

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION: VISITING SOME CONCEPTS

**PSICOLOGIA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL E EDUCAÇÃO ESCOLAR INCLUSIVA:
VISITANDO ALGUNS CONCEITOS**

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ABSTRACT: Considering the importance of the theoretical foundation of the teacher's practice and the current demands of the school reality, this paper aims to present some aspects of Cultural-Historical Psychology, trying to weave reflections about possible contributions to the teaching-learning process of students who are targets of Special Education. From a brief bibliographical survey, with theoretical support in the references of Cultural-Historical Psychology, and also some authors who focus on the theme of Special Education and Inclusive Education, the text highlights the importance of school as an irreplaceable space in the appropriation of culturally accumulated experience by the subject. Therefore, the role of the teacher as mediator and intellectual who reflects on his or her intentional and planned practice with all students and the target audience of Special Education and the possibilities arising from the social coexistence of diversity in the school space.

KEY WORDS: Cultural-historical psychology. Special education. Teacher education.

RESUMO: Considerando a importância de fundamentação teórica da prática do professor e as demandas atuais da realidade escolar, este texto tem como objetivo apresentar alguns aspectos da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, buscando tecer reflexões acerca de possíveis contribuições para o processo de ensino-aprendizagem dos estudantes público alvo da Educação Especial. A partir de um breve levantamento bibliográfico, com suporte sustentado teoricamente nos referenciais da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, e ainda, alguns autores que se debruçam sobre a temática da Educação Especial e da Educação Inclusiva, o texto destaca a importância da escola enquanto espaço insubstituível na apropriação da experiência culturalmente acumulada por parte do sujeito. Por conseguinte, o papel do professor enquanto mediador e intelectual que reflete sobre sua prática intencional e planejada junto a todos os estudantes e também ao público alvo da Educação Especial e as possibilidades advindas da convivência social da diversidade no espaço escolar.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Psicologia histórico-cultural. Educação especial. Formação do professor.*

RESUMEN: *Considerando la importancia de la fundamentación teórica de la práctica docente y las exigencias actuales de la realidad escolar, este texto pretende presentar algunos aspectos de la Psicología Histórico-Cultural tratando de tejer reflexiones sobre posibles aportes para el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de los alumnos destinatarios de la Educación Especial. A partir de un breve relevamiento bibliográfico, con apoyo teórico sustentado en los referentes de la Psicología Histórico-Cultural, y también de algunos autores que enfocan la temática de la Educación Especial y la Educación Inclusiva, el texto destaca la importancia de la escuela como espacio insustituible en la apropiación de la experiencia culturalmente acumulada por el sujeto. Por lo tanto, el papel del profesor como mediador e intelectual que reflexiona sobre su práctica intencional y planificada con todos los estudiantes y también con el público objetivo de la Educación Especial y las posibilidades que surgen de la convivencia social de la diversidad en el espacio escolar.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Psicología histórico-cultural. Educación especial. Formación del profesor.*

Introduction

It is not possible to discuss education without considering the issues that permeate society. For Gasparin (2007, p. 1-2), "the school, in each historical moment, constitutes an expression of and a response to the society in which it is inserted. In this sense, it is never neutral, but always ideologically and politically committed. Therefore, it has a specific function".

In this same direction, Duarte (2007) points out that it would be impossible to historically and critically analyze education without a theory to support it. Thus, we believe that when it comes to school education, it is essential that the educator is aware of the theoretical assumptions that underlie his or her teaching action and seek to deepen the relevant concepts related to the type of education he or she believes it is necessary to develop. Our understanding is based on this need to position a theoretical basis, and our choice is based on the understanding of subject formation as a process, in essence, historical and social, which is supported by the studies developed by Cultural-Historical Psychology.

In this context, we bring to this brief analysis the presence of public-target students of Special Education in regular school classes, which has been intensified in the last decade and has generated demands of formation and reflection for teachers in order to implement pedagogical practices theoretically supported and appropriate to this reality.

Based on this short preamble, this text presents some aspects of Cultural-Historical Psychology, trying to point out the contributions of its aspects to the teaching and learning of students considered as target audience of special education, which, based on educational legislation documents (BRAZIL, 2001; 2008), determine the enrollment of this audience in regular schools of the education systems.

Cultural-Historical Psychology: Some Concepts

Cultural-Historical Psychology is a stream of Soviet psychology with a materialist base that starts from the understanding that man is a historical and social being and that, through the process of learning and development, he participates in the collectivity. It is a theory elaborated by the Russian thinker Vigotski³ (1896-1934) with the collaboration of Leontiev (1904-1979) and Luria (1902-1977) and other members of his group.

Each term in the name Cultural-Historical Psychology reflects a different feature of the new way of studying psychology proposed by Vigotski and his supporters. The Historical merges with the Cultural, since in this perspective the instruments that man uses to master his environment and his own behavior have been invented and perfected throughout social history.

He was born on November 5, 1896, in Orsha, a provincial city in Belarus and died on June 11, 1934, as a result of complications caused by tuberculosis. In his 37 years he had a unique contribution to the understanding of human nature and its development.

Blanck (1996) informs that Vigotski's intellectual production presents more than 180 works and some important manuscripts which have not yet been published. His translated and or interpreted studies are sources of consultation for researchers in the various areas of human sciences, especially psychology and education. It is worth pointing out that it is not possible to appropriate this theory out of context with the time in which Vigotski lived and the historical facts he experienced, among them: the People's Revolution against the Tsar (1905); the social crisis (1905-1917); the Russian Revolution (1917-1929); the death of Lenin (1924); and, the beginning of Stalin's dictatorship (1929).

Luria, one of Vygotsky's great friends and collaborators, makes a reference to the historical period he experienced and its importance to the direction of his group's research:

I began my career in the early years of the great Russian Revolution. This unique and momentous event decisively influenced my life and the lives of

³ In this text, we have chosen to write Vigotski's name using the vowel i. When the author's name appears with a different spelling, it is due to the citation of some work.

everyone I knew. Comparing my experiences with those of American and Western psychologists, I see an important difference. The difference lies in the social and historical factors that influenced us. My whole generation was inspired by the energy of revolutionary change - that liberating energy that people feel when they are part of a society that can make tremendous progress in a very short period of time (LURIA, 1992, p. 23).

The historical context in which Vigotski and his collaborators were inserted demanded a revolution in the way their country was understood and developed. The Soviet Union had serious social problems, among them education. There was, in this post-revolution historical moment, a high rate of illiteracy, and also, the neglect of people with disabilities. In this sense, the goal of Vygotsky's group was to build a Marxist psychology to meet and solve the social contradictions. It was necessary to create a new concept of man for a new society (OLIVEIRA; REGO; 2010).

The new understanding of human specificity would need to be scientifically proven. The new psychology should treat the relationship between man and nature from a historical perspective, in which man was a product and producer of himself and of nature itself. In other words, it was necessary to deny the philosophical bases used until then, for the understanding of the subject as a historical, complex and dynamic being (TULESKI, 2007).

In Luria's (1992) words, a New Psychology was urgently needed, see:

It depressed me to see how arid, abstract and removed from reality those arguments were. I wanted a psychology **that applied to real people in real life**, not an intellectual abstraction in a laboratory. Academic psychology was terribly uninteresting to me, because I saw no connection between research and the outside of the laboratory. I wanted a relevant psychology, which would give some substance to our discussions about building a new life" (LURIA, 1992, p. 27-28, emphasis added).

Hence the relationship of Historical-Dialectical Materialism with Cultural-Historical Psychology, since Karl Marx was concerned with understanding who is the subject that lives in the capitalist scenario marked by the conflicts of inequalities, contradictions and antagonisms of modern society. Historical Materialism seeks to perceive and analyze the totality of the concrete reality, therefore material, constructed and reconstructed through the action of man and labor.

Marx's contributions, especially about the vision of totality and synthesis of man, are crucial to the development of this new psychology. According to Duarte (2007, p. 79) "to understand the thought of Vigotski and his school, it is essential to study the Marxist philosophical foundations of this psychological school".

In this same sense, Tuleski (2008) states that the theory developed by Vygotsky (1896-1934) is materialist and based on the understanding that man is a historical and social being who, through the process of learning and development, participates in the collectivity.

The author, who conducted her research on Luria, explains that according to him, Vygotsky was considered in the group as the main Marxist theoretician, establishing the main bases and the key concepts on which the new psychology should be built, and that, for him, Marx's method would play a vital role (TULESKI, 2007).

For Tuleski (2007):

Just as Marx understands the constitution of man through the dialectic between objectification and appropriation that is part of the very dynamics of work, which is "the fundamental activity based on which social reality is being constituted" (DUARTE, 2000b, p. 115), that Vygotsky & Luria (1996) explain the change of course that takes place in human development. This change of course in development, however, is not the negation of man as a biological species (TULESKI, 2007, p. 65).

Therefore, it is important to emphasize here the need to understand the relationship between Cultural-Historical Psychology, which proposes a well-defined conception of psychology and the diversity of studies in all the themes it addressed.

Along with Vigotski we have the renowned collaborator of his research, Alexander Luria, one of the greatest neuropsychologists in history. He developed pioneering studies in the field of memory, language and cognitive development (considered classics and that arouse great attention and interest). Marked by creativity as a researcher, valued in the fields of Psychology, Neurology, and Linguistics, despite being little known among researchers in the Brazilian educational field, his research adds significant contributions that help to understand the need to preserve the richness of human reality in its complexity (TULESKI, 2007).

The emphasis on the social aspects of human development, the theoretical-methodological perspective of Historical-Dialectical Materialism, and the proposal to study the brain as a system of functional units marked Luria's work through the vigotskian studies (ANDRADE; SMOLKA, 2012, p. 704).

Alexander Luria developed researches related to the brain and the concept of brain plasticity (LURIA, 1992), functional system (LURIA, 1981), language (LURIA, 1986), the development of writing in the child (LURIA, 1998) among others, which are a small part of the relevant production of this author and others of the Cultural-Historical Psychology that can

effectively contribute with school education and the studies of inclusive education, when referring to disabilities and difficulties in the learning processes.

Among some relevant concepts of this theoretical reference, we can highlight the various studies with innovative theoretical proposals on topics such as: the relationship between thought and language, the nature of the child development process, the role of instruction in development, perception, memory, attention, speech, among others (SMOLKA, 2012).

For Vygotski, man is not only a product of his environment, he is also an active agent in the process of creating this environment. In this way, concepts such as Higher Psychological Processes are considered in the sense that they explain those that characterize typically human psychological functioning: consciously controlled actions, voluntary attention, active memorization, abstract thinking, intentional behavior, and are differentiated from more elementary mechanisms such as reflexes, automatic reactions, simple associations (VIGOTSKI, 1996).

Therefore, one of the pillars of Vygotski's thought is the idea that higher psychological functions are built throughout the social history of man. Still, we can highlight among Vygotski's great contributions the statement that the brain is an open system that is in constant interaction with the environment and that transforms its structures and mechanisms of operation throughout this interaction process, thus, the brain cannot be thought of as a closed system, with pre-defined functions that do not change in the process of man's relationship with the world (VIGOTSKI, 1996).

In the meantime, it is up to us, educators, to try to understand: what are the possible relations that can be established between Cultural-Historical Psychology and the issues that refer to learning and school?

For Vygotski (1996), the child is born in a social environment, whose family establishes the first relations through language in the interaction with others. Since then, the mediation of individuals, especially of the most experienced in their cultural group, becomes fundamental to them. The adult, on the other hand, interacts spontaneously in his process of language use, in immediate situations that arise in his daily life.

This theoretical reference considers that there is a mediated relationship between man and the world, whose human activity is aided by mediating elements, called signs and instruments. The theoretical concept of mediation is of utmost importance for the studies on inclusive education, which defends the importance of the other in the learning and development process of the subject. In this way, we understand that it is based on the concept of an interactive subject, whose knowledge is structured about the objects, from the mediation with the other. In

Vigotski's (1996) perspective, knowledge implies a shared action with the role of the other, since it is through others that the relations between subject and object are established, that is, knowledge has its genesis in social relations, being produced in intersubjectivity and marked by cultural, social, and historical conditions.

According to Vigotski (1989), learning is important for the development of knowledge, whose process occurs through interaction between those involved, that is, the one who learns and the one who teaches. In this sense, the author highlights the importance of the social in the construction of the subject, emphasizing the relationship between learning and development, arguing that this development does not occur only in a biological dimension, but mainly depends on learning that occurs through social interactions.

Hence our choice for this referential that explains, substantiates, and justifies the importance of the other in the learning and development process of the subjects. Thus, we understand the importance of an education that welcomes all, includes and does not segregate. Vigotski (2011) points out that it is through interaction with the other that the subject develops the ability to reflect and learn to be self-conscious.

We consider this social coexistence between heterogeneity, between different subjects, which can, in a collective and collaborative way, support each other to learn, to be extremely important. We believe in mediation as a real and propositional possibility in school education, in which everyone, students and teachers, in a collaborative way, can evolve in the humanization process.

Based on Vigotskian assumptions, school education has a different and irreplaceable role in the appropriation by the subject of the culturally accumulated experience, since it offers contents and develops ways of thinking. Thus, it is through it that individuals realize their full development.

Unlike everyday interactions in which adult mediation happens spontaneously, we understand school as the space where we learn, in which the teacher, in a planned and deliberate way, exercises an intentional and systematized mediation and organizes the teaching activity to enable the subject's learning.

For Facci (2004, p. 229), Vigotski and Saviani "share the idea that education is what leads men to appropriate the contents already developed by humanity and, in this way, humanize themselves".

In this context, it is worth pointing out that Cultural-Historical Psychology understands school as the privileged space for learning. Its function begins and ends in promoting learning, mediated by the teacher's teaching and by the human relations that develop there.

Therefore, considering the fundamental role played by the school in the life of the subject, it is important to reflect about this space as favorable to the learning and development of students with diagnoses, either deficiencies or disorders from the reflection of some concepts of Cultural-Historical Psychology.

School as a space of diversity

Vigotski's studies also present considerations about people with disabilities. According to Victor and Camizão (2017):

In the studies on defectology, they differentiated disability based on two fundamental theoretical constructs: the first is primary disability, which is directly linked to organic factors and comprises the organic lesions, brain injuries, malformations, chromosomal changes, sensory losses, in short, they are the physical characteristics of the subject with disability: the second, secondary disability, which is the social consequence of primary disability, that is, it comprises the subject who presents these characteristics based on social development (VICTOR; CAMIZÃO, 2017, p. 35).

In Cultural-Historical Psychology, the issue of heterogeneity has a relevant role for collective interactions in the classroom, in which the diversity of the group must also be considered. The subjects limited by disability are not less capable, they just organize themselves cognitively in different ways. For Vigotski (1989) the focus must be on collectivity, understood by the author as a condition for the development of the disabled child.

Thus, the implementation of an inclusive school pedagogical proposal that brings the possibility of access, permanence, and success of public-targeted students of Special Education in regular school shows itself as a positive element, as their participation in this diverse context provides the student not only with the necessary interactive relationships, but also with the expansion of individual cognitive skills through imitation in learning.

According to Andrade and Smolka (2012), Vigotski was also interested in the dramas of life marked by illness, living conditions, and modes of human functioning, as he studied and developed research for the medical cases of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, schizophrenia, visual and hearing impairment, and mental retardation. "Foundations of Defectology is probably one of the texts that best express the confidence the author had in his method of work and his belief in the possibilities and potentialities of human development." (ANDRADE; SMOLKA, 2012, p. 705).

In his studies, Vigotski (1989) warned that the child who presents a type of disability does not have inferior development to other children considered normal, but develops in a

singular, different and unique way, seeking alternative paths for compensation⁴ or overcoming their limitations. Each and every child has abilities, potentialities that need to be provoked to develop, and it is up to the teacher to conduct this process, seeking ways to do so.

Consistent with the line of thought exposed so far, Vigotski and Luria (1996) propose a new approach for psychological studies related to the issue of disability. If the child development is not conducted solely by biological maturation, if at a given moment, it turns into cultural development which, dialectically, transforms the neuropsychological functions enabling the passage to a higher level, the investment and the appropriate interventions for the possible advances of this subject are salutary.

For Barroco (2007, p. 226), the limit or the disability "not only would provoke in the individual the need to establish alternative ways of being and living in the world, but would also stimulate him/her to go beyond the average behavior", because the child does not feel the disability directly, but the difficulties arising from it.

Although organic deficiency (physical, hearing, visual, etc.) imposes certain biological limiters, cultural development allows the compensation for these defects. Such compensation may occur by the development of other functions that become fundamental for the child's adaptation to the world, such as the development of tactile and auditory perception in the blind and by the development of external tools that make such adaptation possible. "Compensatory cultural behavior overlaps with defective natural behavior. A specific culture of the defect is created: in addition to its negative characteristics, the physically handicapped person acquires positive characteristics" (VIGOTSKI; LURIA, 1996, p. 221).

The compensation of the defect by cultural development changes the functioning of psychological functions, perception is reconfigured, for example, in the absence of one of the receptive systems, the intact systems begin to play a completely new role, becoming a tool that compensates for the existing disability. "Hearing and touch become the center of attention for the blind person, who masters the development of numerous techniques for the maximum use of these senses - for the blind person, these devices merge with the very function of perceptions. Remembering with the help of these devices and even thinking with them restructures the perceptions" (VIGOTSKI; LURIA, 1996, p. 223).

Regarding the problem of mental deficiency, Vygotsky and Luria (1996) follow the same line of reasoning, opposing the belief that the retarded child has a deficient psychological repertoire, that is, his memory, perception and intelligence would be deeply compromised in

⁴ When the subject faces a difficulty or an obstacle and needs to use its reserve of social compensation to overcome it, causing the process of new formations, we are referring to Vigotski's concept called Compensation.

organic terms. Their research has demonstrated just the opposite, that is, that children with mild and moderate intellectual deficits have sense organ activity that is sometimes higher than normal, and that their memory is also sharp. The difference between children with and without disabilities would not be in their natural processes, but in the use of cultural devices, that is, only in the fact that a normal child uses his natural functions rationally and, the more he progresses, the more he is able to imagine appropriate cultural devices to help his memory. Thus, for the authors, the intellectual deficit is a defect not only of the natural processes themselves, but also of their cultural use. To combat this, the same auxiliary cultural measures are required (VIGOTSKI; LURIA, 1996, p. 229).

We understand, therefore, that disability should no longer be an obstacle to the learning and development process, but its driving force.

Luria assumed that the development process of each person follows a unique trajectory.

It is necessary to see the subjects with some kind of disability as complete subjects, and study how they handle and apply the available resources, as this may lead them to compensate their specific deficits through other types of resources (OLIVEIRA; REGO, 2010, p. 116).

It is also in this sense that Barroso (2012) denounces the massification of the school without democratizing it, and the author calls for an education that is attentive to the needs of each one. Thus, when thinking about the school that we need, that we intend, that we wish, it is necessary to think about the subject that is there, the one whom the school should serve.

We agree with Azevedo, when the author defines: "I believe that in each student lives a unique, unrepeatable person, endowed with inviolable dignity, deserving the greatest respect and the best hospitality from any educational institution" (AZEVEDO, 2014, p. 1). Heterogeneity has educational potentialities that homogeneity does not. Diversity has to be recognized as a source of enrichment, because everyone is unique in knowledge and culture, there is an individuality. Teaching the many as if they were one presupposes homogeneity that disregards the individuality of the students in order for them to compose themselves into a group.

In Vigotski's view, the social universe has fundamental importance in the process of the subject's constitution, therefore, the teacher's mediation is crucial in this same constitution. "In the mediation of/by the other coated with gestures, acts and words (signs), the child actively integrates to the consolidated (and emerging) forms of activity of its culture, in a process in which thought and language are articulated" (FONTANA, 2005, p. 15).

In this sense, the teacher's role becomes essential in the teaching-learning process, mediating and anticipating the student's development, proposing challenges that help him/her search for the meaning of his/her world. Hence the fundamental role of the teacher, because, as Fontana (2005, p. 30) states, "the teacher's pedagogical action imprints marks this relationship, establishing modes of interlocution and controlling (in different ways and with different nuances) the senses in circulation in the process of conceptual elaboration".

However, when it comes to the context of school inclusion, we know the difficulties experienced by teachers. To this end, we suggest group work and exchanges between subjects as important and effective strategies in the process of school inclusion, which are not commonly used, since these students usually end up having individualized care with mechanized activities and devoid of meaning. "This way of directing pedagogical practice, according to the cultural-historical perspective, limits the development of compensatory processes, since students do not experience cooperation and academic challenges with other people" (MENDONÇA; SILVA, 2015, p. 517).

Hence the relevance of collaborative work in the process of school inclusion, favoring shared practices between teachers and the students themselves. For Vigotski (2006) the mediation of/by the other enables the emergence of functions that, although the child does not master autonomously, it can perform together, in a shared way.

In this way, Fontana (2005) in his research on pedagogical mediation, again points to the challenge of the educational work:

[...] learn to wait for the movement of the other, his or her time of elaboration, and to respect the elaborations of that other... To resist the temptation to impose the path that seems best, not only for our own purposes, but also for the other(s) (FONTANA, 2005, p. 38).

The school must seek the possibilities for the student's development, what is in favor of his/her development, and the teacher's role becomes fundamental in establishing healthy relationships in the school environment in cases of inclusion. He needs to be aware of the special needs and promote as many possibilities and resources as possible to help him in the learning process. Teacher training is a challenge in the sense that it enables teachers to organize new forms of pedagogical work in an inclusive way.

Final considerations

The complexity of education as a social practice does not allow us to treat it as an abstract and natural phenomenon, but rather, immersed in an educational system situated in a given society and at a given historical time.

There is a close relationship between the type of society we want and the educational model in force. Thus, it is necessary to think about the characterization of the society we live in, the man we are and the man we are training. In the same way, Pedagogy as a Science of Education is related to other areas such as Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology, Economy, and Didactics itself.

Education as a social phenomenon, in order to develop, depends, among other variables, on the teacher. Therefore, every teacher, when organizing and planning his or her classes, and the ways to work the contents, is making choices and revealing the conceptions he or she has about teaching, learning and education that relate to his or her teaching activity. In this way, we defend the urgent and necessary collective reflection on teachers' practices, theoretically supported, to enable new knowledge and the reworking of the knowledge that, dialectically, is reflected in the daily pedagogical practice.

From this text, which analyzes some aspects of Historical Psychology, we can infer that every teacher must seek a deeper theoretical knowledge in order to carry out more conscious practices and more reflected actions. The teacher must be clear about the intentionality of his or her actions, considering that they are linked to the conceptions of subject, man, and society. Finally, it is necessary to seek theoretical and methodological coherence.

In relation to Inclusive Education, we have observed the process of redefinition of the teacher, who has experienced a historical and contradictory struggle between the hegemonic discourse and the construction of inclusive practices, in view of the demands of strategies, resources, and appropriate interventions to meet the needs of each student. Aspects related to physical accessibility, of the proposals, elimination of barriers, flexibility of the curriculum, and articulation with the whole school team need to be respected in order to guarantee the right to education of students who are special education targets.

The Cultural-Historical Psychology presents us the conceptions that have and the contributions it can offer to school education and inclusive education. There are still few researches dedicated to the inclusion process based on this referential, however, we could notice how much its reference authors, since the beginning of their investigations, brought the issue of disability and special educational needs in their concerns and their publications.

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