

THE CONTINUOUS TRAINING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS: CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE HISTORICAL-CULTURAL THEORY

A FORMAÇÃO CONTINUADA DE PROFESSORES DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA TEORIA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL

LA FORMACIÓN CONTÍNUA DE PROFESORES DE LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL: CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA TEORÍA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL

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ABSTRACT: The continuous training of Early Childhood Education teachers has been recurrent theme of studies and discussion. These seek reflections and the consequent improvement in the teaching quality, aiming to favor the learning process of the young child. This present article shows contributions of the Historical-Cultural Theory in the continuous training of teachers, supporting it. In this way it consider it like relevant element to the qualification of the education work and this, in turn, indispensable to the integral human formation. According to vygotskian approach, the humanation happens through the Education, this process capable to potencialize the cognitive, affective and social development of the child in the first step of the Basic Education. As a result the teaching work is highlighted through planned and intentional actions that promote the full development of the child.

KEYWORDS: Continuous training. Early childhood education. Humanation process. Historical-cultural theory.

RESUMO: *A formação continuada de professores da Educação Infantil tem sido tema recorrente de estudos e debates. Estes buscam reflexões e a consequente melhoria na qualidade social do ensino, visando favorecer o processo de aprendizagem da criança pequena. O presente artigo apresenta contribuições da Teoria Histórico-Cultural na formação continuada de professores, fundamentando-a. Desta forma, a considera como relevante elemento para a qualificação do trabalho educativo e esta, por sua vez, imprescindível para a formação humana integral. De acordo com a abordagem vigotskiana, a humanização acontece por meio da Educação, processo esse capaz de potencializar o desenvolvimento cognitivo, afetivo e social da criança na primeira etapa da Educação Básica. Como resultado destaca-se o trabalho docente por meio de ações planejadas e intencionais que promovam o pleno desenvolvimento da criança.*

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Formação continuada. Educação infantil. Processo de humanização. Teoria histórico-cultural.*

RESUMEN: *La formación continua de profesores de la Educación infantil viene siendo tema recurrente de estudios y debates. Estos buscan reflexiones y consiguiente mejoras en la calidad de la enseñanza, con el objetivo de favorecer el proceso de aprendizaje del niño pequeño. El presente artículo presenta contribuciones de la Teoría Histórico-Cultural de la formación continua de profesores fundamentándola. Por lo tanto, se considera como relevante elemento para la calificación del trabajo educativo y esta, por su vez, imprescindible para la formación humana integral. De acuerdo con el abordaje Vigostskiana, la humanización ocurre por medio de la Educación, proceso que es capaz de potencializar el desarrollo cognitivo, afectivo y social del niño en la primera fase de la Educación básica. Como resultado se destaca el trabajo docente por medios de acciones planificadas e intencionales que promuevan el pleno desarrollo del niño.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Formación continua. Educación infantil. Proceso de humanización. Teoría histórico-cultural.*

Introduction

This study presents reflections on the contribution of Historical - Cultural Theory (HCT) for the continuing education of early childhood education teachers, as well as its impact on the learning process of young children. Thus, based on the cultural-historical perspective, we argue that continuing education should meet the socioeconomic context in which the institution, the teacher, and the students are inserted.

According to this perspective, education becomes the most important means for the appropriation of what has been historically and culturally produced by mankind. That is, it is through social relations and interactions that the process of civilization and the appropriation of cultural goods built throughout human history are consolidated.

In the historical-dialectical materialist method, which underlies HCT, both work and education, as well as the relationships established in these processes, are factors that make us human. This is because our needs make it possible for us to set goals and plan actions and, in order to accomplish them, we transform nature and ourselves, humanizing ourselves.

Early Childhood Education is configured as the first stage of Basic Education, responsible for integral human development. In this regard, the Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (LDBEN), n. 9.493/96, states, in its article 29, that this stage "[...] aims at the full development of the child up to five years of age, in its physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and the community"

(BRAZIL, 1996). Thus, going beyond the scope of care, Early Childhood Education institutions came to be considered training and educational spaces, whose commitment is based on expanding the possibilities for child development in order to contribute to their full development.

Considering the purpose of this stage, the need arose to expand studies and discussions about early childhood, the period that precedes the beginning of schooling. This important period requires that the educational work and pedagogical practices be focused on making the child's learning effective and, thus, contributing to his or her full development. Therefore, in view of the advances that permeate the studies on Early Childhood Education, it is essential that the continuing education of teachers who work at this stage contemplate them.

The article is organized in two sections. First, we discuss the implications of HCT in Early Childhood Education, as well as the close relationship between the humanization process and education. We also discuss the Activity Theory and mediation, according to the Cultural-Historical perspective. Considering this theoretical approach, we reflect about the teaching activity.

Subsequently, we approached the continued formation as the main element of qualification of the educational work, specifically in Kindergarten. As final considerations, we emphasize the need to develop a teaching work that promotes learning and, consequently, the development of young children through planned and intentional activities. Therefore, it is necessary that continuing education results in didactic actions that promote an educational process that humanizes and emancipates.

Implications of the Historical-Cultural Theory for the formation of the child in Early Childhood Education

The Historical-Cultural Theory is constituted, in this study, as the main theoretical support, for allowing the understanding of the complexity of the educational process, besides attributing to education a relevant role in the process of humanization of the human being. Thus, we point to some principles of this theory to understand the intense learning phase that children experience in early childhood.

For Mello (2009), HCT establishes a relationship between teaching, learning, and development. For this, the researcher points out a concept of child that characterizes it as a being "able to learn since birth and, because it learns, it develops, it appropriates human qualities socially and historically given in its environment and accessible to its activity"

(MELLO, 2009, p. 373). This concept should be discussed in institutions of Early Childhood Education, involving the professionals who work there: teachers, assistants and caregivers, extending to the whole school community. The discussion aims to overcome the thought that one should wait for the child to grow up to teach him something, as if there was an exact moment when he is ready to learn.

The thinking advocated by Mello (2009) refers to a new vision of the child, of childhood, and of Early Childhood Education,

[...] arising from the understanding that the child has unlimited learning capacity, is capable of humanizing actions, relationships, coexistence with other children and adults in their environment, constituting their human social nature, through appropriations and motivating objectivations of their cultural development. Thus, the expectation we have about the child, the place assigned to him/her in society in general and, in particular, in the educational space and, fundamentally, the learning opportunities we offer, strengthen this new understanding: the child as a person with his/her own rights, particularities, and interests to be expanded through the relationships experienced inside and outside the school of childhood. Resulting from this new look on the child, there is also a new meaning for early childhood education as a possibility of humanization, arising from intentional and conscious processes of teaching and learning of children from their birth (LIMA; SILVA; RIBEIRO, 2010, p. 16).

In view of this conception, we understand that the teaching work in Early Childhood Education becomes essential in the development of relationships that the child establishes both with his surroundings and with his peers. Thus, for learning to occur, it is necessary to think about the child's interaction process with the surrounding world. In this context, the school environment is a privileged space and, in it, the teacher is the main mediator of interventions that favor the development of the higher psychological functions; especially, at this stage, attention, imagination, sensitivity, creation, and language. In this regard, Chaves *et al.* (2012, p. 47-48) explain that:

The Historical-Cultural Theory understands human development from the perspective of culture and mediated activities between individuals, [...] it is of utmost importance the teacher's role as a mediator in the children's development process and in the quality of the relationships established with them, because in this way children learn practical actions, essential to act in society.

HCT defends the child's access to systematized and historically constructed knowledge, as well as the intentional educational practice based on scientific knowledge. In this way, "[...] the pedagogical organization of the school is strengthened when the didactic procedures and the organization of the school routine are an expression of the cultural wealth produced by all men" (CHAVES; LIMA; GROTH, 2012, p. 11). That is, all spaces and the time children spend in educational institutions should be surrounded by activities that enhance specifically human capacities.

As Mello (2007, p. 88) explains, HCT guides us to understand that each child learns to become human. What nature provides at birth is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to move their development. It is necessary to appropriate the human experience created and accumulated throughout history. Only in the social relationship with more experienced partners do the new generations internalize and appropriate the typically human psychic functions, such as speech, thought, control over their own will, and the symbolic function of consciousness. Such functions not only form and develop their intelligence, but also their personality. This movement is called by Leontiev (1978) the process of humanization and, therefore, education, which we will discuss below.

Education and the role of the teacher in the humanization process

In the Marxist dialectical perspective, the humanization process is related to the social and cultural relations present in society, being fundamental the understanding of the concept of culture. For Malanchen (2019), the concept of culture is articulated to the historical process of human formation, considering the man-nature relationship⁴. In this relationship, work is configured as a central category, since it is the main action of the human being to modify nature. Through work, then, man transforms the environment and, in this way, produces culture and humanizes himself.

Thus, the formation of man, as a social being, brings as a fundamental principle the need to be in a condition to survive and make history. In this context, humanization occurs when the mediation of work, in the relationship of human beings with nature, begins to produce culture, and this enhances their psychic functions, differentiating them from other animals (MALANCHEN, 2019).

⁴ Malanchen (2019) states that in this process of man-nature relationship, through work, the production of culture is constituted together with the process of humanization, that is, the "hominized" man transforms himself and nature in favor of meeting his vital needs, thus consciously initiating the production of his means of living.

Bernardes (2012) emphasizes that, by appropriating culture through relationships in society, man transforms the environment and himself, thus humanizing himself through sociocultural relationships. Malanchen (2019), in turn, explains that human beings are born with the biological characteristics of the human species. However, only by relating to other men, through language, does he acquire and accumulate material and intellectual culture. And it is in this relationship that he is constituted as a social and humanized being, through the mediation of labor during the periods of evolution of the human species, from its emergence to the present day.

Mello (2009) reports that in order to understand humanization as a consequence of the education process, it is necessary to consider culture as a source of these and, furthermore, that this is only possible when education goes beyond the transmission of school contents. It is essential to develop the subject's critical sense and capacity for argumentation. Therefore, to appropriate culture means to appropriate the social use for which its elements were created; for this, it is necessary to bring the teaching and learning processes closer and closer together. And it is through teaching that the teacher becomes the main mediator of learning.

[...] in the complex process of early childhood education, the teacher is a professional capable of creating mediating links between the child and the knowledge to be learned, in order to choose the best ways and content of the culture for the activity and, consequently, child learning (LIMA; SILVA; RIBEIRO, 2010, p. 17).

Thus, it is up to the teacher to create the necessary mediations according to the specificities of each child, in order to break with the alienated appropriation of culture and promote learning. In this educational process, the teacher starts to understand the child as

[...] citizen, bearer of rights, capable, strong, skilled, rich in symbologies and forms of expression, with a thousand faces, curious, with a desire for relationships and communication with other people. In other words, a person - albeit a small one - participating, active in the learning of knowledge and human relations. These teachers assume an important role of **cultural mediation** and social support, as they observe, listen, reflect, document and interpret the process performed by the child, questioning their own knowledge and certainties (LIMA; SILVA; RIBEIRO, 2010, p. 17, our emphasis).

This way, the teacher identifies the child as a social being, a developing subject, and, therefore, must respect his unique characteristics. Only then can we provide an education based on mediation, in which the child and the teacher are constituted as subjects and partners in the pedagogical practice.

Understanding the role of school education in the formation of the human being, therefore, implies recognizing that the humanization process that the individual goes through during sociocultural relations occurs in a collective way and, furthermore, that in this trajectory the appropriation of culture takes place.

In this regard, Duarte (2014) discusses the educational work as an act of producing humanization in each individual, through the set of relationships established among men, which are responsible for making them humanized. In this way, man is not born humanized, he is born as a human species that only becomes humanized through the relationships established with his peers and through interaction with more developed subjects. The privileged locus for such interactions, where the intentional educational work takes place, is the school space.

Activity theory and mediation from a historical-cultural perspective

As discussed in the previous section, we can see the importance of education in child development and in the formation of the individual. However, it becomes necessary to understand the role of the teacher in the mediation of teaching and the pedagogical practice directed to the student during the humanization process. Thus, it is observed that the humanization process is related to the appropriation of culture, which, according to Mello (2009), involves mediation and is permeated by intentionality, being inseparable from cognitive and affective aspects. At school, the process of culture appropriation and development of historically and socially created human qualities is mediated directly or indirectly by the teacher.

The concepts of culture, mediation, and activity are widely discussed in HCT. Mello (2009) explains the triad whose dynamics result in the process of humanization. In the process of culture appropriation, the author emphasizes that the school has as its primary function the mediation between teaching, learning, and human development. She also states that mediation happens through the activity of the subject that learns, and highlights as a fundamental element the relationship that the individual establishes with the culture he or she appropriates.

Saito and Oliveira (2018) state that teaching is fundamental to the humanization process and that for this reason it must be properly organized so that the subject appropriates scientific concepts. For Vygotsky, "Teaching would be totally unnecessary if it could only use what is already mature in development, if it itself were not the source of development and emergence of the new" (2001, p. 334). Thus, he warns that not just any teaching will promote psychic

development and with this he emphasizes the importance of "good teaching", that which is ahead of development.

Eidt and Duarte (2007) understand that the quality of the development of the higher psychic functions is not pertinent to any teaching, but depends on how it is organized and planned. That said, we can see that school education promotes, to some extent, the child's psychic abilities. However, the quality of these capacities should be analyzed according to how the teaching activity is organized and developed.

Duarte (2002) discusses the Activity Theory and indicates that it emerged in the field of psychology, with the studies of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria, under the Marxist theoretical support. He also points out that although the term has emerged specifically from the work of Leontiev, several authors eventually adopted this name to refer to the work of scholars of historical-cultural psychology.

To understand the Activity Theory it is necessary to understand the concept of activity proposed by Leontiev, namely: the molecular unit of human life that aims to guide the subject in the objective world.

In a stricter sense, that is, at the psychological level, it is the unity of life mediated by the psychological reflex, whose real function consists in that it orients the subject in the objective world. In other words, activity is not a reaction or a set of reactions, but a system that has structure, its internal transitions and transformations, its development (LEÓNTIEV, 1978, p. 66-67).

Santos and Asbahr (2020) point out that Leontiev, although he uses the concept of activity several times and at various times, does not present a static concept. This is dynamized and dialectically requalified, all the time, as a phenomenon of material life. The structure of activity is constituted, according to Leontiev (1978), by: necessity, motive, operation, action, conditions, and object.

Educational work, then, is configured as an activity of the teacher. It is worth noting that the educational work has the teaching activity as a structuring activity; however, it is not limited to it. Thus, when considering the dynamics of the concept, we recognize the importance of the training of this professional, especially, in our study, in continuing education, especially regarding reflection and change of attitude in pedagogical practice.

Continuous Training for Early Childhood Education teachers

Saito and Oliveira (2018) emphasize that teacher training should meet the specificities of the educational work with children, considering that education is a social right of all subjects; a subjective right guaranteed since the Federal Constitution of 1988. It is important that such training "[...] ensures enough theoretical knowledge to translate into humanizing pedagogical practices that present the knowledge historically elaborated by men, with decisive mediations of the professionals who will be daily with them" (SAITO; OLIVEIRA, 2018, p. 10).

For Franco and Longarezi (2011, p. 557), "the activity is the starting and arrival point of the professional formative process, as it enables direct approximation of the content of the formative action with their needs". Thus, it is understood that the constituent and constitutive elements of continuing education, in the cultural-historical perspective, are stimulators of the process of human-social development and contribute to overcoming ruptures between sense and meaning of this training.

We understand teaching activity as specific to the teacher. However, it presents a unity with the student's study activity. Thus, teaching in Early Childhood Education implies reflecting on the learning and development process of the child, from the first months of life to five years of age. Such reflection takes place in a continuous formative movement that analyzes the social relations established and the ways in which culture is appropriated.

The educational work, due to its complexity, is being transformed throughout the teaching career. Therefore, continuing education must consider the dynamics of the context of social practice, in order to verify how this practice is established. It is also important, in this formative process, to identify what teachers think about their own training and also how they aim to achieve new forms of improvement in the course of their teaching activity.

Hence, thinking about the organization of this formative movement makes us evaluate the conditions placed before the quality of the educational work and its contributions to the teaching and learning processes. And, by thinking reflexively about the teacher as the main mediator of these processes, we cannot fail to list the constant challenges to be overcome in education. Factors such as:

[...] the devaluation of the teaching profession, especially for work with children aged 0 to 5 years. This devaluation process reflects in the teacher's knowledge and doing, in which many are discouraged and even accommodated with the situation that involves low wages, crowded classrooms, extensive workload, multiplicity of functions and roles, health problems, among other issues (SILVA; OLIVEIRA, 2014, p. 70).

These questions make us uneasy about how to follow and defend a systematized continuing education in the face of so many difficulties to be solved. Therefore, according to Silva and Oliveira (2014, p. 71), we understand that "continuing education is urgent and necessary not merely to develop technical artifacts, but mainly as a space for dialogue, reflection and exchange of experiences. In this regard, the authors reaffirm the need for teachers to know the laws that govern education, so that:

[...] may demand more from the competent authorities, whether public or private entities. However, it is important to highlight the teachers' duties in the pedagogical work with children that should overcome the dichotomy between care and education, allowing by the process of organizing time and space, possibilities for knowledge, for learning and child development (SILVA; OLIVEIRA 2014, p. 71).

Even in the face of so many challenges, teachers assume a double task: both to overcome the difficulties and not to allow them to affect the quality of education, that is, "it is necessary to fight to establish oneself as a quality and capable professional" (SILVA; OLIVEIRA, 2014, p. 72). Given this scenario, continuing education is one of the ways of valuing the education professional, established by LDBEN n. 9.493/96. In its article 67, the law ensures continued professional development, salary progression, and periods reserved for studies, planning, and evaluation during working hours.

It is through continuing education that the teacher will be able to understand the problems of everyday school life, reflect on them and, thus, plan educational practices aimed at the full development of the child. Hence the importance of this training being based on and systematized in HCT. This approach is capable of enhancing cognitive development, generating reflections and possibilities for problem solving, and improving teachers' knowledge. In this way, HCT gives teachers who work in Early Childhood Education the opportunity to direct their pedagogical practice, with the goal of humanizing future generations.

By way of concluding remarks

Considering the theoretical contribution and the reflections about the process of humanization resulting from the education process, we emphasize the importance of continued education under the HCT perspective for teachers of Early Childhood Education. This perspective defends that the formative movement promotes "good teaching," that which is ahead of development, as Vygotsky (2001) reaffirms.

We understand that the continuing education of the Early Childhood Education teacher has specificities that require a theoretical and practical foundation that meets the context of his or her work. It is up to this training, then, to contribute so that the teacher rethinks the educational practice and plan it in order to favor the child's learning, enhancing their development. Thus, the continuing education of teachers working in Early Childhood Education can develop critical and reflective thinking about education as a process of appropriation of historically produced cultural goods. However, this will happen if the training, and its consequent educational practices, are intentionally planned in the light of HCT.

We reaffirm, therefore, that HCT as a presupposition for continuing education presents proposals and actions that consider both the needs of the teaching activity and the complexity of human development. As a result, we point out that the teaching work should promote learning and enhance the development of the child's higher psychic functions. In this way, if systematized, the teaching work aims to ensure that education results in the formation of humanized subjects.

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