



Vicarious learning and types of behaviors in children on Initial Education

Aprendizaje vicario y tipos de conductas en infantes de Educación Inicial

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Abstract

This article analyze the ways in which vicarious learning encourages the reproduction of behaviors in infants of initial education. The research was born from a problem evidenced in the classroom of a private institution located north of the city of Quito in order to understand the reproduction of aggressive behavior in toddlers through vicarious learning. The methodology used was based on a qualitative approach observing and collecting information to deepen the investigation. The methods used were: the synthetic analytical, the ethnographic and the hermeneutical. In addition, the technique of direct observation of the children was used; and the interviews that were applied to two teachers. The results determined that infantes manifest different behaviors according to the activity and the environment. Although aggressive and acquired behavior have greater incidence. Ignorance about vicar learning by teachers was also determined. This leads to the majority of behaviors especially the aggressive see them as natural by age without considering the space or change that directly affect these behaviors. Research emphasizes the importance of considering vicarious learning as one of the aspects that affects the behavior of infants within the educational space and that can be mediated or modified processes through reinforcements. Likewise it is necessary that there are more information in Ecuador on this subject so that teachers create learning guidelines.

Keywords: learning process, behaviour, socialization, teaching, training, early childhood education.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las formas en que el aprendizaje vicario promueve la reproducción de conductas en los infantes de Educación Inicial. La investigación nació a partir de una problemática evidenciada en el aula de clases de una institución privada ubicada al norte de la ciudad de Quito, con la finalidad de comprender la reproducción de conductas por medio del aprendizaje vicario. La metodología utilizada se basó en un enfoque cualitativo, al observar y recopilar información para profundizar la investigación. Los métodos utilizados fueron: analítico sintético, etnográfico y hermenéutico. Además, se utilizó la técnica de observación directa a los infantes; y entrevistas aplicadas a dos docentes. Los resultados determinaron que los infantes manifiestan diferentes conductas, según la actividad y el ambiente. Aunque, la conducta agresiva y adquirida tienen mayor incidencia. También se determinó el desconocimiento sobre el aprendizaje vicario por parte de las docentes. Esto lleva a que la mayoría de conductas, especialmente agresiva, las vean como naturales por la edad, sin considerar el espacio o cambios que inciden de forma directa en dichas conductas. La investigación enfatiza la importancia de considerar el aprendizaje vicario como uno de los aspectos que repercuten en el comportamiento de los infantes dentro del espacio educativo y pueden ser procesos mediados o modificados mediante refuerzos. Asimismo, es necesario contar con mayor información en el Ecuador sobre este tema para que los docentes puedan crear pautas de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: proceso de aprendizaje, comportamiento, socialización, enseñanza, formación, educación de la primera infancia.

1. Introduction

The study of vicarious learning contributes to a better understanding of why certain behaviors occur more frequently in the educational environment, since children from their first years attend children's centers. The lack of knowledge about learning of behaviors that are not biological, allows us to positively influence changes that can occur. Vicarious learning, by showing that most acquired learning is done by observing different behaviors of their peers, their home or even through television programs, videos or websites, is an option that helps to understand the influence of peers and society as a whole behavior in socialization.

Vicarious learning allows to process the information about the acquisition of behaviors that a person observed in his/her immediate environment. These behaviors are previously assimilated and become a kind of guide at different times and spaces by symbolic imitation. Therefore, vicarious learning processes the knowledge acquired through social interaction from mediation processes, i.e., attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, as they are mental functionalities that help to collect, store, retain and reproduce information almost exactly. In addition, these functions are involved in the advancement of learning depending on the positive or negative reinforcement received to establish whether the visualized behavior is acquired or not.

2. Conceptual Review

Research on vicarious learning or also called learning by observation, have been carried out from the pedagogy and psychology: Reta and Ballesteros (2018) analyze several learning strategies to implement in preschool and basic through the behavior observed between peers, thus generating that infants develop vicarious learning in relation to their actions and decision making involving educational insertion.

Acosta and Alsina (2022) propose the teaching of patterns through observation and its influence on the learning of children from four to six years old. In addition, they worked in real situations to reproduce the evidence and with graphic contexts that attract the child's attention. This way they had the result that learning was more significant when performing

real situations compared to the graphic resources presented.

Torres (2021) analyzes vicarious or social learning in the stage of the child from birth to three years of life, since infants from very young learn by observing the behavior of a determining social model. The author wants to implement the notion of learning in the educational and pedagogical project in La Brittany, France, in order that the children have free exploration according to their requirements and needs.

Rodríguez and Cantero (2020) address Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory about vicarious learning within the educational space. In addition, it starts with the experiment of the Bobo doll carried out in 1961 with the aim of demonstrating vicarious learning. To begin the experiment, the first group of children were exposed to observe physical and verbal aggression by an adult towards the Bobo doll, the second group of children did not observe anything. Subsequently, the first group went to a room where the Bobo doll was located and behaved in the same way as they had observed from the adult, while the second group showed acceptable behavior.

Mesa (2018) considers that different behaviors are being implemented according to what is evidenced in his environment and suggests several tactics that make it possible to approach different emotional disorders or personality in order to develop patterns of emotional bond. In addition, the author presents the cognitive-behavioral model of intervention that is used by a child psychologist in order for the child to assimilate knowledge through immediate results and vicarious learning.

Zurita (2018) examines the use or management of knowledge by imitation related to the development of role recognition in children of four years. In addition, the acquisition of new behaviors through learning by imitation and observation is given immediately. Through the identification of roles in children, it seeks to increase and strengthen their capacities. This learning, from an educational point of view, is a way of

Acquiring new behaviors at different stages of the human being's life that is open to incomparable events without rewards or fears of possible punishment, all is given by voluntary observation in order to reproduce it in the future as a skill of its own. (p. 20)

López *et al.* (2012) address the issue considering migrants and natives related to the coupling of infants in the educational environment. This study is related to parenting practices and behavioral problems that are evident throughout the educational period, in which 176 children participated, aged four and five years. Through the analysis of the results, it is shown that there are dissimilarities in parenting practices and behavioral problems developed by children during the school day.

Murillo and Merino (2016) analyze the behavior in the integral development of the child and relate it to the general progress of the child, promoting the improvement of the behavior inside and outside the classroom. The children investigated showed low self-esteem, attention deficit, adaptation difficulties and insufficient training of female teachers. The authors of this research sought to enhance and achieve the total progress of the children according to the stages corresponding to the age and to promote the integral development through the application of strategic guidelines of behavior appropriate to the age of the children.

Illicachy (2017) approaches the discussion of behaviors from a very different perspective since it does so from the concept of Foucauldian power. Although the approach is completely different, for the research is important because it places that in many schools in the indigenous area of the city of Riobamba use punishments as ways to obtain obedience and that students carry out the activities without any rejection. These forms of disciplining are also learned as the teachers at these schools promote in the same students that they punish their peers and therefore become learned behaviors.

The varied and broad approaches focus on the different analytical aspects of vicarious learning, behavior and the factors that influence it. However, in Ecuador the topic is not directly related to behavior and is little known and researched, even more so at the Initial level. Generally, the behaviors that children manifest in the school space are attributed to age, gender, socioeconomic status or often as innate, with no major options to be modified. While many of the behaviors are known to be learned through television programs or through the Internet, they tend to be seen or categorized as bad influence, focusing on the program as such and not on vicarious learning and mediation process. Considering these aspects, the

general question that guided the research is how vicarious learning contributes to the appearance of different behaviors in infants of Initial Education, and the general objective was to analyze the different types of behavior that appear and reproduce through vicarious learning in infants of Initial Education.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach was used, which allowed to know, deepen and investigate vicarious learning through the observation and collection of information on the different behaviors of students. The methods used were three the synthetic analytical method for the theoretical part when analyzing texts found in the database such as Scopus, Google Academic Scielo, Microsoft Academic and digital repositories that helped to synthesize thoroughly basic research concepts. The ethnographic method was used to gather information through participant observation from January to July 2020 from 7h to 12h30 and thus determine the various behaviors, emphasizing the aggressive ones observed in children how these related to vicarious learning. Finally, to analyze the information, the hermeneutic method was used because it allowed interpreting the texts and relating from the general to the particular vicarious learning in the school context.

Two techniques were used: reading, which helped to understand in depth conceptual bases through authors referring to the subject, based on reliable bibliographic sources; and participant observation for collecting the data with the aim of recording information related to the subject. In addition, the teacher was interviewed to know her point of view on the different types of behavior observed during the pedagogical activities. Two instruments were used: the interview and the field diary, which helped to understand the context in which the children are immersed. An open interview was applied through an interpersonal dialogue, which allowed to ask structured questions and new questions that were emerging when addressing the research topic in order to deepen the subject, focusing on the reproduction of different behaviors through vicarious learning. These interviews were conducted to two teachers corresponding to sublevel 2. The field diary (FD) allowed to collect and describe in detail the relevant events observed during the whole class day to orga-

nize, analyze and interpret the information that was collected according to the types of behavior and the relationship that existed with vicarious learning.

3.1 Sample

The research was conducted in a private educational institution, located in the north of Quito. The institution has 25 years of experience and has been involved in initial, basic, and higher education. There are two sub-levels: 1 and 2, which worked with a teacher, an assistant teacher, and the pedagogical coordinator of the Initial area. Sub-level 1 consists of 18 students. The study population consisted of 19 children, ten girls and nine boys between three and five years old who were in the 2018-2019 academic year and two teachers of the same level. The socioeconomic status of the children's families was medium to high. Three of the families in the group were foreigners, they were in Ecuador to work, the rest were nationals. A sample was not taken, since the whole population was used.

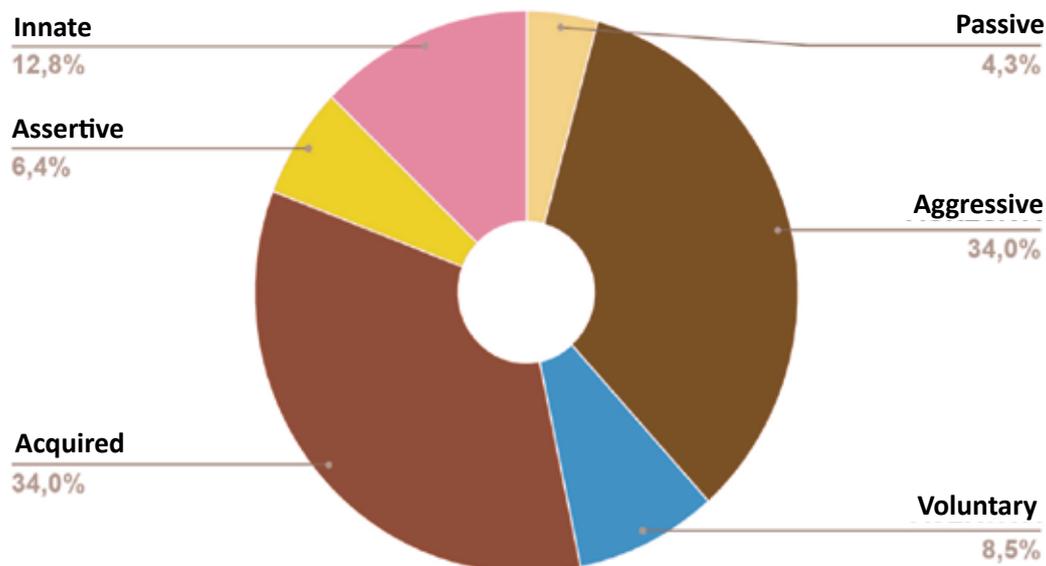
4. Results

The results of the research are presented in two moments: the first one shows in a table the different behaviors of children during the time of observation. This classification was taken from Castellero (2018) who states that different actions or behaviors can be developed from various activities or situations based on different criteria. The second moment analyzed shows how these behaviors are related to vicarious learning. Excerpts from the field diary (FD) emphasize the type of behavior and how these occur through vicarious learning.

4.1 Type of behavior during the research

It was possible to observe different types of behaviors that the children showed during the school day. The behaviors were not static, nor always the same. However, aggressive behavior, 34 % and acquired behavior, 34 % were more frequent. While behaviors: passive, 4.3%, voluntary behavior, 6.4%, assertive behavior, 8.5%, innate behavior 12.8%.

Figure 1. Types of behavior



4.1.1 Passive behavior

Passive behavior could be observed especially when teachers use videos to motivate and explain certain topics. At that time, most boys and girls are

not motivated to do anything other than watching the video. One time, in a math logic class, a boy stood up from his position and tried to get some of his classmates to play with him, but they ignored him. Faced with this attitude, the boy began to play

with Play-Doh. His face showed a certain attitude of submission and frustration: if no one wants to play with him, he does it alone, without fighting or insisting (FD 21-10-2019). Despite his interest in playing with his teammates, he opted for a quiet and passive activity. This way it is shown that passive behavior is the accumulation of behaviors that will vary depending on the needs of their context, in addition, the individual interrupts or eliminates his/her own interests (Castillero, 2018).

4.1.2 *Assertive behavior*

More assertive behaviors were observed during the initial activities. One day at the beginning of the school day, as the students arrived, they stood up and did not want to sit in their positions to start the class. The teacher started counting 1, 2, 3... so that the children who were standing would sit, but very few sat. However, when they saw that most of their classmates began to sit down, they quickly left their backpacks in their lockers, sat down and continued counting on the teacher who had already started the initial activities (FD 06-11-2019). In this way the assertive behavior develops, since they accept their limits and present skills that aim to develop in their environment and interact with peers (Cuadros, 2018).

4.1.3 *Innate behavior*

At the end of the school day, when the teacher indicated that the children who would exit on Batallas Street,¹ they needed to take their backpacks to get down, and the other children would stay in the classroom, as they needed to be guided to their respective routes. At that moment a boy came crying to me, he said: “teacher, are you going to stay? because I don’t want to stay here, I want to go home” (FD 21-10-2019). Thus, it was observed that innate behavior, in this case fear and insecurity, is part of the person who manifests it as a type of pre-established behavior (Castillero, 2018). Thus, the child demonstrates an affective biological need to search for safety as something innate.

4.1.4 *Aggressive behavior*

One day, as the students arrived to computer classes, they sat leaning against the wall as the teacher sang ‘my fingers’ and placed children on each computer. At that moment a boy started pushing his classmate and his classmate tried to bite his hand while the teacher called them, but they did not pay attention, since they were fighting among them (FD 21-10-2019). This is how aggressive behavior was observed, since according to Bandura’s research, it is mentioned that there is a high probability that aggressive behavior is repeated because it increases the aggressive willingness at the time of observing it (García and Ocaña, 2018)

Another day it was observed that the children went to the break and Nico² and Alan started to play as if they were policemen, they took a girl with both arms and they pulled her from one side to the other, pushed and the girl fell to the ground, then they began to press her back and the girl started to cry. I had to separate them because the teacher did not notice what happened (FD. 30-10-2019). In this way, it is shown that the aggressive behavior represented by the child physically or verbally is developed with the aim of mastering and reaching their own needs, regardless of the welfare of others (Castillero, 2018).

According to Barbero (2018) “aggressive behavior is inevitable in all living beings, since this behavior is due to one of the most primary impulses, which also appears to guarantee our survival” (p. 41). In addition, children manifest aggressive behavior when they play, as they start from their impulses depending on the environment or what has caused inconvenience to their interests (Armijos, 2017). Teachers agree with the authors to some extent but have different views. Teacher 1 mentioned that there is no aggressive behavior in children, but attention should be paid when they play since children do not measure their strength and can attack their partner without any intention. While Teacher 2 stated that there is more aggressive behavior in boys than in girls and these behaviors occur more often during class hours.

¹ The educational institution has two exits: one for children who go home with the school bus and another through Batallas Street, in which parents pick up the kids.

² Fictitious names used in the investigation to preserve their identity.

In addition, teacher 2 points out that there is a student with a high IQ level, which must adapt to the level and learning pace of all the peers since their parents have asked for it. However, the child is bored with the topics discussed in class and demonstrates aggressive behavior in the absence of attention from a teacher, arguing that aggressive behavior is manifested for several reasons: for being frustrated when performing some activity, fear of the unknown; for lack of attention or because these previously behavioral patterns are increasingly stable (Bouquet *et al.*, 2019).

4.1.5 *Acquired behavior*

On one of the school days, as the students were entering the classroom, the teacher gave them play-dough, puzzles, plastic ladders or rosettes, Ezekiel³ was building planes with plastic ladders and making them fly, her sister also saw him making planes with plastic ladders and started running around the classroom making the plane fly (FD 30-10-2019). This behavior shows that such behavior is part of the own experience, an example or a model transmitted directly or indirectly through observation (Castillero, 2018).

In the interview, teachers 1 and 2 mention that the acquired behavior that boys and girls develop may be a reflection of what the environment at home is like and try to express it in the classroom, reason for which it is inferred that the behavior of children can be mostly acquired from family or friends who are in their close environment or transmitted through observation in television programs or video games (Castillero, 2018).

4.1.6 *Voluntary behavior*

One day, at the time of the meal, the teacher placed antibacterial gel in the hands of the children to be able to serve food. When the teacher began to distribute, Joaquín⁴ got up and said: “I want to help you distribute the food”, then the teacher assigned her the task of placing a spoon on each plate and carefully delivering each plate of food to her companions (FD 06-11-2019). In the act described above,

such conduct is affirmed by carrying out an action voluntarily and consciously. In addition, it neglects the well-being of other people to meet their own needs (Castillero, 2018).

4.2 *Vicarious learning*

Vicarious learning means transporting, because once the information is obtained in a symbolic way, different behaviors or attitudes are transmitted from the observed to the observer. This type of learning is an inquiry process about the organization of the behavior and the events that take place in the environment, so that the information is transformed into symbolic imitations that serves as a guide for the execution (Bandura, 1986). In addition, it focuses on the observation of different behaviors that are considered by the person to represent in a similar way; here reference is made to Albert Bandura’s experiment on the “Bobo doll” (Rodríguez and Cantero, 2020).

Vicarious learning has mediation processes that influence learning, which are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. This process is necessary, and it plays a very important role because it helps to understand how the previously observed is internalized so that it becomes meaningful learning. In addition, it should be considered that the observed person should call the attention of observers for such behavior to be repeated in a similar way (Jara *et al.*, 2018).

Both positive and negative reinforcement are involved in vicarious learning. The first one has the objective of offering a desirable stimulus after performing a certain behavior. Through this reinforcement, which is presented physically or verbally, a conditioning is sought with a stimulus, so that the emitted response increases the likelihood of repeating it in a similar way (Megías and Llano, 2019). Negative reinforcement is intended to cause the person to increase the response of a particular behavior by eliminating the stimulus. This reinforcement is negative, since it does not consider any attitude, behavior or completely ignores it, causing the behavior to be repeated (Herrera, 2019).

3 Fictitious names used in the investigation to preserve their identity.

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Below is what could be observed during the investigation:

4.2.1 *Mediation processes*

Behavioral learning was observed through mediation processes when students returned tired from the park and asked for water. A child began to play with the glass full of water, as two of his classmates paid attention to what his peer was doing, later the observed behavior was reproduced by the two students, having as motivation the laughter of all their classmates to see them as they play with the glass of water (FD 30-10-2019).

At another time, during classes on the relationship with the natural cultural environment, mediation processes were observed when a child begins to run around the classroom and hit objects that he finds on his way, time later the child who observed such behavior did the same (FD 21-10-2019). In the previously described, the four mediation processes are evident: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

In this way, children perform mediation processes recognizing different roles that their peers reproduce in the educational space, thus increasing or reinforcing the behaviors that were imitated (Zurita, 2018).

4.3 **Positive reinforcement**

During the break, the teacher indicated that those who had eaten all food could go to the playground. At that moment, Romina headed to the baskets that were ordered and begins to throw the pieces of wood to the floor until finding the one that she wanted. The teacher observes and seeing that she leaves all the watered pieces on the floor makes the positive reinforcement (FD 21-10-2019).

4.4 **Negative reinforcement**

The negative reinforcement was observed when the teacher started teaching natural and social relationship classes and Samuel was the only child who was standing playing with his glasses, asking his classmates if they wanted to play with him, finally, he was spinning in the classroom playing with his glasses. Despite this, the teacher did not say anything, and he continued with his classes (FD 23-10-2019).

5. **Discussion and conclusions**

Throughout the research it was possible to identify vicarious learning in children by observing behaviors during classes, many of which are mediated by their family environment. Due to the scope of the investigation, it could not be determined whether these are mediated by television programs or the Internet. During the time the research lasted, there were different behaviors that the children represented, and these do not have a certain pattern. In addition, everything influences these behaviors such as what they expect, what children need and even the space. Assertive, acquired, voluntary, passive and innate behaviors are evident while in class, in more calm activities, while aggressive behavior is repeatedly observed in free spaces, related to play or when there are changes in the activity. However, depending on the type of behavior, they do not always have a positive or negative reinforcement by the teacher. Another aspect that is striking is that the type of aggressive behavior occurs in a rather high percentage than the rest of the behaviors, along with the acquired behavior.

Regarding the processes of vicarious learning, it was observed that there are processes that develop by a sum of responses that makes it possible to remember and manifest the observed action, which is cataloged as mediation by means of the attention to observing a certain behavior performed by another person; the retention to assimilate the observed; the reproduction to execute any behavior evidenced almost exactly and the motivation to receive any type of stimulus after performing the observed. In addition, the type of positive reinforcement influences the moment of doing a reward in a tangible way when giving sweets, toys or intangible as a congratulation for some assertive behavior. Also, the positive reinforcement is observed when correcting the aggressive behavior, always noting that their actions were not correct. In contrast, negative reinforcements are presented by ignoring any aggressive manifestations of the child. The interesting and worrying thing that could be determined in the research is that the teachers intervene occasionally, since they perceive the aggressive behavior as a normal expression of their age or as reactions to situations uncomfortable for kids, i.e., just simply child's play, since they do not always consider that some behaviors are aggressi-

ve or at other times, they do not perceive that such behaviors occur among peers.

Although the subject of vicarious learning is broad and interesting, and there are several studies related to the subject in relation to other academic levels -since it is almost invisible in basic education - it is not taken into account in a pedagogical way or is not a focused topic that involves initial education, although it is one of the first approaches to the educational field where children will develop and enhance their skills. For these reasons, the teachers are not aware of the subject and consider that the behaviors of the children are due to other factors according to their age in relation to development and interaction between peers, so they do not intervene during aggressive behaviors through more explicit mediation processes or there are not always positive reinforcements that are appropriate and can have the expected results.

At the beginning of their school years, it is essential that children observe various behaviors, especially positive in the environment around them, including the educational space. The teacher must play an important role, and, in this way, the kids will develop observed behaviors that, in addition to improving their behavior, also helps them significantly in a pedagogical way to recognize, identify and better assimilate the knowledge acquired through observation and using didactic materials. It is often claimed that children absorb everything observed from their immediate environment, as shown by Albert Bandura in his experiment with the Bobo Doll, stating that everyone learns through observation. These observations should generate wide and varied behaviors, especially when infants are in freer and less controlled spaces. Another aspect to consider is the mediation processes that the teacher must perform, encouraging above all positive reinforcements in the face of aggressive behaviors manifested by children that generate difficulty in the interrelation between peers so that these behaviors are modified and eliminated, and students learn different ways of solving conflicts.

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