

HOMWORK AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT AREA

O DEVER DE CASA E SUA RELAÇÃO COM A ZONA DE DESENVOLVIMENTO PROXIMAL

LOS DEBERES Y SU RELACIÓN CON EL ÁREA DE DESARROLLO PROXIMAL

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ABSTRACT: This text proposes a reflection on a didactic instrument widely used in schools to complement the contents worked in class, homework. Starting from the scientific concept of the Proximal Development Zone (PDZ), developed by the Russian psychologist Lev Vigotski (2007), we seek to understand the meaning and significance of this policy, both for the school and for the family. The bibliographic review points out that this tool is a link between family and school, (CARVALHO, 2004; 2006; CARNEIRO 2010; OLIVEIRA; MARINHO ARAÚJO, 2010; RESENDE 2006; 2012; 2018), however, also reveals that school territories still need to reflect, study and discuss this policy-practice and its modes of use.

KEYWORDS: Education. Homework. Zone of proximal development. Family-school.

RESUMO: O presente texto propõe uma reflexão sobre um instrumento didático muito utilizado nas escolas para complementar os conteúdos trabalhados em classe, o dever de casa. Partindo do conceito científico de Zona de Desenvolvimento Proximal (ZPD), desenvolvido pelo psicólogo russo Lev Vigotski (2007), buscamos compreender o sentido e o significado dessa política, tanto para a escola quanto para a família. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo recorrendo-se uma revisão bibliográfica. Esta aponta que este instrumento de/para aprendizagem é um elo entre a família e a escola, (CARVALHO, 2004; 2006; CARNEIRO 2010; OLIVEIRA; MARINHO ARAÚJO, 2010; RESENDE, 2006; 2012; 2018), no entanto, revela também que os territórios escolares ainda necessitam refletir, estudar e discutir essa política-prática e seus modos de uso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Dever de casa. Zona de desenvolvimento proximal. Família-escola.

RESUMEN: Este texto propone una reflexión sobre un instrumento didáctico muy utilizado en las escuelas para complementar los contenidos trabajados en clase, los deberes. Partiendo del concepto científico de Zona de Desarrollo Proximal (ZPD), desarrollado por el psicólogo ruso Lev Vigotski (2007), buscamos comprender el significado y trascendencia de esta política, tanto para la escuela como para la familia. La revisión de la literatura señala que

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esta herramienta es un vínculo entre la familia y la escuela, (CARVALHO, 2004; 2006; CARNEIRO 2010; OLIVEIRA; MARINHO ARAÚJO, 2010; RESENDE 2006; 2012; 2018), sin embargo, también revela que los territorios escolares Todavía es necesario reflexionar, estudiar y discutir esta política-práctica y sus modos de uso.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educación. Deberes de la casa. Zona de desarrollo próximo. Escuela-familia.*

Introduction

Through a theoretical provocation about homework as a practical policy, carried out by Carvalho (2004), this article seeks to understand the sense and meaning of its uses in the relationship between family and school. This study joins an existing production on the subject, carried out by Carvalho (2004; 2005; 2006), Carneiro (2010), Oliveira, Marinho Araújo (2010) and Resende (2006; 2012; 2018), among others, however, it presents contributions to the understanding of the importance of the theme from the concept of Zone of Proximal Development developed in the work of Lev Vigotski.

The methodological path was built from the analysis of works published in the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation (BDTD, Portuguese initials) and SciELO, The Scientific Electronic Library Online. In the search performed for articles, theses and dissertations, the analysis category (key words) used was: *dever de casa* (homework). It is important to point out that this text is not just a literature review work, therefore, a chronological cut of the publications was not carried out, also considering that we have a very small number of research dealing with the subject.

Thus, this text initially discusses the contributions of scholars who are dedicated to research on homework, placing them in the field of educational research and then points out elements for understanding its importance through Psychology of Education.

Homework, family and school: notes for reflection

For Resende (2006), the prescription of school activities to be performed at home is not a recent practice. In a historical context, the author points out that from the last two decades of the 20th century onwards, there has been a more intense movement of intertwining between family and school around the performance of extra-class activities.

Carvalho (2006) points out that traditionally homework has been considered a teaching strategy in the school curriculum: an exercise of revision, reinforcement, fixation,

which serves to prepare the student for subsequent content or for an eventual assessment. The author argues that it is important to understand homework as a practical policy, as it comprises formal and informal, explicit and implicit discourses and practices, involving various social actors, in addition to government guidelines (CARVALHO, 2004, p. 94).

In the Brazilian territory, homework works as an explicit policy, an instrument for regulating families in relation to school, in part, the objective of this control is justified in favor of school achievement. Soares (2011) understands homework as a political issue and argues that the school, through these activities, extends to the students' families the educational values it advocates.

Despite the recurrent criticisms that have been made, whether for its excess, or for its mechanical repetition of the contents that are worked on in class, homework, over time, came to be seen as an educational need recognized by parents and teachers, that is, it became the main means of interaction between family and school.

Oliveira and Marinho-Araújo (2010, p. 101, our translation), explain the divergences between these two socializing agencies:

The divergence between school and family is in the task of teaching, with the first having the function of favoring the learning of socially constructed knowledge in a given historical moment, of expanding the possibilities of social coexistence and also of legitimizing a social order, while the second has the task of promoting children's socialization, including the learning of behavioral patterns, attitudes and values accepted by society.

Marques (1999) emphasizes the existence of a partnership between family and school and claims that one of the main homework strategies is the involvement of parents in learning activities at home, participation in carrying out work, projects and homework.

In a critique of this perspective, Oliveira and Marinho-Araújo (2010) point out that such parental involvement attitudes are reduced to collaboration in their children's activities and performance. According to the authors, expectations regarding the participation of parents involve monitoring the homework or the formation of the student in terms of discipline, respect and appropriate behavior.

Carvalho (2004) understands that homework is an integral part of the teaching-learning process, however, he recognizes that its implementation affects students' lives outside of school and their family routine, as it assumes the connection between classroom and home activities, and an adequate domestic structure supporting school activities. When carrying out an analysis of the work of Clark (1993), Eric (2000), Henderson and Berla (1994), Carvalho (2004) identifies a clear preponderance of assessments favorable to the

productivity of homework in terms of academic achievement. For the author, the activities focus on "areas such as learning difficulties, compensatory education programs, motivations and values of families and students, and the conceptual relevance of the task, in the context of planning and evaluating teaching" (CARVALHO, 2004, p. 96, our translation).

For Franco (2002 *apud* RESENDE, 2008), homework is considered as any pedagogical activity elaborated and proposed by teachers, intended for students' work outside the regular period of classes. Generally, the activities that are sent for students to do at home are an extension of what was developed in the class. Many pedagogical proposals believe that it is through this practice of repetition that learning is consolidated. Whether you agree or not, the fact is that in all schools the "traditional" homework prevails.

Understood as an integral part of the teaching-learning process, homework can also be seen as a way to keep the student busy at home, but its excess castrates the free time that is so necessary for the exercise of creativity and the child's autonomy. However, it cannot be ignored that the extra-class activity, if well programmed and previously planned, can positively interfere in class learning.

Understood as a formative policy that shapes family-school relationships, homework still needs further studies in the field of educational research. In his master's research, Soares (2011) carried out a thorough search on the websites of the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation (BDTD) and the National Association and Postgraduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPEd, Portuguese initials) in order to understand and highlight the most relevant research on the subject from 2000 to 2009. The author's findings reveal a low incidence of works related to the subject, thus demonstrating a scarce investment in research and publications.

From the perspective that in the field of school practices, homework is practically unanimous. Carneiro (2010) points out that the reasons for its prescription are justified by the valuing of a cognitive development that allows an autonomous and self-regulated behavior of the student, as well as in the neoliberal discourse that, linked to education, values the techniques of organization and strategic thinking (CARNEIRO, 2010, p. 36).

Considered a link between family and school, Resende (2006) points out that the excessive use of homework has become popular in the last two decades. When carrying out a macro analysis of the political situation, Soares (2011) highlights that it is in this period that the neoliberal discourse of schools as an efficiency engine is intensified, stimulating individual and institutional competitiveness and that from that moment on, the responsibility of families for school achievement became more evident.

Resende et al. (2018) sought to understand different conceptions and practices around homework in schools that develop projects to extend the school day. After a field research carried out through questionnaires, the researchers found data that indicate an intensification of conflicts around homework and the division of educational work between family and school.

In a recent research, Suehiro and Boruchovitch (2019) point out that school progress and success are associated with motivation to read and student involvement in performing different types of tasks.

According to Suehiro and Boruchovitch (2019, p. 1-2, our translation):

Homework or home task is an after-school activity that students should do at home, with the aim of reviewing and studying what they learned during class. It can involve from readings, writing exercises, problem solving and research, to other tasks of different complexities.

The authors also found that homework can become complex and demotivating, considering that reading, one of the main vehicles for disseminating information, has been permeated by many difficulties, especially in the Brazilian context. Also in this research, the authors discuss the importance of intrinsic motivation and extend that this is qualitatively the best form of engagement and the one that provides more expressive learning outcomes (SUEHIRO; BORUCHOVITCH, 2019, p. 2).

To Suehiro and Boruchovitch (2019, p. 2, our translation):

In general, students with this type of motivation show better school performance and deeper information processing; more effective and sophisticated learning strategies; psychological well-being; adequate self-perception of competence; and low levels of anxiety.

Criticism aside, homework is an important resource when it comes to school achievement, because by taking to the family environment what is worked on at school, the child has the possibility to reframe or re-elaborate what was not very clear in the moment of the class and this can happen through the mediation of a more instrumentalized other. However, what research has revealed is that an extrinsic motivation model based on reward and academic performance prevails, reasons external to the student, especially when it comes to children.

When it comes to children, the collaboration of parents in the learning process has a central value, as their social roles legitimize the connection between what is learned at school

and the world of everyday life, reaffirming the bonds of affection and responsibility that are so necessary for the full development of the human being.

However, even knowing the responsibility that is implicit to them, many parents outsource the task of monitoring their children's development and academic performance to school boards and tutors. There are also cases of parents who, for lack of time or patience, end up doing the task for their children, which impairs learning and reinforces in the child's thinking, the idea of homework as a burden or something that parents seek to find ways to free the children from. The actions are taken, in general, as a result of pressures, obligations, deadlines, rewards, punishments and threats, among other reasons (SUEHIRO; BORUCHOVITCH, 2019, p. 2).

When studying the views and experiences of teacher mothers and mothers in relation to homework, Carvalho and Burity (2005) highlight that these confirm the school's discourse of valuing homework, however, its realization in the context of the family reveals contradictions. The analysis of the content of the interviews contrasts with what the interviewees say: "it is in the poorest strata of the population, whose children attend public schools, that these clashes are more strongly evident, suggesting that homework may be having an opposite effect on expected benefits of it" (SOARES, 2011, p. 43, our translation).

Homework and the Proximal Development Zone

In this text, based on Vigostski (2007), I defend the importance of home activities as a way of anticipating what happens in the school context. That is, I understand that such activities should be planned in order to promote the development of students, considering what they already know, the Real Development Zone (RDZ), and what they can learn on their own or with the help of another more experienced partner, Proximal Development Zone (PDZ).

In the school context, children and teachers through their interactions can activate Zones of Proximal Development in teaching-learning situations and through the resolution of activities and tasks. The quality of interactions established at school, between teacher-student and student-student, can favor learning, as it is through these interactions that the Proximal Development Zones are triggered, which allows the teacher to better understand the teaching process and rhythm of your class's development.

According to Fino (2001), development consists of a learning process that takes place through social interactions with more experienced others. In this sense, we can understand

that the concept of Proximal Development Zone, postulated by Vigotski (2007), refers to this child's experience with adults or with a more experienced partner.

A fundamental aspect of Vygotski's work related to social interaction is mediation, an important concept in cultural-historical theory. For this author, our actions in the physical and social world never happen directly, but rather mediated and indirect, through symbols and signs and other individuals.

According to Rego (2014), in the development of the cultural-historical theory, advocated by Vygotski, the teacher's role in the mediation of students' learning occupies a central place, as it is this that allows the student, through their interventions, to jump from a level of development to another.

About this Vigotski (2007, p. 98, our translation) adds that:

The Proximal Development Zone provides psychologists and educators with an instrument through which is possible to understand the inner course of development. Using this method, we can account not only for the maturation cycles and processes that have already been completed, but also for those processes that are in a formative state, that is, that are just beginning to mature and develop.

According to Vigotski (2007), the Zone of Proximal Development characterizes mental development in a prospective way. This approach is interesting when we think about development in its possibility of becoming, that is, what the child can learn in interaction with others and with the symbols and instruments developed by the culture.

According to Fino (2001, p. 6, our translation):

The ZDP provides psychologists and educators with a tool through which the internal course of development can be understood, and that the use of this method can allow considering the cycles and processes of maturation that are already complete, in addition to those that are in state of formation.

Based on the knowledge of this theory and its main concepts, such as the Proximal Development Zone, it is understood that the teacher in their pedagogical practice can make use of homework as a mechanism to promote learning. This implies thinking that extra-class activities can be designed to broaden the class's perception of what has already been discussed in class, bring challenges, provoke questions, favor the development of intrinsic motivation and, above all, stimulate the constant scientific spirit of research.

It is interesting to mention here the relevance of knowledge on the part of educators about the process of human development, considering that it directs the possible paths that

individuals must follow in their maturation process, as well as pointing out the psychological functions that have already matured.

Still on this, Vigotski (2007, p. 97, our translation) highlights:

The distance between the actual level of development, which is usually determined through independent problem solving, and the potential level of development, determined through problem solving under the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers.

This position by Vigotski (2007) makes clear the importance of the role of the teacher and other social subjects in the process of human development, as well as pointing to the quality of the interactions proposed in school spaces.

From this perspective, in which it is assumed that learning advances to development, we can think about the relationship between the classes that take place in schools, the activities carried out there and those that are determined for the child to perform at home. What is observed in everyday school practices is the regulated fulfillment of an agenda from which children and their families cannot escape. For Carvalho (2006), the legitimization of homework as a formal policy has serious implications for an equity project in school education.

Based on the observation that the use of homework is a constant reality in Brazilian schools, it is necessary to think about the meaning and sense of this policy. Mitjans Martínez and Rey (2017) argue that the educational process is complex and has different dimensions, and reducing it to its psychological, content-based dimension would imply a psychologization of education.

For most parents, homework comprises the occupation of another shift in which the child is not at school, but continues to carry out activities guided by it. However, for children, this excess of activities often compromises their moments of leisure and artistic creation. Starting from the premise that parents understand homework as a school obligation and even as a parameter to assess school quality, it is important to reflect on the psychological dimension of this strategy in the field of education.

To understand the meaning and sense that homework acquires in the educational process, as well as its uses in the family-school relationship, it is necessary to clarify these concepts in the light of cultural-historical theory. Aguiar (2015) points out that Vygotski makes a distinction between one and the other and “evidences the dialectic of the constitution of consciousness, the integration between affective and cognitive, the social, historical and unique character of the subject” (AGUIAR, 2015, p. 129, our translation).

Aguiar (2015, p. 129, our translation), mentions - that for Vygotski:

Meaning is a relatively stable social construction, of conventional origin. Man, at birth, finds a system of meanings, ready, historically elaborated. On the other hand, meaning is the sum of psychological events that the word evokes in consciousness. Meaning is constituted, therefore, from the confrontation between current social meanings and personal experience.

Oliveira (2009), also based on the theory of Vigotski (2007), explains that meaning refers to the system of objective relationships that is formed throughout history and that is shared by all people and the sense is the affective meaning of experiences for each individual. From this perspective, we can understand homework as a policy with a broad, governmental, regulatory meaning, as its sense is only perceived differently by each child within their families.

Carvalho (2006, p. 88, author's highlights, our translation), explains:

As the main vehicle of family-school interaction, it is more than a cultural practice or an informal policy developed by families and schools and their agents (parents and teachers): it is in fact a formal policy (fairly regulated) which articulates the educational efforts of these institutions, therefore, through it the family (and its accompaniment or omission, from the point of view of the school) becomes an object of educational policy. On the one hand, like school work transferred to home, homework can be a defensive strategy against demanding state responsibility to provide sufficient formal education, quantitatively and qualitatively. On the other hand, it can consist of a strategy for regulating private life through public policy, through the instruction or disciplining of the family by the school.

Linked to family life, homework over time has gained different connotations. As for its sense, it is clear that the wealthier families, who have more resources to meet the demands of the schools, perceive it as a kind of reinforcement, which guarantees better performance in school subjects. On the other hand, economically disfavored families have greater difficulties to operationalize the excess activities. "From the family's perspective, homework can be a legitimate need and a desirable practice, or a burden and an imposition, depending on variable material and symbolic conditions, falling particularly on mothers" (CARVALHO, 2006, p. 88- 89, our translation).

Final considerations

This text proposed to raise a reflection on the ways of using homework by schools and in the context of families. The analysis undertaken here did not intend to condemn or defend this practice, which is already part of Western school culture, however, it raises reflections on

the senses and meanings that are implied in this educational policy and seeks to encourage new/other studies and research involving psychological knowledge.

The literature review indicated that, in capitalist societies, the routine use of homework and its quantity implies changes in family relationships. Therefore, children from wealthier families have more technological and personal resources to carry out their tasks. “This objectively places different families in unequal positions in the school market, as they do not have identical material and cultural conditions to face this role” (RESENDE, 2012, p. 163, our translation).

The expansion of this practice reveals a scenario that proved to be very favorable to the emergence of educational franchises specializing in school reinforcements and that serve a portion of society that has more financial resources. Soares (2011) believes that there is a “fundamental interference of the economic-cultural origin of families in the school success of their children, pointing out the monitoring of school tasks and supervision of studies by parents as items that generate this success” (SOARES, 2011, p. 43, our translation).

The survey of texts and research on homework also indicate that there is a legitimacy of the entire educational system regarding its use, even though a good part of the families use it as an indicator of school quality. Marinho-Araújo and Oliveira (2010) point out that the monitoring of these tasks by families tends to reduce significantly with the beginning of adolescence.

In this social context, briefly outlined in the literature, we can think of the child in the perspective suggested by Filho (2012), as a “mini-executive”, who goes to school one shift and attends English, math and other reinforcement classes in the other and the families, justifying the lack of time, outsource their responsibilities. Inserted in this adult-centric routine, it is logical that there is no time for the child to play, experiment, invent, which compromises their capacity for creativity and imagination, processes of great importance in the formation of psychic development.

In the context of historical-cultural theory in Psychology, Mitjans Martínez and Rey (2017) reinforce the importance of the concept of Proximal Development Zone as a difference/distance between what the child can do alone, Real Development Zone, or with the help of a more experienced one. Based on the idea defended in this text, which maintains that homework can contribute to the development of higher psychological processes, considering the child's Proximal Development Zone in a coherent manner, we understand that the sensible use of this policy can be a great ally in educational process.

Finally, we conclude that homework is a strategy that enhances learning and that can and should be used from the beginning of the child's schooling, however, it should also be considered that factors such as intrinsic motivation and emotional impacts interfere with learning. Therefore, it is assumed that it is not enough for homework to dialogue only with the child's Proximal Development Zone, it is necessary to think about its meaning as a formal policy from the perspective of the curriculum and the way in which it is worked in schools, as well as about the sense of their fulfillment for students and their families.

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