

## TEACHING ACTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: FUNDAMENTALS OF EDUCATIONAL WORK IN THE LIGHT OF THE CULTURAL-HISTORICAL THEORY

### *AÇÃO DOCENTE NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL: FUNDAMENTOS DO TRABALHO EDUCATIVO À LUZ DA TEORIA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL*

### *LA ACCIÓN DOCENTE EN LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL: FUNDAMENTOS DEL TRABAJO EDUCATIVO A LA LUZ DE LA TEORÍA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL*

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**ABSTRACT:** The teacher's action is decisive for the educational work in childhood, therefore, this study aims to discuss the relationship between the teacher and the elaborated culture, as well as the influence of knowledge in the pedagogical relationship with children from 0 to 5 years old. The human development occurs through a cultural-historical process and the acquisition of knowledge occurs through the interaction of the subject with the environment and with others, reinforcing the need for teacher training as an element for the qualification of the educational work. The methodology used was bibliographic research based on Historical and Dialectical Materialism. The results indicate that Early Childhood Education as a space of systematized knowledge has the purpose of promoting the development of the child through proposals intentionally organized by the teacher. This research, therefore, corroborates the reiteration that teaching is the guiding axis for the development of the maximum human potentialities.

**KEYWORDS:** Education. Early childhood education. Teachers. Cultural-historical. Human development.

**RESUMO:** *A ação docente é decisiva para a o trabalho educativo na infância, portanto, este estudo tem o objetivo de discutir a relação entre o professor e a cultura elaborada, bem como a influência do conhecimento na relação pedagógica com crianças de 0 a 5 anos. O desenvolvimento humano ocorre por meio de um processo histórico-cultural e a aquisição de conhecimentos se dá pela interação do sujeito com o meio e com os outros, reforçando a*

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*necessidade de formação do professor como elemento de qualificação do trabalho pedagógico. Como metodologia optou-se pela pesquisa bibliográfica com base no Materialismo Histórico e Dialético. Os resultados indicam que a Educação Infantil como espaço do saber sistematizado tem a finalidade de promover o desenvolvimento da criança por meio de propostas intencionalmente organizadas pelo professor. Esta pesquisa corrobora, portanto, na reiteração de que o ensino é o eixo norteador para o desenvolvimento das máximas potencialidades humanas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação. Educação infantil. Professores. Histórico-cultural. Desenvolvimento humano.

**RESUMEN:** *La acción docente es decisiva para el trabajo educativo en la infancia, por lo tanto, este estudio tiene como objetivo discutir la relación entre el maestro y la elaborada cultura, así como la influencia del conocimiento en la relación pedagógica con los niños de 0 a 5 años. El desarrollo humano se produce a través de un proceso histórico-cultural y la adquisición de conocimientos se produce a través de la interacción del sujeto con el entorno y con otros, reforzando la necesidad de la formación docente como elemento de cualificación del trabajo pedagógico. Como metodología, se optó por la investigación bibliográfica basada en el Materialismo Histórico y Dialéctico. Los resultados indican que la Educación Infantil como espacio de conocimiento sistematizado tiene el propósito de promover el desarrollo del niño a través de propuestas organizadas intencionalmente por el docente. Esta investigación corrobora, por tanto, en la reiteración que la docencia es el motor para el desarrollo de las máximas potencialidades humanas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación. Educación infantil. Profesores. Histórico-cultural. Desarrollo humano.

## Introduction

By understanding that every individual develops through a cultural-historical process, assuming that the acquisition of knowledge occurs through the interaction of the subject with the environment, it is possible to reflect through the considerations of Mello (2000), Vygotsky (1994) and Bernardes (2006), that it is in the exchange with other subjects that knowledge and social functions are assimilated. For this reason, the present study seeks to discuss the relationship between the teacher and the elaborated culture, as well as the influence of knowledge in the pedagogical relationship with children from 0 to 5 years old, by actions that aim at child development and reinforce the need for teacher training as an indispensable element for the qualification of the educational work.

Since it is the responsibility of these professionals to enable the learning and development of the child in its entirety, aiming at its humanization, the following question is

proposed: How can the teaching action through instrumentalized training overcome the spontaneous practices in Early Childhood Education?

Therefore, this study is based on the understanding of the importance of permanent training for professionals in the first stage of Basic Education, since it is related to their performance, and thus, it is essential that the initial and continuing education of professionals who work in this phase of education is also of quality.

To answer the research problematic, we chose to conduct a bibliographic research based on the Historical and Dialectical Materialism, which understands the dynamics of reality and the historical dimension of contradictions and phenomena, being related to the contents of objective reality, the thought and movement of knowledge and also the sciences of forms and laws of thought, since "[...] the dialectic understood as a method allows us to know the concrete reality in its dynamism and interrelationships" (GAMBOA, 2012, p.14).

In the methodological elaboration in Marx (1883), reality is captured in its totality and dialectic, apprehending historical and social processes, making them logical categories. The scientific methodology criticizes the perspectives that start from an abstract, illusory, superficial or unilateral universality, and thus, proposes the analysis of the elements in a broad, concrete way and with multiple realities.

The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of many determinations, that is, unity of the diverse. That is why the concrete appears in thought as a process of synthesis, as a result, not as a starting point, although it is the effective starting point and, therefore, also the starting point of the intuition of representation (MARX, 1883, p. 116).

Such perspective is contrary to the apprehension of immediate reality, apparent and isolated from historical and social contexts, because it fragments the human vision, reducing it to technique or manipulation, not allowing the subject to seek his subjectivity and social objectivity, acting homogeneously and mechanically and, consequently, not reaching the praxis.

Therefore, the research will be developed from the Cultural-Historical Theory and is based on authors who dialogue with this referential, among them: Leontiev (1978), Duarte (1993), Saviani (2013), Mello (2004), Vygotsky (2002), Drumond (2018), Martins (2013), among others who discuss the theme in question.

## Man, work and education in society

By going through the principles left by Engels, aiming to understand the differences and singularities of man with the other animals, Marx reflects on many strategies to be followed by man, where he will have to plan and execute intentional actions that will create the tools to transform the environment in which he lives (nature), and these actions will ensure his survival.

Once applied and executed, these strategies integrate a set of objects that, consequently, modify and compose human culture, through a specific and innovative action on nature, as a mechanism that brings together the essence and appearance of objects, approaching phenomena beyond their function or what can be physically observed; this action is determined as "work", which is "[...] the basic and fundamental condition of all human life [...]" (ENGELS, 1876).

It is understood that, through work, man alters nature and creates tools to meet his needs, which consolidates a crucial point in his differentiation from other animals, because he is a subject and producer, active and practical, and with his actions he ensures his biological existence, acting in nature and, by modifying it, produces his means of living, forming his personality and also modifying others, since he is able to think, plan and execute efficiently the best ways to adapt to the environment in which he lives, ensuring his survival and his development.

This category is, therefore, the mediator of social relations, because the knowledge and the reflexive abstraction that come from the act of work allow us to get to know the reality to be transformed, in its laws and causal movements, because there is a complex process of capturing the real in its multiple determinations and movements. When entering the objective reality, one finds a production of humanity and appropriates it, that is, there is the participation of what is not natural and was produced by human beings through work, which means that it transforms, is transformed and creates elements for relations.

It is noticeable, since the dawn of humanity, the search of man for his subsistence, where he develops intentional actions on nature. Leontiev (1978) explains that man does not adapt to nature, he transforms it according to his needs. In this mediation process between the individual and nature, the development of cognitive, physical, and mental skills for the appropriation of new skills and instruments is evident.

The man, through these intentional activities on nature, established the formation of groups, that is, he started living in a society with similar objectives, because, through these activities, he developed in physical, psychic and cognitive aspects that enabled a remarkable difference between the current man and the primitive man (ENGELS, 1876).

For this, as the subject evolves, transformations also occur in the way of life, work, spaces, and social relations, because he needs to continuously produce his existence, but, instead of just adapting to nature, he transforms it for his good, because he is able to mentally represent real objects, which makes him knowledgeable about the properties of the real world (science), valuation (ethics) and symbolization (art), therefore, "In doing so, he starts the process of transformation of nature, creating a human world (the world of culture)" (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 11).

It can be said that it was possible the appropriation of the historical development of society and thus, of culture, which covers all human construction performed over the years, and according to the culture used and internalized, by which has access in a particular social group, the man constitutes the society and creates its culture (MELLO, 2004, p. 137).

Based on Marx's assumptions, it becomes possible for us to visualize the nature of human aptitudes benefited by the set of social and historical acquisitions, since:

All his relations with the world, vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, thought, contemplation, feeling, will, activity, love, in short, all the organs of his individuality, which in their form are immediately social organs, are in his objective behavior or in his relation to the object the appropriation of this, the appropriation of human reality (MARX apud LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 267-268).

It is understood that the human being, through his social relations, appropriates culture and knowledge according to his life experience (LEONTIEV, 1978), and in view of this, one can understand that his mental actions are consistent with the cultural, social and historical context; thus, the man is understood as a cultural-historical being, where his knowledge provides a set of potentialities that will provide means for his survival, from the creation of a simple instrument to the most complex machines.

By acquiring knowledge of the world, man develops science and art that, consequently, from his actions, are unified to his skills, incorporating his know-how. To this end, the individual becomes capable of discovering in objects attributes then unknown, being able to master them and develop new physical, psychic and cognitive functions (LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 265).

Luria (1990 apud DUARTE, 1993) portrays that human cognitive life is a product that men externalize from their social practice; this refers to the higher cognitive activities that have a socio-historical nature. Thus, it is understood, through the studies of Vygotsky - forerunner of the Cultural Historical Theory with philosophical assumptions from the studies of Karl Marx - that the human being develops from its reality, i.e., it is according to life experience, material

conditions, skills, competence and education that will determine how the human being will be understood.

Thus, it is essential that the human being has interaction with his environment, with social groups or with nature, so that from this experience he has the appropriation of cultural elements in which he can live in a society (SFORNI, 2004; VYGOTSKY, 1994). Thus,

Culture and school, in particular, develop in man increasingly new methods, create provisions of experience, deploy large numbers of complex and sophisticated auxiliary methods, enabling all functions to be transformed from natural to 'cultural'. It is in the phase of basic schooling, and mainly, during the adolescent's schooling, that this process causes a fundamental mark in the development and consolidation of the 'higher psychological functions of intelligence' (MOURA, 1999, p. 179).

Education has a fundamental role in the process of human development, since it is in charge of the appropriation of the elaborated culture and, consequently, the development of consciousness, therefore, school institutions have a significant and incomparable function in the formation of the subject (MARTINS, 2013).

It is through the educational process that the individual develops his material and intellectual culture skills, which are prerequisites for living in society, this means that education has to ensure the creation of skills necessary for access to elaborated culture and scientific knowledge. The appropriation of culture is, therefore, always collective, learning, which involves a process in which the individual is in contact with the objectifications of those who preceded them, having the opportunity, from the result of others, to perform their work.

Educational institutions are responsible for the function of formal education, which according to Saviani (2013, p. 15) aims to "[...] provide the acquisition of the instruments that enable access to elaborated knowledge (science), as well as the very access to the rudiments of this knowledge [...]". Thus, day care centers and preschools have the function of transmitting specific knowledge: the knowledge accumulated throughout history by men, scientific and systematized, which is not just any knowledge, but an "[...] elaborated knowledge and not spontaneous knowledge; systematized knowledge and not fragmented knowledge; erudite culture and not popular culture" (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 14).

Moreover, school education is constituted in the process of human formation, development of knowledge and reproduction of worldview, critical sense and the formation of individuals who practice citizenship, in addition to being responsible for the transmission of cultural goods built by men through an intentionally organized knowledge.

It is understood, then, that education goes beyond the transmission of scientific knowledge, and cannot limit the individual to the world of work, but must enable him to have the basic and essential conditions, as well as access opportunities. Only then will it be possible to understand that the "[...] cognitive instruments that allow the conscious transit within the society in which it is inserted, is the means to acquire competence in the use of signs [...] existing in the culture" (SFORNI, 2004, p. 23).

At school, these processes of appropriation of culture, formation and development of human qualities historically and socially created, is mediated directly or indirectly by the teacher, who has the essential function of planning and organizing the relationship of the child with culture, through actions aimed at teaching that actually leads to learning and human development, thus, it is through educational work that man learns to be human. In this sense, the teaching action becomes a fundamental axis in the formation of subjects through the appropriation of elaborated knowledge, constituting itself as a condition for human emancipation (BARROS; PASCHOAL; PADILHA, 2019).

It can then be said that the formation of the psychism is complex and the result of the appropriations of the material and intellectual heritage historically produced and is not installed naturally or spontaneously, but the subjective reference system is formed from social relations, especially school education, which is responsible for the organization of teaching in order to promote development, with intentionality of actions, and therefore has a very significant formative potential with regard to the subjectivity of individuals, whether students or teachers. Given the importance of school education, it is then necessary to better understand its legal determinations, especially Early Childhood Education as a right of the child aged 0 to 5 years old.

## Early Childhood Education in Brazil and its legal determinations

In Brazil, teacher education gained strength and began effectively after Independence (1822), and it was with the Law of the Schools of First Letters, enacted in 1827, that the country became concerned about teacher education, which started to require didactic preparation. But this still did not concern the pedagogical issue, this concern with teacher training was evident in the establishment of Normal Schools, which would train primary teachers, being the responsibility of the higher level to train secondary teachers (SAVIANI, 2013).

Early Childhood Education is the first stage of Basic Education and this definition was established in Brazil by the Federal Constitution (1988) and legitimized in 1996, with the Law of Directives and Bases (LDB); since then, the training of teachers for Early Childhood Education has been regulated in the country. From this, it is necessary to understand the teaching in this stage in its entirety, so that the teacher realizes that for the full development of the child to happen, their work must be performed differently from the other stages of education, and that one should seek the understanding of the specificities of each age group (DRUMOND, 2018).

In 2006, through Law n. 11.274, of February 6, an amendment was enacted in article 32 of the LDB, which came into force with the following wording: "compulsory elementary education, lasting nine (9) years, free in public schools, starting at six (6) years of age, will aim at the basic education of citizens [...]". This determination directly influenced Early Childhood Education, and to this day has corroborated the fact that this stage of education is often seen as a preparation for elementary school, leaving aside its specificities. Drumond (2018, p. 289) states how this fact has reflected on the first stage of Basic Education:

The dismantling and fragmentation of Early Childhood Education, which has been happening in recent years - with 6-year-old children in Elementary School and compulsory enrollment at age 4 - represents a setback, because we are running serious risks of having a preparatory pre-school, with our eyes set on Elementary School, excluding children from 0 to 3 years old.

With this statement it is clear the need to think about the training of teachers for Early Childhood Education taking into account that at this stage the focus is on the child as the center, where the teacher comes in as a mediator of relationships, responsible for organizing the space and time for them to live their childhood (DRUMOND, 2018).

Putting the child at the center of the learning process is what the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education - DCNEI (BRAZIL, 2010) propose, which is another guiding document for Early Childhood Education. It focuses on play and interaction as the



structuring axes of the curriculum, in addition to establishing ethical, political and aesthetic principles in order to:

[...] guarantee the child access to processes of appropriation, renewal and articulation of knowledge and learning of different languages, as well as the right to protection, health, freedom, trust, respect, dignity, play, coexistence and interaction with other children (BRAZIL, 2010, p. 18).

Another document that guides the practices of Early Childhood Education is the Common National Curricular Base - BNCC (BRAZIL, 2017); in it, the child is seen as the protagonist of learning, and like the DCNEI, it also establishes interactions and play as the structuring axis of pedagogical practices. The BNCC presents in the Early Childhood Education stage six learning and development rights that must be ensured to children, which are: living together, playing, participating, exploring, expressing, and knowing themselves.

Martins (2014), states that "it is up to school education, then, to organize teaching with the aim of promoting development, aware that it does not result from any model of school education". Taking this statement into account, school education needs to assume its role in order to ensure that school education promotes development, having as allies in this process guiding documents that aim to ensure rights of access and permanence of children in daycare and preschools.

In view of the above, it is possible to notice some advances in legislation regarding Early Childhood Education with the Federal Constitution of 1988, which represented a milestone in the achievement of the rights of children from 0 to 5 years of age, as well as the determinations provided in the LDB (1996), DCNEI (2009), and BNCC (2017). The recognition of daycare centers and preschools as eminently pedagogical spaces, which need to be organized by qualified professionals, is an important achievement and corroborates the fulfillment of the main goal of Early Childhood Education, which is the promotion of the full development of the child, through a highly qualified work performed by well-trained professionals who are aware of the process of humanization of individuals.

## Teaching children from 0 to 5 years old: relationship with the Cultural-Historical Theory

From the achievements in relation to the guarantee of access to Early Childhood Education, the relevance of teacher training stands out, so that the teacher understands how the humanization of individuals, their learning and development occurs. In the light of the Cultural-Historical Theory, we can understand man as a socially constructed being and, therefore, the process of acquisition of human particularities happens through the objectification of the cultural-historical practice (MARTINS, 2016). In this way:

The processes of internalization, in turn, interpose themselves between the planes of interpersonal (interpsychic) relations and interpersonal (interpsychic) relations, which means to say: they are instituted based on the universe of human objectifications made available to each individual through the mediation of other individuals, that is, by educational processes (MARTINS, 2016, p. 14).

For learning to happen, it is necessary that there is someone to teach it, and more than that, that it is by a professional who dominates the signs, which according to Vygotsky (apud MARTINS, 2016, p. 16) are "[...] auxiliary means for the solution of psychological tasks and, analogously to the tools or technical instruments of work [...]". Thus, in the cultural-historical conception, signs are the instruments used for the development that occurs through a mediated process and subjugated to teaching, that is, one learns through the use of signs.

Martins (2014, p. 104) also states that the internalization of signs is necessary for the formation of consciousness, which takes the human psyche to a high degree of complexity, formed by a set of psychic functions: "[...] sensation, perception, attention, memory, language, thought, imagination, emotion, and feeling. The analysis of subjectivity cannot be separated from the analysis of the concrete nature of man and his objective conditions of life, so that the efforts towards the quality of development of individuals are inseparable from the efforts to transform the conditions that alienate them (MARTINS, 2014), and this is one of the fundamental roles of school education.

Much has been discussed in schools about the behavior of children, and there is always that comment about how such a student is "messy", does not sit still, scatters toys around the room, screams, runs, and so on, in short, the daily life of a room of early childhood education is full of these events, however, often, what in the eyes of an adult seems "mess" and even misbehavior, in the world of small sounds like discovery (MELLO; SINGULANI, 2014).

The Cultural Historical Theory allows overcoming the old view of the child as a miniature adult who has no human qualities and brings us a new concept of child, as being "[...]

capable of learning from birth and, because it learns, develops and appropriates the human qualities socially and historically given in its environment and accessible to its activity" (MELLO, 2009, p. 373).

Launching a new look, countless possibilities open up for Early Childhood Education, by having the conception of the child as a being capable of understanding, knowing; by perceiving him/her as someone who can learn since birth, teachers place themselves in the place of more experienced mediators (MELLO, 2009). With this, it is possible to highlight that the organization of the school space should occur systematically, promoting listening through careful observation of feelings, emotions, gestures, attitudes and what the child shows when interacting with others.

In the same way, Sarmiento (2003, p. 81) states that:

This listening allows the educator to understand the different ways children interact and play, as well as their preferences, habits, customs, tastes and singularities. Educating to look means to be open to understand that what we see is loaded with individual and collective meanings, thus giving meaning to what children show and do in their doing and thinking.

Mello and Singulani (2014), state that due to the prejudice with the young child, by not seeing them as capable of learning and knowing, many start to decide and do everything for them, thinking this is the best, however, the role of the teacher of the child from 0 to 5 years old is:

[...] is to organize the individual and collective experiences lived by children so that they form a curious intelligence and a supportive personality, we started to look for a multiplicity of materials that can be offered to the eyes, ears, hands, thought, initiative and curiosity of children: things that have shape, texture, size, color, movement (MELLO; SINGULANI, 2014, p. 40).

By not seeing the child as a producer of its own knowledge and capable of learning and developing itself also through its actions, the teacher commits what Mello (2009, p. 17), puts as the third trap created against the child and its human development, which is "[...] to restrict its activity at school, doing for it, thinking for it [...]", attitude that continues to perpetuate in the practices of capitalism that divides the work, and reduces the creation of humanizing needs in children (MELLO, 2009).

In this way, when observing the noise of a toy, when turning a box over and throwing everything on the floor, the little child - as Mello and Singulani (2014) call them - is learning, discovering the world, everything for him can be transformed into action and thought, and so he is learning and developing as he is "messaging around" with his explorations of the new.

In this perspective, Leontiev (2001) and Vygotsky (2002) consider that the relationship between behavior and the development of children happens as a dialectical unit between biological and historical factors; in such a way, the aforementioned theory is essential in the discussion regarding the child, understood here as a historical and social being who becomes human from his interactions and relationships with others, being able to be critical, creative, autonomous, and able to act in his environment and transform it since he is a baby.

Evidencing what has been exposed so far, Garanhaní (2005) and Saviani (2013) reiterate the significant importance of the teacher in this segment, who must be constantly professionalized, since it directly affects the child's development process, and must be considered as a serious, intellectualized, uncommodified, and alive work.

The formation process involves theoretical and practical knowledge about children's specificities and the organization of pedagogical work with children. Therefore, professional training is a necessary and indispensable condition to guarantee the quality of the services provided, therefore, the professional must plan and organize the actions in a way that respects the needs of each child and enhance their capabilities, know the theory that underlies their actions so that their work is in fact developing and humanizing.

### **Final considerations**

Human development occurs through the historical and cultural process of acquiring knowledge and interaction through work, which in a social dialectical totality differentiates man from other animals, because the individual modifies nature, produces culture, and appropriates the historical development of society. In this context, daycare centers and preschools stand out as spaces of systematized knowledge, institutions marked by advances and setbacks in their legal determinations in Brazil.

Early Childhood Education is, therefore, one of the most important educational stages for the development of the individual, indispensable in the process of integral formation of the child. Thus, the Cultural-Historical Theory that underlies the research legitimizes the child as someone cognitively, affectively, and socially capable, who appropriates culture through activity, interaction, and games, in contact with objects and with others.

Therefore, the visible relationship between the child and the more experienced partner - through the relationships experienced between people, the adult, and the social environment itself - is highlighted on the child's development, which in fact brings the teacher to the center

of the theme as a mediator in this process, acting in the socialization of historically developed knowledge, in order to enhance the individual's psychic development.

Given the relevance of the teacher and his/her role in Early Childhood Education, it is necessary to reinforce initial and continuing education as indispensable for quality pedagogical work, which in fact promotes the humanization of individuals, because if the professional is offered a theoretical foundation linked to practice, with an organized curriculum, he/she has opportunities to reflect on his/her actions in order to plan and contribute to the child's learning and development in a full and effective way.

As an answer to the initial question about how the teaching action through instrumentalized training can overcome the spontaneous practices in Early Childhood Education, it can be said that, as the organizer of the educational environment, the professional must mediate the interactions enabling the learning and development of children in all its aspects, aiming at their humanization, therefore, the overcoming of spontaneous practices will happen through the training of those involved, so that they can reflect on the educational practice. This is why permanent training is key to the qualification of their work with children from 0 to 5 years old, since the more instrumentalized they are, the more they will be able to contribute to the full development of the individual in question.

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