

## Chapter 6

# “Visual Vivencias”: A Cultural-Historical Tool for Understanding the Lived Experiences of Young Children’s Everyday Lives

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The aim of this chapter is to present a theorisation of “Visual *Vivencias*” as a method for studying children aged three years and younger and, through this, contribute to a new cultural-historical understanding of early childhood research. We specifically introduce a case example that took place in a Mexican family in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, as part of a wider project reported elsewhere (Quiñones, 2011).

In this chapter we introduce a dynamic (Vygotsky, 1987) wholeness approach (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008) to researching children’s learning and development. We think mainstream research methodologies and methods that go beyond traditional quantitative techniques have neglected to address how to research this developmentally unique group of young human beings. Children in the birth to three-year-old period find themselves in a position of “maximum dependence on adults” with all of their behaviours and actions completely interwoven and intertwined within the adult world, with either no or limited capacity in human speech (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 216). As such, cultural-historical researchers interested in examining social practice and the social situation of development have a complex and challenging task (Bozhovich, 2009).

L. V. Vygotsky draws our attention to the dialectical relations between the unity of child and the social environment. The younger the child, the more complex it is to investigate these relations. It is not just the research tools we use that determine what might be possible to capture as part of the research process, but importantly, it is the theoretical gaze we adopt that shapes how researchers make sense and interpret the data. In conceptualising the subject of our research (young child) as intimately intertwined in social relations, we foreground a particular theoretical reading of how data can be generated and analysed. The data generated in the research reported here and the tools used to understand very young children were visually captured using digital video technologies. In a cultural-historical theorisation of researching with young children we created the methodological tool of *Visual Vivencias* which conceptualises both the theory and the tool of capturing young children’s everyday life.

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A methodological reading of this research challenge has, as yet, not been sufficiently theorised. In this chapter we seek to highlight important theoretical and technical dimensions significant for undertaking cultural-historical research focussed on the birth to three years age group. We based our work on the methodology of cultural-historical theory formulated by Vygotsky (1987, 1993, 1994) in which the dynamic unity of intellect/cognition and affect were foundational (see Bozhovich, 2009; Gonzalez Rey, 2009a, 2009b; Veresov, 2006). Vygotsky (1987) in his theory explains how cognition should not be studied in isolation but rather should be conceptualised in unity with affect (Vygotsky, 1987) and, further, taking into account emotion in the child's lived experience—in Russian *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1994). This concept of *perezhivanie* is translated as *vivencias*. We think the concept of *vivencias* captures closely the Russian term of *perezhivanie* and because the first author's mother tongue is Spanish we feel more comfortable with the concept. *Perezhivanie*–*vivencia* is what Vygotsky (1994) referred to as the unity of intellect and affect in the child's lived experience, and how the child is aware and understands his or her social environment, through what we think in a subjective form. The child's making sense and meaning is further analysed and interpreted according to how the child expresses and communicates. Later in this chapter we provide a more detailed theoretical discussion of this term.

We begin with a brief review of contemporary research methodologies adopted in Mexico for the study of young children.

### ***Approaches to Studying Children in Mexico—the Cognitive Divide in the Early Years***

Vygotsky (1998) has argued that in Western psychology researchers' attention has traditionally been directed to a single observable criterion for measuring development, such as the behavioural aspects of a child. Karpov (2005) argues that in this conception of child development researchers have overlooked the importance of having “a holistic view of child development because they do not describe interrelationships of different aspects of child development” (p. 8). But these criticisms should not just be directed to Western societies. This view of child development also dominates Mexican views of young children's development, where the focus is on the child's acquisition of social, affective and cognitive process in separation from one another rather than in unity. For instance, in the “Preschool Educational Program” (*Programa de Educación Preescolar*; SEP, 2004b) designed by the Secretary of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP) early childhood curriculum learning goals were directed to a system based on competencies—*competencias*—where, for example, social competence is separate from physical competence.

As part of the Preschool Educational Program, there are two training books—referred to as the “Training and Professional Actualization of Preschool Teacher”, *Formación y Actualización Profesional para el Personal Docente de Educación Preescolar* (SEP, 2004a)—which detail the theoretical underpinnings of the

program. These training books show the historical and philosophical underpinning of preschool education in Mexico. Moreno notes how, for example, Mexican kindergartens in 1903 were based on Pestalozzi's idea of educating the child according to their physical, moral and intellectual environment (2005, cited in SEP, 2004a). This idea historically foregrounds the education of the child possessing cognitive and intellectual capabilities; this closely follows the preschool education of children in their program based on children's acquiring competencies.

More recently in Mexico there have been several studies from ACUDE (*Hacia una Cultura Democrática, A.C.*), “Towards a More Democratic Culture”, a Mexican non-government organisation which has close partnerships with SEP and UNICEF (UNICEF Mexico & SEP, 2002). Some of their research is based on investigating the development of Mexican children related to the principle of *competencias*. In their project *Proyecto Intersectorial sobre Indicadores y Metodologías de Indicadores del Desarrollo, Calidad de Programas y Contextos Intersectorial* (“Project on Indicators and Methodologies about Development, Quality of Programs and Contexts”; Myers, Durán, Guerrero, González, & Meléndez, 2005; Durán & Myers, 2006), the aim is to know and follow the current situation of early childhood in Mexico in relation to how children acquire competencies and to indicate their level of development using quantitative measurements. This study analysed the *competencias* of children from the ages of one, three and six as measured on an *Escala de Competencia*, “Scale of Competencies” (Durán & Myers, 2006). In the age group of birth to three years, young children's growth development and motor and social skills, such as development of gross development, language development and social development, were measured (Durán & Myers, 2006). These studies foreground quantitative methodological approaches for studying discreet components of young children's development rather than showing the complexities and interrelationships associated with various aspects of children's learning and development as well as their experiences with how these competencies *competencias* are researched as a whole.

Much of the published research related to SEP and UNICEF frames the development of young Mexican children through the acquisition of *competencias*. Details of the contexts that are important in the child's life at home and in the community are separated from this analysis as it focuses on the “sole” child. For example, the evaluation measures how the child age three years and younger identifies her mother and his use of different forms of communication, such as gestures and corporal movement, used to express his likes and dislikes (Myers & Durán, 2006). Our argument is that these measurements are more complex to evaluate than quantitative measurements to analyse competencies would suggest.

This emphasis shows how competencies, such as motor skills (discussed later in this chapter), are valued in Mexican society and how children's knowledge of academic and formal skills is important in the early years. A strong emphasis is made on factors such as survival, growth and psychomotor development as important for the young child's development. These studies, as examples of the dominant research undertaken in Mexico, illustrate the maturational view of child development prevalent in Mexico today. In addition, these research studies show

Mexican societal values of intellectual and cognitive activities in young children's education that are specific for young children aged three years and under. However, what kinds of research methods are needed to visually document how such an academically oriented approach is possible for children aged birth to three years?

### *The Concept of Perekhivanie*

*An emotional experience [perekhivanie] is a unit where, on the hand, an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced—an emotional experience [perekhivanie] . . . (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 341; emphasis in original)*

When researching with young children we suggest that it is important to consider the environment in unity and in dialectical relationship with the child. The concept of *perekhivanie* captures such a dynamic system, emphasising the unity between thinking and emotion; individual and environment; and consisting of social relationships and the social situation within which the child is learning and developing as conceptualised by Vygotsky (1987, 1993).

Vygotsky (1998) extended his theorisation of experience through using the concept of *perekhivanie*, translated in his seminal work in English as “living emotional experience” (1994, p. 339). Vygotsky (1994) showed how *perekhivanie* meant the child's attitude and awareness to what he/she is experiencing from the environment and having an emotional component to this relationship. In this dialectical relationship the integration of environment into the child's awareness was essential—without environment there isn't a sense of awareness by the child. The concept of *perekhivanie*, therefore, goes beyond cognitive and mechanist ways of portraying development such as differentiation of external and internal relationships the child has with others.

In Vygotsky's (1994) cultural-historical theory, the individual and social environment is seen in *unity and is dialectically integrated*. As Vygotsky explains:

The emotional experience [perekhivanie] arising from any situation or from any aspect of his [sic] environment determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have in the child. (emphasis in original; p. 339)

Vygotsky (1994) gives an example of three children from the same family whose mother has a problem with substance abuse (e.g., drinking). Vygotsky argues that each child's *perekhivanie* in the family will have a different influence on them, even though the situation is the same. This difference depends on the *attitude* the child has to the *situation* and the “awareness of the same event will have a different meaning for them” (p. 342). That is, *the child's attitude, understanding and awareness of an event will have a different meaning for each child in the family*.

How can one explain why exactly the same environmental conditions exert three different types of influence on these three different children? It can be explained because each of the children has a different attitude to the situation. Or, as we might put it, each of the children experienced the situation in different way. It appears that, depending on the fact the same situation had been experienced by three children in three different ways, the influence which this situation exerted on their development. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 340)

Vygotsky’s notion of *perezhivanie* suggests that the environment is important when considering the child’s development and has a direct influence on the child’s personality development—as a unidirectional process.

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 [*perezhivaniya*] because, as I have said, all the child’s personal characteristics which took part in determining his attitudes to the given situation have to be taken into account in his emotional experience. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 341)

A methodological point of view when an analysis emphasises the role of the environment on the child is on how Vygotsky searched an “indivisible unit” (p. 341) between the environment and the child. Such units are unidirectional when studied together, this allowing the research process to investigate the child’s emotion and cognition as a united whole. The way researchers study this unity together demands a complex methodology. How the child gives meaning to events that involve them is different from the interpretations of adults about the same events. As such, interpretations of these events “affect” the child in different ways. We think that sometimes the child is in “emotionally charged” situations when the adult place control on the child’s actions and will through their meaning making unless it makes cognisance of both cognition and the emotional encounter.

The emotional experience of the child and the meaning, then, determines how the situation is managed by the child and will influence the child’s intellectual and emotional development as a whole. Yet, how do researchers capture these unidirectional influences of emotion and thought through the child’s actions and will? What methodological orientations and tools help researchers perceive these “emotionally charged” situations and how is the child able to express and communicate back to others? What kind of methodological means allows researchers to understand the child’s emotional lived experience, *perezhivanie–vivencia*, and allows us to understand the young child’s sense and meaning of everyday events in his/her life? This chapter examines how a child expresses himself—through non-verbal language—his thinking and emotion in relating back to his mother while doing school homework. The next section deals with the research into how unity of intellect and affect and *perezhivanie* has been investigated by cultural-historical researchers.

## Research Orientations into *Perezhivanie*

Kravtsova and Kravtsov (2009) explain how Vygotsky’s concept of the unity of affect and intellect brings together two processes that have traditionally been studied as separate entities. That is, the child’s cognition has been seen at the centre of education and the affective process of the child at the centre of family’s upbringing of the child (Kravtsova & Kravtsov, 2009). In our research we draw on the notion of *vivencias*—intellect and affect as unity in the centre of a young child’s upbringing in the context of the family.

Researchers like John-Steiner, Connery and Marjanovic-Shane (2010) note that cultural-historical researchers are paying more attention to the concept of *perezhivanie* and the role it plays for parenting and teaching. Researchers like Ferholt (2010) note how the concept of *perezhivanie* is an elusive phenomenon. Ferholt puts forward the concept of “intensely-emotional-lived-through-experience” through what has been termed “film-play” (p. 164). Empirical research using film makes *perezhivanie* “alive” and because film itself is a form of *perezhivanie*, researchers are able to evoke the complexity by studying how it unfolds, is revealed and is experienced. Ferholt uses film-play to study *perezhivanie* where these experiences are captured as vivid, alive and emotional and can also be relived. This method of film-play is similar to our approach because it reveals the qualities of *perezhivanie*. For Ferholt “film-play makes *perezhivanie* the subject of empirical investigation both because it keeps *perezhivanie* ‘alive’ for study, and because it is itself, a form of *perezhivanie* (p. 176)”. Film allows making empirical research a “researchable phenomena (p. 177)”. Through film *perezhivanie* is revealed and experienced.

Contemporary researcher Gonzalez Rey (2009a), in expanding Vygotsky’s conception, explains how *emotions* are elements of the child’s psyche life and are determined by symbolic productions such as signs, images, imagination and even fantasy that are essential to a theory of subjectivity.

Subjectivity as a continuous production of symbolic—emotional configurations, which would result from the complex alternatives generate in the interwoven movement between the dominant at the beginning of any system of relationships subjective configurations, and those new configurations appearing on the ongoing process of development. (2009a, p. 71)

In other words, the person has subjective symbolic-emotional configurations and their production occurs through the process of development and this is ongoing and complex. We would argue subjective configurations are complex to investigate. Gonzalez Rey (2002, 2009b) notes how Vygotsky wanted to capture the unity of consciousness through cognition and affect in what he called *perezhivanie*, stating that “*perezhivanie* is the integration of cognitive and affective elements which always presupposes the presence of emotions” (2002, p. 136). This leads us to our methodological problem of how researchers can study not only cognition or intellect but also affect in the context of *experienced emotions*.

We use the concept of *vivencias* instead of *perezhivanie*. The Spanish translations of Vygotsky’s work employ the term *perezhivanie* to *vivencia*. Gonzalez Rey (2009a) was the author that used this concept in Spanish, explaining how Vygotsky used *vivencias* in the unity of intellect and affect. In his theory of subjectivity Gonzalez Rey went beyond unities and advanced to the concept of *vivencias* through subjectivity—such as emotions have a subjective component (for more, see Gonzalez Rey, 2009a, 2009b; Quiñones, 2011). These subjective components are found through imagination and fantasy and are associated in the cultural life of the subject. *Vivencia* enables the researcher to recognise processes that configure experiences and generate multiple collateral effects of the lived experience, even when we don’t have control of these emotional productions (Gonzalez Rey, 2009a,

2011). The collateral effects are part of the child’s expressions of subjectivity in the social relations the child is part of in social scenarios. These emotional and symbolic productions have a subjective form of the child’s experience (Gonzalez Rey, 2011).

The work of Gonzalez Rey (2009a, 2009b, 2011) theorises the child’s lived experiences in the form of subjective expression. However, very little empirical research is available that applies the concept of *perezhivanie–vivencias* (Ferholt, 2009) in education and less still in parenting. We aim to show *perezhivanie–vivencias* for the first time in an empirical research with a young child in the context of his home, in a Mexican family and in a very formal homework activity. We think that *perezhivanie–vivencia* (singular use) in a visual form enables researchers to see “emotionally charged” situations and be able to read and make visible the emotional lived experiences of young children.

The next section explains how *petrezhivaniija vivencias* (plural use) as a concept is used as a methodological tool in the form of *snapshots*—photographs to represent the young child’s *vivencias*—as unity of emotional and thinking subjective productions of the child.

## Research Method

A dialectical–interactive methodology was chosen for this research because it allowed the researcher to investigate the *vivencias* of an event in the life of a three-year-and-half young child, Cesar, and his family members. A wholeness perspective takes into account “different perspectives of the different people’s viewpoints” (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 34) in order “to research the conditions as well as how children participate in activities. This allows the conditions and the child’s development to be conceptualised as a whole” (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 35). The larger project (Quiñones, 2011) drew upon capturing dynamically children’s learning and development across institutions, family, community groups and preschool (Hedegaard, 2008; Fleer, 2008a, 2008b). This chapter only presents one event, home and meal times of the young child. Digital video observations make it possible to observe and study children in their everyday settings and allow for later discussions of these visual data with participants (Fleer, 2008a).

The role of the researcher was to point the camera at the everyday practices, focussing on the child and the child’s relationships with others—in this chapter, with his mother—in order to capture the wholeness of the situation. Using this approach the researcher can video-observe whole institutional practices and activities and closely obtain the child’s and adult’s perspective of the activity. It allows the researcher to revisit different moments in time from different and multiple perspectives, giving multiple but related interpretations (Fleer, 2008a).

The challenge was how to present data in a “static” form such as written text digital video recordings. Through visual forms of data generation and using the theoretical concept of *vivencias* as a methodology we have named *Visual Vivencias* as a means through which it is possible to understand the complexities that a young child expresses through communicating his thinking and emotion. In the next section, *Visual Vivencias* is discussed throughout this chapter in relation to

methodological problems in not only studying the “sole” child but also the *vivencias* in an alive moment of time that is relived.

### **“Visual Vivencias” as a Methodological Tool**

In this research, the digital video observations focused on the relationship between the mother and the young child in order to capture visually their *vivencias*. This dynamic approach to data generation allows the researcher to present the data in a visual way and revisit the data many times in order to go further and in more depth with what was happening in the home from the mother’s and the child’s perspective. Because the video observations are a very dynamic approach to researching young children’s *vivencias*, allows the researcher and the reader to make multiple interpretations of the child’s and adult’s perspective of the institutional activity.

Through this form of *Visual Vivencias* as a methodological tool, the researchers can present the digital video observation—in a visual form and conversation transcript of what happened on an event of the child’s life. The creation of a *Visual Vivencias* in the study enabled the researchers to present, analyse, interpret and discuss the data together—and enable the researcher process to be collaborative, that is, discussing it with others. The interpretations are presented and discussed through visual forms, thus giving a wholeness perspective to the data set through not only portraying the one single view of the child but also different perspectives such as the mother’s view. The unit of analysis is the *vivencia*, the production of unity of intellect and affect through the thinking and emotion of the child in the actions that are displayed in the photographs of the child’s production and configurations from different perspectives—child’s, mother’s and researcher’s. Taking this approach we seek to understand the child’s expression and forms of communication through the method of capturing living and dynamic video recording of children’s *vivencias*.

The methodological tool of *Visual Vivencias* further enables the research process to create multiple readings of the material and revisit it several times. The child’s *vivencias* are part of important specific *momentitos* (little moments in time) of the research material generation process.

Through theorising the research as *Visual Vivencias*, the researcher can visually investigate, interpret and reinterpret an ongoing alive experience of the child in order to read what is behind the child’s thinking and emotion and how he or she makes sense of the events. It is an alive and lived moment as through digital video observations the event can be relived again.

In summary, through *Visual Vivencias* we sought to focus on:

- Dynamically visually documenting the “alive” experiences of the child and the social environment such as the relationships the child is living in those *momentitos* of time.
- Dynamically showing the young child’s united thinking and emotion through his social interactions towards others.



- The child’s making meaning and sense of events through subjective components, configurations and productions.
- Researcher’s subjectivity sense and interpretation of the events (scenarios, social life of the child).

The *momentitos* are captured through *snapshots* or photographs. In the next section this is discussed.

### *Snapshots*

The data generated in this research shows a series of *snapshots* in order to analyse and interpret the *vivencias* of a young child on how he lived the academic task of doing homework. The data is visually represented in *snapshots* or photographs manually taken from the video recording of the event. Twenty-four *snapshots* were taken of the whole 7 min of verbal and non-verbal conversation between the child and the family member, the mother, father and sister.

The selections of the *snapshots* were taken in relation to the *expressions* of Cesar and his mother. This was to prove that in specific *momentitos*, the child had “emotionally charged” moments in the activity and the non-verbal communication the child had with his mother. This will be further analysed. It is important to mention that the *snapshots* allowed the researchers and the reader to make their own interpretations of *the child’s expressions and actions* during the lived emotional experience—*vivencia*—of the child.

However, because the activity itself focused on the relationship between the mother and young child, this is where the researcher pointed the video camera. The researcher pointed the camera in a non-intrusive fashion by not covering her face with the camera viewfinder because this enabled her to talk with family members if appropriate. For example, the researcher tried to interact as unobtrusively as possible and position herself at the end of the table to record the whole social situation. The conversation mainly took place at instances with the father around school themes. Ethical considerations while video-observing were considered through the researcher being non-intrusive and explaining to the family that at any moment the camera could be turned off and/or film deleted. This was reiterated at each session. Researchers who are video-observing or filming need to take into account the purpose of the visit but at the same time relate to the participants. Further, it is important that the researcher considers the multiple interactions occurring at the moment of observing. The role of the researchers is important in adopting and accounting a listening attitude towards participants while video observing.

When taking the *snapshots* manually, the researchers observed the video several times. The discussion that follows is framed around the importance of understanding children’s *vivencias* in valued practices at home and the “emotionally charged” activity of the practice seen. In the example below it is of the mother’s “high expectations” of Cesar. Of course, the manually taken *snapshots* are subjectively taken as it is the researcher who is taking important *momentitos* to demonstrate in a written form what is important to the research, which, for us, is the emotion.

Also, we invite the reader to make his/her own interpretations, which is possible because the research methodology represents the data visually.

### ***Researcher's Subjective Role***

The researcher's interpretation of the spaces of expression in the young child's sense making of this space or social environment is important in analysing the *vivencias* of the young child and the family. It is important to recognise these as subjectivities; therefore throughout the discussion we make assumptions and interpretations about what we think is representative of the reality of the child.

Gonzalez Rey (2000) explains:

La subjetividad representa una realidad que no es asequible de forma directa al investigador, y que tampoco puede ser interpretada de forma fija por manifestaciones indirectas que sean susceptible de forma fija por manifestaciones indirectas que sean susceptibles de generalización, pues la expresiones de cada sujeto o espacio social conciernen a diversos sistemas de sentidos que expresan trayectorias propias . . . los sentidos subjetivos aparecen de forma gradual y diferente dentro del espacio de expresión del sujeto . . . cada configuración de sentidos referentes a diferentes espacios de la vida social. (pp. 233—234)

Subjectivity represents a reality that is not directly accessible to the researcher, nor can it be interpreted as fixed forms of expressions of indirect manifestations which is capable of susceptible generalisations, as the expressions of each subject or of a social space that concerns various systems of senses that express their own paths . . . the subjective senses appear in a gradual form and are different within the space of expression of the subject . . . each configuration of senses relate to different spaces of social life. (pp. 233–234)

Following a cultural-historical view on how the role of the researcher is understood, the researcher forms part of the reality of the child in that moment of time. The researcher interprets the expressions of the subject in the social space and considers the child's configurations and production of these forms of expression.

The following section shows how in different communities non-verbal communication is important in young children's lives, such as the child in this study.

### ***Non-verbal Communication***

Rogoff (2003) explains how through guided participation cultural communities prefer to use "speech or silence", and "gesture" and "gaze" (observation) as part of their participation in adult or school activities. In non-Western communities such as Mayan communities, Rogoff states that "nonverbal communication" is important. Mayan mothers in Guatemala use "communicative gaze, touch, posture, and timing cues" (p. 314). Mothers and toddlers from this community use very sophisticated forms of "nonverbal communication" and "express more complex ideas nonverbally" (p. 315). People and children in these communities are also "keen observers" (p. 314). But this form of communication is thought to carry less information. However, keen observation encourages children to observe, and

children learn through watching. Adults also encourage this type of learning by “observation”.

Family and community expectations that children should be keenly observing and participating in ongoing activities are another form of support of this kind of learning. (Rogoff, 2003, p. 319)

More recently, Mejia-Arauz, Rogoff and Paradise (2005) state how in some communities “observation” plays a more important role than other communities. For example, in the United States and non-Western communities such as those of Mexican heritage, children whose mothers had little experience with school were more likely to learn by “observation”, in comparison to US non-Mexican-heritage and European-heritage children, whose mothers have extensive experience with Western schooling. The researchers explain how “observation” is used for learning and how it is important to recognise this form of learning in school practices. Lopez, Correa-Chavez, Rogoff, and Gutierrez (2010) agree with Mejia-Arauz et al. (2005) that opportunities for learning through observation in schools should build on the children’s skills, especially for those children living in rural Mexican families and communities. These sociocultural studies suggest that research in culturally diverse communities must pay attention to the forms of non-verbal communication and learning the way children learn by watching and observation (Lopez et al., 2010; Mejia-Arauz et al., 2005; Rogoff, 2003). Further, White’s research, presented in this volume (Chapter 4), expands on the idea of word and gesture by suggesting they are not used discretely but instead in a relational dance which she suggests offers greater insights into the personality of the young child.

The next section deals with the institutional space where this research took place—in an intimate and private space in a young child’s family home. In the following example we show how gestures, words, touch and silences are all part of the *vivencias* of the activity which, taken together, provide evidence of emotionally charged engagement.

## Research Context

Although the *vivencias* reported in this chapter focus on the child at home, they could equally apply to early childhood settings or, in the case of the wider study, schools.

Cesar (three years and a half) and his family were part of this research. Their home is located in a middle-high socioeconomic community in the northern part of Mexico. The family was invited to participate in this study through their school—an early childhood centre. This community is one of the wealthiest communities in Mexico. The school was located in a city in the state of Nuevo Leon. This municipality is part of the metropolitan zone of Monterrey city in the state of Nuevo Leon, Mexico. The school sends homework twice a week for Cesar to complete.

The digital video recording took place in the family house. The researcher, Gloria, organised a research visit with the mother and after a day at the school

video-observing Cesar. Cesar's mother picked up her children and the researcher to video-observe the family's mealtime and afternoon family practices. This was the researcher's first visit to their home. The family consisted of Cesar, his sister aged five years old and his mother and the father. In these *vivencias* they all are sitting on the table while two maids are preparing lunch and serving the family. Cesar has finished having his lunch and decides to do his homework. The notebook is on the lunch table and Cesar does his homework using several coloured pencils. The activity takes place in a period of 7 min. The following abbreviations are shown in the transcription: D (dad), M (mum), S (sister), A and C (maid), Cs (Cesar, child). In the next section the activity of homework is discussed.

## Analysis of Motor Skills Activity

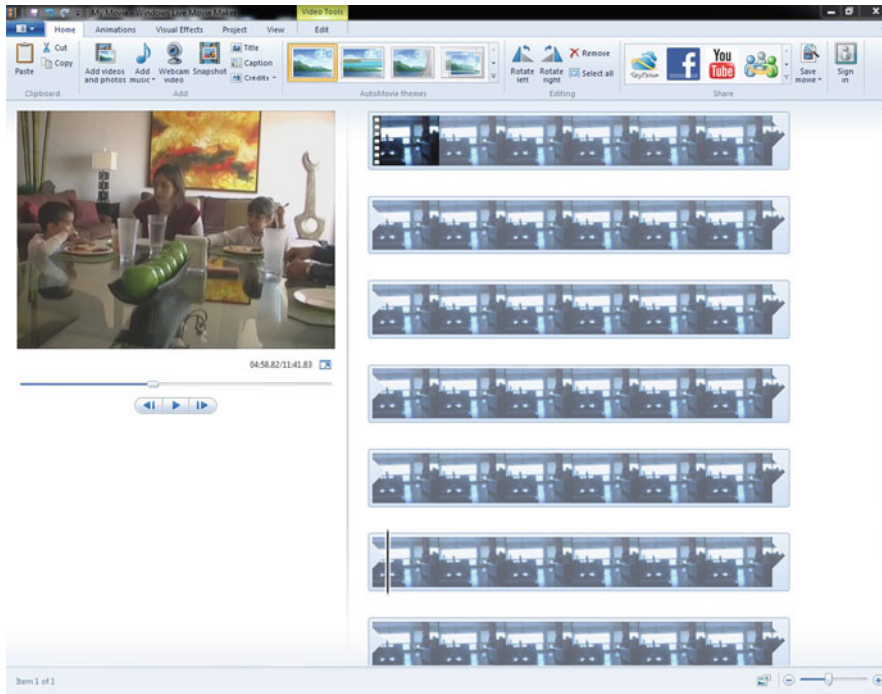
### *A Focus on the Institutional Practice and Activity Tradition of Motor Skill*

Hedegaard (2008) and Fleer (2008c) refer to practices and activities as interrelated concepts. Practice refers to the institution such as home and school and activity is related to the person. Taking into account a wholeness approach to understanding the conditions for child development, Hedegaard (2008) has outlined how the researcher must consider the institutional practices children participate in, the activity that dominates the institutional practices, the demands this places on children, what kind of conflicts occur in relation to these different demands and what crises the children meet in order to deal with these demands. She calls this a wholeness approach. We add to this approach the specific need for documenting and analysing the unity of intellect and affect in children's development. The institutional practice and activity of motor skill homework was chosen because it was an institutional tradition found at school and at home. We thought that the "emotionally intense and charged" relationship between the mother and the child would contribute to our discussion and that we needed a methodology that shows visually how emotions are subjectively produced by the child and the adult.

Through "Windows Live Movie Maker" (see Image 6.1) specific *snapshots* of the seven-minute video clip can be manually taken by the researcher. The specific moment is captured by pressing "snapshot" and the image is saved. The *snapshots* allow the researcher to select or manipulate specific moments of the research process. This allows the data to be presented in a dynamic visual way through photographs represented by *snapshots*.

In the discussion, frames show the wholeness of the family conversation and the *snapshot* specific verbal and non-verbal communication of the family, their *vivencias* and more important *vivencias* of the activity and practice. *Visual Vivencias* show moments of interaction between the child and the mother taken in the form of *snapshot* photographs. This will be later illustrated with examples.

The *snapshots* are defined as visual moments in time, *momentitos*, and they are matched to the conversation around the child's and family *vivencias* of the activity.



**Image 6.1** “Windows Live Movie Maker”

In this chapter we show some examples of the full seven minutes of the “motor skill” activity, which focused on 24 *snapshots*.

## Findings

### *Cesar’s Displays of “Emotionally Intense and Charged” Non-verbal Communication*

Cesar is sitting at the dinner table with his family. His mother is coaching him as he does his homework. In this example, we see the dominant Mexican tradition of “motor skills” is contextualised within an academic activity of homework, as Cesar participates in a pre-writing activity:

Cesar has school homework and decides to do it at lunch time. All the family, mother, father and sister are sitting in the table having lunch. He quickly finishes his lunch and continues with his school homework. The page of the booklet he is doing is about motor skill activity and the child has to follow the “arrows”, drawing onto the page directly, showing the movement associated with each symbol. The mother is sitting next to Cesar on her right side and Cesar’s sister sits on the mother’s left hand. The father is sitting on the left side of the sister, in front of Cesar. The mother is having lunch and is constantly paying attention

to Cesar's homework. She constantly points to the notebook to show Cesar how to do the homework "right". The sister and dad support the mother and the homework becomes a collaborative exercise. At the end of the seven minute activity the mother asks Cesar to do another activity in the book and the child walks off to the kitchen and turns his back to his mum and does not follow her instructions. (Home video observation, November 3, 2009)

As video observations were made of this lunch-time homework routine, we began to unpack a *series of snapshots* on how the interaction between the mother and Cesar was taking place through "non-verbal communication". In this research, and in this Mexican community, Cesar prefers to use "silence" and "gestures" for communication and for participating in the homework activity. The child is able to communicate complex ideas "non-verbally" through gestures and the mother through touching him.

Cesar from a very young age is communicating *non-verbally* by *showing eye contact for approval* on the activity and *avoiding eye contact* when he *disagrees*. The mother, father, sister are "keen observers" too. All the family members are participating and keenly observing Cesar's practice of the activity. This is exemplified in the following example of data (Frame 6.1).

A cultural practice in Mexican families is close eye contact with parents when they are talking to you. This example shows how Cesar (Cs) *shows eye contact* with his mother (M) when following the rules of the homework (*snapshot 10*) and the expectations are met. Non-verbal communication is expressed by Cesar who is able to meet expectations. However he *avoids eye contact* as the intensity of the interaction between the mother and child becomes "emotionally charged" when the expectations of the mother are not met (*snapshot 23*).

Both the visual digital *snapshots* and the conversation transcribed support the importance for young children to practise "motor skills" development. Children's "keen observation" at the same time as adult responsiveness and assistance and guided participation in activities becomes evident. The *sequential snapshot* (Frame 6.1) as a method of data gathering and analysis clearly shows this important finding. The relations between the mother and the child through "non-verbal communication" are made visible through the methodology adopted. This series of snapshots of course doesn't show the moments of silence. First, in snapshot 9 Cesar is performing the homework activity and in snapshot 10 he is closely looking at the mother for eye contact approval. He eventually finishes the homework and in snapshot 23, after 4 min of doing the homework and intense checking from the mother, Cesar has finally finished the activity. Cesar avoids eye contact (see snapshot 23). Cesar doesn't respond to his mother by looking at her or speaking. He shows by his expression he has finally finished with his work. The mother's intention is to receive a response. She doesn't get a response from Cesar; she realizes this and then touches his hand, but what she gets is disapproval and rejection from Cesar as he moves away from the table. He doesn't fulfil the mother's expectation that he will do another activity.

The school practices are dominant in the family practice and these show how young children in Mexico are expected to do homework. This school practice is adopted by the mother who copies the homework instructions of following the arrow

**Frame 6.1** “Sequential *Snapshot*”—non-verbal communication



**S 9. Cs doing activity. M attends to HW.**

M: Look this one it's not very nice, little one.



**S 10. Cs looking for approval.**

Cesar continues to do it slowly and more delicately, then looks back to observe mother and seek approval.

and “pointing” with her fingers in order to emphasise how Cesar has to follow these directional symbols. Yet this vignette does not capture the intensity of the emotional interaction that is evident around the dinner table where the pointing by the mother towards the symbol is featured (see Frame 6.2). The snapshots show how young children express their subjective experiences of the activity and how the child configures and produces knowledge in an intense moment. The snapshots allow the researchers and the reader to make their own interpretations and capture the emotion in a visual form in parallel with the explanations made here.

In the following *snapshot* we can see visually the significance of the interaction. The intensity of the interaction is captured through this visual documentation. When the visual documentation and the family dialogue of both the child and the mother are paired we also notice that Miss Maya, the teacher, is included in the interaction, despite the fact that she is not physically present.

**Frame 6.2**

*Snapshot*—cognitive divide  
“Following the rules”



**S 15. M pointing, having to do it several times.**

Cs: But here no (meaning inside the circle).

M: Yes, it's because Miss Maya wants you to do it a lot of times with different colours, 10 times.

Cesar chooses a colour and keeps doing circles.

Frame 6.2 shows how the school practices and pedagogy are also dominant in the home activities. The very young child is following the school rules associated with the activity. The content is an academic activity and the dialogue shows how academic success is valued at home. Through this data-gathering technique, the dominance of cognition and academic activities is practised in both the school and the home. Through framing research in a holistic way, data generation is not isolated to just the home or school context. But rather, the research analysis is sensitive to how values are seen in the practices of both. This kind of research method makes it possible to capture and analyse how academic values are operationalised in the home between a mother and her three-year-old child, and also how the young child is able to demonstrate and configure emotionally these intense interactions and how the researchers make sense subjectively—in their own way—of the events in the young child's life.

Through this *snapshot* it is possible to notice also that the mother is concentrating on Cesar's physical capacity, moving the activity beyond the academic task. For Cesar to be able to be academically successful, he must also be physically successful. This physicality is shown by following the “right way”, as the mother says: “Miss Maya [school rule] wants you to do it with different colours and several times”, demonstrating that Cesar successfully follows both the school and home practices. This tradition of “motor skills” and physical development of the child has been an important practice in Mexican kindergartens, both historically and in contemporary times. As discussed previously, the Preschool Educational Program (*Programa de Educacion Preescolar*; SEP, 2004b) has an emphasis on children acquiring the skill and competence of physicality. *Snapshots* and transcripts



of dialogue allow for a deeper and broader analysis than the more traditional quantitative approaches to research that are dominant in Mexico.

### ***Family Practice “High Expectations”***

Cesar’s *vivencias* captured thinking and emotion behind an academic activity. Cesar was able to produce these *emotional configurations* through his mother’s “high expectations” of the activity. Cesar’s attitude was to follow the rules, and the awareness of his entire social environment was evident in his response of being compliant and following the rules of the activity. Frames 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5 show *subjectivity* through how the mother consistently expects Cesar to produce a very high quality of homework performance through detail of fine motor skills draws. Alongside Cesar’s non-verbal communication and actions are presented in the snapshots of the activity.

Through the methodological tool of visually observing children’s *vivencias* used in this chapter, described as *Visual Vivencias*, the reader can view the research process that captures the young child’s *vivencias* emotionally experiencing and how Cesar is able to communicate his intentions to the mother. The young child, Cesar, is able to communicate his approval and avoiding of the mother’s rules and expectations through close eye contact and raising his eyebrows and not facing her when disapproving. This shows visually through *Visual Vivencias* the “emotionally charged” experience in a seven-minute collaborative activity.

Through the form of documenting *vivencias* as a methodological tool, the researchers present video observation through the form of *snapshots* and conversation transcript of what happened in each event of the child’s life. The documentation of *vivencias* enabled the researcher to present, analyse and discuss the data in a visual form. It also shows how the *vivencias* of the child and the unity of intellect-thinking and affect-emotion are subjectively displayed in the *snapshots*.

### **Conclusion—*Visual Vivencias* as an Analytical Tool**

*Vivencias* of this event has been shown in this chapter to demonstrate their effectiveness in bringing together the young child’s meaning making with what he is thinking and feeling through relationships which are framed by a “deep” sense of interrelation. *Visual Vivencias* serve as an analytical tool to further understand “visually” the child’s emotional experience of the event.

In our research, we seek to move beyond a maturational view of development and adopt a cultural-historical approach to both child development and the study of very young children. We have argued that a cultural-historical approach to research will allow for more than single independent characteristics to be studied and a broader dynamic system of intellect and affect to be gained. In a cultural-historical dialectical approach that is dynamic and holistic *Visual Vivencias* serve as methodological tools for the analysis of complicated video data through *snapshots*.

**Frame 6.3** “Sequential snapshot” mother’s “high expectations” of activity



**S 4.** M: No, no. Remember that is with colour.



**S 7.** M: Wait.



**S 12.** M: look this one it's not very nice little one.



**S 14.** Very good ... Stop, stop! only this circle, you don't trace only like this look (points at circles with finger).

**Frame 6.4** “Sequential snapshot” Cesar’s *perezhivanie vivencias* of mother’s and attitude “seeking approval” towards “high expectations”



**S 8. Showing colour to Dad.**



**S 18. Cesar smiles back to mother as he has finished activity, seeking eye contact.**

In order to analyse and interpret the complexity of *perezhivanie vivencias* we have documented the lived experiences and the forms of *emotional expression* of Cesar. The snapshots have a subjective form as the researcher manually takes specific “alive” moments that are revisited several times to conclude to Cesar’s *vivencias* (see Fig. 6.1).

A research methodology which makes central the approach of analysing *snapshots* as dialectic (that is in unity with both individual and social, affective and cognitive aspects), and as connected sequences, allows the researchers to illustrate the *vivencias* of very young children. Through the example of Cesar and his family, and the documenting *momentitos* of their intellectual orientation towards homework it was possible to see Cesar’s *vivencias* of his activity and family practice of “high expectations”.

The *snapshots* capture “alive” moments of the young child’s symbolic and emotional production and configuration of the events and can be read through not only his expression on how he understands it and is aware of the academic demands,

**Frame 6.5** “Sequential snapshot” Cesar’s *perezhivanie vivencias* (emotional living) of mother’s and “avoiding” attitude towards “high expectations”



S 21. D: Put red. Cs: It’s because I don’t want to.  
M: No?



S 23.

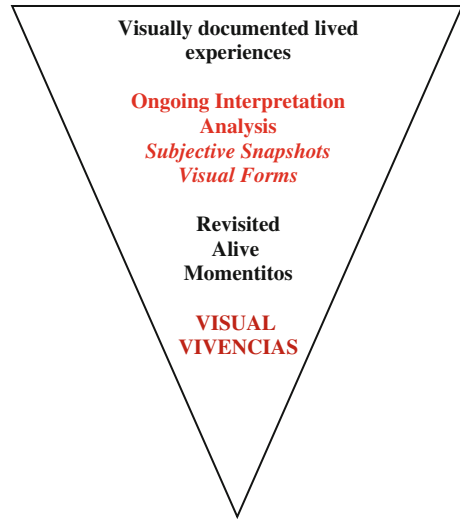
C: I don’t want to.  
M: Just listen, show Dad, listen ... look at me,  
look at me, look at me ...

but also how we revisited them and present them for you, the reader, to make your own interpretations, which of course are subjective.

Photographs or *snapshots* that are portrayed here show the intensity of emotions. The moment was what it was and it can be relived here in order to provide an ongoing interpretation. The subject of our research (the child) is intertwined by very “deep” social relations. Taken together, visual methodologies being “visual”, combined with the theoretical concept of *vivencias*, provides a new approach to generating data and analysing the young child’s emotion and voice.

Throughout this chapter we considered the young child’s meaning making of the relationship he has with his mother. The different forms of communication include non-verbal cues—for example a smile given to his mother after finishing a very academic and formal activity does not pass by un-noticed. This consideration

**Fig. 6.1** Cultural-historical interpretation of “*Visual Vivencias*”



enables researchers and educators to not only consider verbal communication but also understand the child’s many different forms of expressing non-verbal emotions and meanings.

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## Glossary

**Dialectics:** We refer to dialectics when there is a dynamical relationship between the individual and the social environment consisting of social relationships and the surrounding place. This concept usually reflects opposites and counterparts; we here refer to the unity and dynamics of the relationship of the individual and environment.

**Perezhivanie:** Vygotsky (1994) referred to *perezhivanie* as emotional living experience. This concept reflects the methodological problem Vygotsky refers in his writing about environment.

**Visual Vivencias:** is a methodological tool that uses photographs of moments in time of the research. The program used was “Windows Live Movie Maker”, which captures in a photograph a *snapshot* of the whole activity of the child. This research aims to capture these moments visually for multiple interpretations and not just of the researchers.

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## Commentary to Gloria Quiñones and Marilyn Fleer: “Visual Vivencias”

E. Jayne White

On my initial reading of this chapter I was struck by its clarity in relation to the research journey that unfolds about a young Mexican boy, Cesar, and his homework activity through the employment of analytical snapshots that are underpinned by carefully articulated methodological imperatives. The detailed description of the methodology that underpins this data provides the reader with a rare glimpse into what, I believe, constitutes a new and exciting operationalisation of sociocultural theory in the form of *Visual Vivencias*. I am in no doubt that, for this reason alone, the chapter will be inspirational for researchers grappling with meaningful ways of entering into the complex world of the very young child.

The interpretation of Russian *perezhivanie* in relation to Spanish *vivencias* is a particularly interesting and fruitful contribution to the research arena, especially when considered from a cultural-historical standpoint. In this location the authors seem to be suggesting, with Vygotsky (1994), that lived emotional experience of the individual learner is the central point of gestalt for the researcher; and that it is located in the dialectical relationship that takes place between the environment and the child’s emotional engagement with that environment. I interpret this to mean that the environment, per se, holds relevance to the child’s learning or experience only when it is imbued with meaning through interaction. This is an important claim for research with very young children, since, as the authors point out, so much research with this age group (including in a non-Western society such as Mexico) is heavily weighted by measures of competency against pre-determined measures that are located “in the environment” without consideration of emotional engagement, meaning and experience on the part of the learner.

The “wholeness approach” to research advocated by the authors in their research design represents considerable challenges when we consider affect and cognition as a dynamic system in unity. It is one that has perplexed researchers across the globe and, in early childhood research, led to the development of significant frameworks for analysis (see for example the work of Carr, 2009, and Clarke, 2007, among others). Several neo-Vygotskians have attempted to respond to the challenge drawing specifically from Vygotsky, including the foci of analysis model (Rogoff, 1995) and activity theory (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999). In this chapter, the authors draw from Hedegaard’s (2008) framework—a recent addition to the field which bears close allegiance to these models; and invites the researcher to view institutional practices and individual activities as interrelated concepts. However, Quiñones and Fleer go further to suggest that a wholeness approach



should also be concerned with intellect and affect, providing additional provocations to guide the researcher towards dialectic approaches in research activity. It is here they invoke *perezhavanie* as a unit of analysis.

If we take this idea seriously, as these authors most certainly have, the researcher must somehow search for meaning from the perspective of *this* child in *specific* contexts (that is, the life-world of this child), while recognising the prevailing influences of the wider world—a constant quest for researchers and teachers alike in claiming any interpretation of “voice”; and one that is at the very heart of this collection. With Hedegaard’s inspiration, the authors of this chapter have a means of doing so. As many of the contributors have already pointed out, this is not an easy task when the very young child does not share the same semiotic language system as the adult, in particular the researcher. It was exciting, therefore, to read of the authors’ cognisance of non-verbal forms of language in understanding the *vivencias* of Cesar, and the important part they play in meaning making for the very young learners. The sections which explore skills and non-verbal communication provide a particularly useful example of how interpretation might be possible using *Visual Vivencia* as a methodology. Given Vygotsky’s (1987) claim that infants do not have the capacity for human speech, this section provides a very useful embellishment of the way a young child engages with human speech in subtle yet complex ways.

I was consistently drawn to the authors’ interpretation of *perezhivanie* throughout this chapter. This is a Russian concept also employed by Voloshinov (1978), who suggests that meaning is always evaluative and therefore must have significance for the particular group in which acts take place (Liberali, 2009). Bakhtin’s additional use of the Russian term *postupok* (Bakhtin, 1993)—an answerable act or deed—suggests that the gestalt of this lived experience is determined not so much by the environment in relation to the individual, but by the *people* in that environment and the strategic orientation of the individual toward them in the language acts they present (Marjanovic-Shane, 2011). Given that *vivencias* is also proposed as an extension of the term, and that it seems to take into particular account the strong influence of family and society, I wonder if further attention to these orientations would be valuable in studies of very young children across cultures. In making this suggestion it occurs to me that there is much scope for enriched interpretations of key theoretical constructs when language is shared across cultures and societies as a means of understanding complex ideas. Such an approach, however, requires reflexive positioning on the part of researchers if their ideas are to be taken seriously across cultural and conceptual borders, and offers less universal certainty than many researchers are accustomed to. The dialogues that take place around these concepts help us to clarify our meaning as well as those of others, and to recognise the interpretative (and cultural) nature of research in this domain.

In any case the authors' solution is sought in an approach they carefully describe as a "dialectical-interactive". This method, developed by Hedegaard and Fleer (2008), allows the researcher to study everyday activity, in this case homework, in complex ways that fulfil their promise of expanding on the notion of *competencia* to take account of the dialectics at play. Like others in this book, their route is through video, and the employment of stimulated dialogue using that video. Here the emphasis seems to shift from "*child vivencias*" to those of "*mother and child vivencias*" (although this is not explicitly expounded) as a unit whose members are assumed to share the same emotional experience or speak for one another—a notion I ponder since I concur with Linell (2010) that the infant needs to be treated as a research subject in their own right (however hard that is). Having said that, it is important to note that the examples provided in this chapter are part of a larger study involving home and school dialectics that are not discussed here, so the emphasis was less on the home as a sole institution than the home environment as an important part of the wider educational experience. Such is the value of research of this nature, since the authors are able to recognise a far more complex picture by investigating such systems.

On a more pragmatic level, it was surprising to learn that Mexican approaches to very young children are so heavily influenced by discrete competencies with such emphasis on skills and physical development. It caused me to reflect on the significant influence and power wielded by educational institutions on what families see as important learning—an aspect of discussion that this research explores in the wider study. However, I would suggest that the researchers' choice to focus on homework as a leading activity for investigation lent itself more to this scholastic emphasis than other activities may have. It would be interesting to see this research repeated, in the home, with other cultural activities in mind, since it is likely that these hold significant emotional value to the child (indeed, it could be argued that they would hold *more* emotional value to Cesar). As one of very few sociocultural studies that has been conducted in this locale, this chapter provides a beacon of hope in research that is conducted in and between home and other locales; since it is clear that any cultural-historical interpretation cannot ignore this significant institution in the life and learning of a young child. In Cesar's case, the chosen *vivencia* raises important, but unexplored, questions concerning the emotional value of homework as an educational activity for the very young child despite its value to his family.

To conclude, not only does this chapter provide important incentives for researchers to consider the wider contexts of the child's life-world, but it also sets the scene for future research that investigates the *vivencias* of young children in an increasingly diasporic world (I make this claim for both the researcher and the researched). The inspirational examples outlined here, underpinned by a unique methodological framework, provide

a potential route to the emotional lived experience of the infant and toddler as a means of bringing cognition/competency and emotion into dialectic interplay. Moreover, the notion of *visual vivencia* provides researchers with inspiration to go beyond current frameworks to develop methodologically sound approaches that best suit their purpose. Theorising of how best to understand and appreciate young children through such exploration is a route we must inevitably take if we are serious about deepening our understandings of our youngest children, ourselves, and the societies in which we live.

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