. 79) for the conscious development of emotions. These studies in the area of the Arts and play draw upon the concept of *perezhivanie* in different ways, but they each draw attention to the emotional dimensions of the performance. Here the concepts of a doubleness of feelings (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1966) is considered, as a double subjectivity that emerges through role-playing/dramatising when children/adults become more consciously aware of self and the environment. Vygotsky (1966) wrote about how children can engage in two different feeling states during play, feeling happy they are playing and feeling sad or frightened as a result of the subject of their play. He also wrote about this in *The Psychology of Art*. What becomes evident through the early and latter writing of Vygotsky on play/drama and *perezhivanie*, and the contemporary writings of scholars in the Arts, is that both the lived phenomenon or experience and the conscious awareness appear to matter in research and these

points have implications for researching in play based settings. These points are taken up further in the next section.

### **The relations between an everyday and theoretical reading of *perezhivanie***

In order to study the relations between an everyday reading of *perezhivanie* as a phenomenon and the theoretical reading of *perezhivanie* as a concept, an example of playful learning in science is introduced. Vygotsky's (1925/1971) earliest writing in *The Psychology of Art* are included in the discussion, even though he had not developed this concept at that time. However, some early thinking that was developed further in his later writings (González Rey, 2011) are helpful for drawing out the complexity of *perezhivanie* for early childhood research.

#### *Microscopic playworlds: Being inside a drop of water*

In the transcript that follows, taken from Fleer (2014), we see two children and their teacher inside a “drop of water” imagining pond life and the organisms from their compost bin that they had previously observed using magnifying glasses or under a microscope. On entering the bubble the children squeal with excitement:

Teacher: Thanks Chantelle. How do you like it in here? It's pretty amazing isn't it?

Chantelle: It's like a big block of air (jumps and laughs).

Teacher: A big block of air.

Chantelle: It's so w-a-r-m (drawn out and expressed with a quality of “warmth”).

Teacher: So you think it's a warm spot to be in.

Chantelle: If you've got more time, how about we keep going round and round.

Teacher: Charlotte we probably will have a chance to do it another day. But imagine, do you know how that story was imaginary, and you imagine sometimes, being pirates on a pirate ship...imagine you're some of those tiny little creatures we've seen in the compost bin, but you're inside a drop of water, how would you move inside a drop of water?

Hugh: We'd just break it.

Teacher: You'd just break the drop, but imagine you're so tiny, and this is a big drop of water, and we're a drop inside a pond of water. We are a drop inside a bucket of water, and we are inside the drop.

Hugh and Charlotte: [Children stand and frantically move about, pretending to be drops of water vibrating around]

Teacher (narrating their actions):

Slowly slowly, it looks like you're getting all shaken up Hugh. Oh a rolling down sort, wow that's rolling right down. Oh, and down again.

In this playworld example, the cultural device of climbing into a simulated “drop of water” (plastic inflated bubble) was supported by the teacher being inside the imaginary situation with the children, as illustrated through her saying “imagine you're some of those tiny little creatures we've seen in the compost bin, but you're inside a drop of water, how would you move inside a drop of water?”. Her narrative to support the children's actions, as they role-played being the organisms they had observed under a microscope, helped the children imagine themselves being “those tiny little creatures we've seen in the compost bin”. As Vygotsky (1925/1971) wrote “if a child plays at soldiers, cops and robbers, and so on, this means, according to some, that inside himself he [sic]



really becomes a soldier or a robber” (p. 246). Participating in the imaginary situation together with others, including the teacher gives a collective and social sense to the activity, rather than something that is only individually felt, as also noted by Vygotsky (1925/1971) in the context of the Arts: “the melting of feelings outside us is performed by the strength of social feeling, which is objectivized materialized, and projected outside of us, then fixed in external objects of art which have become the tools of society” (p. 249). The children’s performance as an action (being microscopic organisms), rather than as an objective material form, reflects an emotional quality that is socially shared. Vygotsky (1999) stated that in drama, the feeling of “we” rather than “I” is created as a form of social consciousness. The actor creates on the stage infinite sensations, feelings, or emotions that become the emotions of the whole theatrical audience. Imagination supports the establishment of this shared emotional quality, as we noted when the teacher said “and you imagine sometimes, being pirates on a pirate ship...imagine you’re some of those tiny little creatures”. Vygotsky (1925/1971) argued that “imagination and fantasy must be regarded as functions servicing our emotional sphere, and when they discover some exterior and superficial similarity with mental processes, the reasoning is always based on emotion” (p. 47).

Important in this discussion is how the theoretical use of the concept of *perezhivanie* highlights how emotionally charged situations are not just experienced, but that a level of consciousness of the situation is foregrounded. For instance, “by dragging a child into a topsy-turvy world, we help his intellect work, because the child becomes interested in creating such a topsy-turvy world for himself [sic] in order to become more effectively the master of the laws governing the real world” (Vygotsky, 1925/1971, p. 258). Role-playing being the organisms from the compost bin or from a water sample taken from some pond water, gives the children a strong sense of the organisms they have been observing. Barbara McClintock, a Nobel-Laureate has said in her scientific research that she projects herself down into the microscope and interacts with the organisms she is studying, so that she can gain a real feel for the organism (see biography by Fox Keller, 1983). A form of emotional imagination (Vygotsky, 1925/1971) is supported through this approach to scientific work. We see this approach also in the example of role-playing being inside a drop of water. The children are not just “experiencing” but are consciously imagining and re-creating through role-play the actions of the organisms that they have studied under a microscope. As noted by Vygotsky (1925/1971), “since the intellect is nothing but inhibited will, we might possibly think of imagination as inhibited feeling” (p. 48). We can better understand the children’s scientific role-play in the microscopic playworld when we use the concept of *perezhivanie*, conceptualised as the unity of emotions and cognition. What is key here is how both a lived experience of being inside the bubble (everyday reading), and a conscious engagement of the playworld scenario through a form of emotional imagination (theoretical reading) are both needed for understanding how these children were acting inside the bubble. The teacher’s narrative of the children’s actions inside the bubble supported a level of consciousness of emotions and thinking about the organisms being role-played and studied. In play, a double subjectivity by the child is evident where the child is both in the play and above the play. This is an activity that is unique to many young children, but it can also be found in the theatre as was previously discussed. *Perezhivanie* as a double subjectivity in play/art adds to our understanding of this concept and foregrounds the dynamic and subjective context in which early childhood researchers work. As such, *perezhivanie* can never be an external structure, event or activity, but rather as González Rey (2011) suggests, will always be a personal affective relation that is in constant flux as new social relations and configurations are formed.

Importantly, a scientific reading of *perezhivanie* as a prism through which personal and environmental characteristics as a relational whole are shown in the process of development must

be identified as being a central dimension of the concept of *perezhivanie*. The point to be made for research, is that *an everyday reading of perezhivanie is also an important aspect of a theoretical conception of perezhivanie*, where both the everyday and theoretical reading are needed for understanding the unique and dynamic relations the child has with their social and material environment.

### **Researching in early childhood contexts**

In this section is shown how *an everyday reading of perezhivanie is as important as a theoretical conception of perezhivanie*, because both are needed for undertaking research in complex interactional spaces, such as preschools. In researching within the early childhood period the role of the researcher is to find the particular prism through which the child's environment is refracted. This is however, a relational idea, as was shown in the previous section where each child brought to the experience of being inside the bubble their own personal characteristics that together determined how something was experienced. The early childhood researcher seeks to identify the unit of *perezhivanie* for a particular child where the focus is on the relations, not the individual child. This unit does not lose any of the characteristics of the whole, that is, the personal characteristics of the child and the situational characteristics of the environment. In this reading, both the phenomenon that is being experienced and how it is being experienced by the child, are captured in the research. That is, both the child's own personal characteristics, such as their motive orientations, social relations, emotional connections, and the concrete conditions, as well as how the child is experiencing and relating to the environment, must be captured in the research. This is a complex and dynamic context in which to work, to theorise and to analyse, because research has traditionally focused primarily on the individual, even when it is difficult to determine the significance of a given attitude to a particular situation. That is why, research that draws upon the everyday and theoretical concept of *perezhivanie* must always be from the child's perspective if the unit of *perezhivanie* is to be identified as a relation. As noted by Veresov (2015): "what is important is that *perezhivanie* is a tool (concept) for analyzing the influence of sociocultural environment, not on the individual per se, but *on the process of development* of the individual" (p. 8).

Research that draws upon the concept of *perezhivanie* determines what might be the smallest relational unit of situational and personal characteristics for a particular child during the moments of the study period. That is, *perezhivanie* is the indivisible unity of personal and situational characteristics.

What is known is that in one context the situational characteristics will play a primary role for the child and in another situation, these same characteristics may not, because of the child's social situation of development. The research does not necessarily need to determine what might be the situational characteristics of the environment at that moment or the personal characteristics of the child, but rather it is the relationship that needs to be studied, analysed and theorized. Only then can the child's *perezhivanie* (as a relational whole) be determined, so that the child's *perezhivanie* is viewed in research as an indivisible unit of relations between the personal constitutional characteristics and situational characteristics at that particular moment.

Key to using the concept of *perezhivanie* is also recognizing that different environmental conditions will mobilise differing relationships between the children's personal characteristics and the situational characteristics of the environment at that moment. This conception allows researchers to better analyse why it is that in the same early childhood teaching environment or moment of interaction between the teacher and the children, that the same social and material environment will elicit different *perezhivanie* by the children. As such, seeking to control for these personal

constitutional characteristics in what seems to be the same situational environment for children falls outside of a cultural-historical conception of research. The concept of *perezhivanie* makes visible this challenge by explicitly recognising that personal constitutional characteristics are always mobilized by the particular situation. These personal characteristics are crystallised through emotionally charged situations, and as such, can never be an aggregate of individual and or collective personal constitutional characteristics, because different events will elicit different *perezhivanie*. That is why “reconceptualising the context as a subjective and dynamic phenomenon poses challenges for the researcher” (Brennan, 2014, p. 285).

In this explanation of *perezhivanie* for early childhood research in educational settings where a large number of children are interacting with one or two teachers, a focus on the levels of awareness (dynamic unit of consciousness) becomes necessary, because the same situations will have different meanings for different children. In research that draws upon the concept of *perezhivanie*, it becomes important to capture these differing relations between the children’s personal and situational characteristics across moments of time and across contexts if the unit of *perezhivanie* for individuals is to be determined.

Taken together, it would seem that early childhood research which draws upon both the phenomenon and the concept of *perezhivanie* for understanding children in play-based settings needs to encompass the following four principles.

1. *Child’s perspective*: *Perezhivanie* must always be from the child’s perspective because the analytical lens is always focused on the process of the child’s development.
2. *Perezhivanie as an indivisible unit of relations*: Early childhood research does not necessarily need to determine what might be the situational characteristics of the environment at that moment or the personal characteristics of the child, but rather it is the relationship that needs to be studied, analysed and theorized.
3. *Differing perezhivanie*: Early childhood research will always be subjective and dynamic because different events will elicit different *perezhivanie*.
4. *Levels of consciousness*: Early childhood research needs to capture potentially differing relations between the children’s personal and situational characteristics across moments of time and across contexts.

## Conclusion

The research literature primarily draws upon either an everyday reading of *perezhivanie* or a theoretical conception of *perezhivanie* when undertaking analyses or framing studies. However, in this paper it is argued that even though the term *perezhivanie* is contested, that both are needed for researching in early childhood settings. Unfortunately, *perezhivanie* in many respects is represented as a splattering of ideas that scholars have drawn upon in different ways to make sense of complex data, and this work collectively does not give a full picture of what this concept means for research.

*Perezhivanie* as a phenomenon was discussed in the context of the everyday readings of this term across research where important findings have been documented. *Perezhivanie* was also discussed as a theoretical concept that captured the unity of emotions and cognition, *perezhivanie* as a prism and as a unit of dynamic consciousness, but also as a double subjectivity in play/art. The latter theoretical reading, re-introduced one of Vygotsky’s (1925/1971) earliest conceptions of art and play in *The Psychology of Art*. Together, these dimensions of *perezhivanie* were examined for their

methodological power and ability to support early childhood researchers and, through this, provide a more nuanced reading of this concept and contribute to the current discussions found in the literature where some clarification is still needed.

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