

Articles

Fernando González Rey's contributions to the decolonial discourse through the lens of intercultural competencies

Contribuições de Fernando González Rey ao debate decolonial na perspectiva das competências interculturais

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Abstract

This article analyses Fernando González Rey's contributions to psychology, concentrating on his theory of subjectivity within historical-cultural and decolonial frameworks. Using a theoretical essay, it facilitates an exchange between his epistemological approach and Darla K. Deardorff's intercultural competencies model, with the intention of informing educational practices that advance mental health in culturally diverse school environments. The discussion posits that subjectivity, understood as a contextually situated symbolic-emotional production, offers a basis for reconsidering educational processes beyond universal and normative paradigms. The text emphasizes the significance of qualitative epistemology and the constructive-interpretative methodology in analyzing intercultural experiences. It concludes that advancing intercultural competencies, aligned with subjectivity theory, enhances inclusive and adaptive educational practices to address current social challenges—particularly in Latin America. Furthermore, it underscores the value of emerging social representations in fostering intercultural coexistence and confronting longstanding inequalities.

Keywords: epistemology; school violence; subjectivity.

Resumo

O artigo examina as contribuições de Fernando González Rey à psicologia, com foco em sua teoria da subjetividade sob uma perspectiva histórico-cultural e decolonial. A partir de um ensaio teórico, promove-se um diálogo entre sua proposta epistemológica e o modelo de competências interculturais desenvolvido por Darla K. Deardorff, visando refletir sobre práticas educacionais voltadas à promoção da saúde mental em contextos escolares marcados pela diversidade cultural. Argumenta-se que a subjetividade, concebida como produção simbólico-emocional situada, oferece fundamentos para repensar os processos educativos, superando modelos universais e normativos. O texto reflete a relevância da epistemologia qualitativa e da abordagem construtivo-interpretativa na compreensão de experiências interculturais. Conclui-se que o desenvolvimento de competências interculturais, articulado à teoria da subjetividade, contribui para práticas educativas mais inclusivas e responsivas aos desafios sociais contemporâneos, especialmente na América Latina, reforçando a importância de novas representações sociais na convivência intercultural e no enfrentamento das desigualdades históricas.

Palavras-chave: epistemologia; violência escolar; subjetividade.

INTRODUCTION

Fernando L. González Rey, a Cuban psychologist, scholar, and educator, was born in Havana in 1949 and passed away in 2019. He made significant contributions to the field of psychology, particularly through his approach to subjectivity from a historical-cultural perspective, and was actively engaged in advocating for a Critical Social Psychology in Latin America (Goulart, 2020).

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As a proponent of developing a psychology responsive to the specificities of Latin American realities, he questioned the uncritical reproduction of North American and European models (Goulart, 2019). Regarding González Rey's intellectual trajectory, Goulart (2020) notes the influence of Soviet psychological theorists such as V. E. Chudnovsky and L. I. Bozhovich, particularly through critiques of the fragmentation of psychology. According to Rodríguez-Camejo, García-Ramos, and Santiago Estrada (2020), González Rey was primarily grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky, advancing the understanding of affectivity and deepening analyses of the categories of meaning and affective-cognitive unity within subjective elaborations. While Vygotsky focused extensively on language and cognitive processes, González Rey placed greater emphasis on emotions and the affective dimensions of subjectivity (Santos, 2020).

Discussions of development and educational contexts recur throughout his work, as reflected in his assertion that "[...] in the classroom, new senses and meanings are generated, inseparable from the histories of the individuals involved" (González Rey, 2001, p. 10). He further argues that "[...] the theoretical construction of subjective configurations and processes present in education [...] must be developed within the very processuality of the subject's subjective constitution and of the social processes within which their experience occurs" (González Rey, 2001, p. 12).

As a critical heir to Vygotsky, Rodríguez-Arocho (2020) also identifies developments in the theory of subjectivity concerning human development in educational contexts, proposing a reorientation of educational experience toward individuals' motives, experiences, and singularities, with particular attention to lived experiences and social contexts in the construction of senses and meaning in learning, where affection and intellect are intertwined.

González Rey (2001) defines the learning process as a dynamic of signification in which the learner expresses the social subjectivity of the different social spaces in which they live, requiring that one "[...] grasp in its full complexity the processes of subjectivation involved in educational processes" (González Rey, 2001, p. 11).

Among the challenges of reflecting on human development in educational contexts, particular attention in Brazil in recent years has been given to mental health. This aspect is evidenced by Federal Law N. 13,935/2019, which mandates the presence of psychologists and social workers in public basic education systems, consolidating the integration of mental health and education; Federal Law N. 14,819/2024, which establishes the National Policy for Psychosocial Care in School Communities, fostering coordination among health, education, and social assistance sectors; and Federal Law N. 15,100/2025, which regulates the use of personal portable electronic devices by students in public and private basic education institutions, aiming to safeguard the mental, physical, and psychological health of children and adolescents.

Within the development of these policies, social vulnerability intersects with the mental health of school-aged children and youth living in countries considered developing, as noted by Magalhães et al. (2021). Peres and Martins (2012) highlight that socioeconomic conditions, interpersonal relationships, pedagogical practices, the medicalization of education, discrimination, and prejudice constitute significant challenges to mental health in school contexts. Studies by Park et al. (2022) and Lardier et al. (2020) further indicate that issues related to race, ethnicity, and gender identity variations are associated with increased vulnerability to emotional distress, bullying victimization, and self-harm behaviors.

From the aforementioned problem emerges the discussion of intercultural competencies, a recurring theme in the work of Darla K. Deardorff, particularly in her research on academic mobility within the internationalization framework (Deardorff, 2015a, 2015b). More recently, Deardorff (2020, p. 17) has addressed the challenges of communication in light of engagement in interpersonal interactions conducive to the construction of a "shared humanity" or "authentic community", facilitating learning about "living together". Understanding communicative competence as fundamental to the intercultural dimension, it follows that intercultural competencies are also fundamental to mental health in educational contexts. This debate has been advanced by Bizarria et al. (2025b), who discuss intercultural competencies in relation to Deardorff's (2020) reflections, particularly in the context of xenophobia and discrimination.

The encounter between González Rey and Darla K. Deardorff reveals contributions to a field of theoretical reflection recognized as decolonial, associated with understanding the repercussions of colonization's violence within the dynamics of coloniality in processes of subjectivation, particularly in the Global South context. This debate underscores the need to revisit social problems and analytical challenges in light of psychology's social commitment, presupposing theoretical and methodological advances consistent with emerging discussions. It demands, as França Sá and Marsico (2022, p. 423) argue, "[...] broadening our scientific spectrum through alternative theoretical assumptions and more diversified methodological approaches in publications".

Recognizing in González Rey's work significant contributions to the decolonial field (França Sá; Marsico, 2022), it is observed that "[...] his theory of subjectivity emerges as a critical theoretical framework in relation to dominant psychology because it opens a new path to explain singular, individual and social human creations, as inseparable from broader social dynamics" (Goulart, 2020, p. 1176).

Regarding intercultural competencies, this study assumes that developing them from a subjectivity-based perspective may promote mental health in school communities. In doing so, it stimulates decolonial reflection, particularly concerning contributions to educational management grounded in decolonial discussions (Bizarria et al., 2024).

Thus, the aim is to establish a dialogue between González Rey and Darla K. Deardorff to present contributions to intercultural competencies based on the theory of subjectivity, particularly by recognizing qualitative epistemology, the constructive-interpretative design of his proposal, and the notion of subjective configurations. In this regard, the study departs from the assertion that "[...] teaching-learning processes are not keeping pace with social, economic, and cultural transformations, which is not difficult to derive [...]" (Bizarria; Barbosa; Costa, 2022, p. 145). Therefore, "[...] an urgent expansion of the conception and subsequent development of competencies should consider real, vital, and processual alternatives to crises" (Bizarria; Barbosa; Costa, 2022, p. 146).

Through this dialogue, it is proposed to advance the understanding that "[...] it is within relationships that this competency manifests itself, or rather, it is in collective configuration that competency acquires representational meaning within a given social, cultural, and historical context" (Bizarria; Barbosa; Costa, 2022, p. 146). Accordingly, analyzing interculturality within the field of decoloniality, as a contribution of this research, aims to generate understandings of how competent behaviors are constructed, required, "[...]and how they may assume representative collective configurations" (Bizarria; Barbosa; Costa, 2022, p. 146).

From the perspective of the study's objective, a methodological stance aligned with the "theoretical essay" is adopted, grounded in an argumentative analysis of the theme of 'enabling spaces'. The essayistic condition is assumed, supported by a literature review, and expressed through critical, reflective, and thoughtful writing, recognizing the paper as a thought-in-process - reflective, amateur, and experimental (Larrosa, 2004). Furthermore, Botton (2011, p. 96) understands that the assignment presupposes "[...] experience as a process inseparable from understanding itself, that is, not merely as a medium of analysis", while also presenting itself as an unfinished text-an analytical exercise on a theme, rehearsing alternative possibilities of approaching a given problem.

VYGOTSKY'S INFLUENCE

As an heir to Lev Semionovitch Vygotsky (1896-1934), González Rey (2013a) discusses the dichotomies that characterized psychology during the first half of the 20th century. He advances a dialectical understanding of the crisis in the context of historical-cultural psychology, drawing on Soviet psychology (Goulart, 2024). This discussion arises in a context in which "[...] questions and processes related to subjectivity appeared in some of the most important modern and postmodern philosophers, some of whom were used to reject subjectivity" (González Rey, 2019, p. 20).

Moreira, Oliveira and Sousa (2023, p. 133) state that Vygotsky's approach is significantly influenced by Karl Marx (1818) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), and is presented as

"[...] oriented by the dialectical method and historical materialism", attributing central importance to language. "Vygotsky not only understands the word as a result of the socio-historical process of humanity but also emphasizes its inseparability from meaning" (Moreira; Oliveira; Sousa, 2023, p. 136). The authors further cite that for Vygotsky:

Meaning shapes the word as language, giving it the power to communicate, to construct subjectivities. It is the constitutive mediation of signs, or symbolic mediation, that enables intelligibility between people, understanding (or at least, an attempt at understanding) between them (Moreira; Oliveira; Sousa, 2023, p. 136).

Along this path, Santos (2020) states that González Rey uses many concepts from Historical-Cultural Psychology, especially the definitions discussed by Vygotsky, such as the dialectic, which reflects a significant reconfiguration of the concept of mind and articulates it within a historical-cultural perspective. In this movement, it elects subjectivity as the central element of the human psyche, moving away from the view that consciousness is the object of study in Psychology, as observed by Vygotsky (Santos, 2020). With an emphasis on dialectics, González Rey (2013a) discusses the integration of contradictory elements into qualitative units that reflect the dynamics of human reality, including the formulation of concepts in a more processual understanding of the human being and their subjectivity.

Regarding the discussion on Vygotsky, González Rey (2015) revisits fundamental concepts, particularly the importance of considering the social and cultural context in the formation of subjectivity, arguing that, from Vygotsky's work, one can re-examine the construction of identity and social representations, inviting reflection on the methodological and epistemological implications. The social construction of knowledge and the mediation of psychological processes by culture in the pursuit of understanding the concept of meaning, incorporating subjectivity, also derives from his readings, with the analysis of social representations and the role of the subject as an active and generating agent in their social contexts (González Rey, 2006).

ENTERING THE FIELD OF SUBJECTIVITY AND IDENTITY

Before entering into the topic of "subjectivity", it is noted that González Rey (2019, p. 1) states that this term "has been treated peripherally by philosophy", being addressed by post-structuralism and neo-pragmatism as an anachronistic concept in their respective analyses, "[...] completely disconnected from philosophy and psychology throughout their histories, based on an ahistorical and fossilized definition of it, as a legacy of modern philosophy of the subject" (González Rey, 2019, p. 20). He further considers that "[...] modern individualistic rationalism, identified by the emphasis on the cogito and on consciousness, has not led to a conception of subjectivity as an individualistic concept" (González Rey, 2013b, p. 39).

He understands that:

[...] the rejection of the question of subjectivity derives from three long-held hegemonic positions in Western culture: the defense of certain ideologies as expressions of human rationality; the dominant model of science since Modernity which, in younger and more belated sciences such as psychology, continues to be hegemonic at the institutional level; and the defense of the rational character of the human being, from which stems the attribution of rationality to many of the dominant institutional forms in the various types of human activity (González Rey, 2013a, p. 17-18).

In light of advances in post-structuralist approaches regarding the conception of subjectivity as a social construction within the context of discourses and narratives (González Rey, 2017), González Rey (2019, p. 7) observes that "[...] subjectivity replaces consciousness, in an attempt to overcome a concept that has been characterized by its imprecision and plurality of meanings", supported by a historical-cultural reading, recognizing that "[...] everything in human knowledge is historical and, consequently, concepts are not substances in themselves but theoretical devices sensitive to different treatments in different historical contexts and within different theoretical systems" (González Rey, 2019, p. 6).

Along this path, he assumes that the “[...] historical-cultural proposal on subjectivity is distinguished [...] by recognizing human motivations as inseparable from symbolic processes and constructions” (González Rey, 2017, p. 17). He therefore defines subjectivity as a phenomenon intrinsic to culture, understanding it from discursive practices as a process that integrates emotions and the symbolic productions of the human being, which “[...] exists as a moment of human action, but only of an action charged with subjective meanings that specify its belonging to culture itself” (González Rey, 2013b, p. 39).

In this context, subjectivity assumes ontological and epistemological premises that consider it as a founding element of human experience, from a historical-cultural perspective (González Rey, 2013a, 2015). Therefore, he states that “[...] subjectivity, in fact, moves in the opposite direction to the fundamental principles that underpinned late modernity, based on the idea of an objective science and a rational representation of the human being” (González Rey, 2013b, p. 21). Thus, subjectivity as a symbolic-emotional unity, represented by the concept of subjective sense, allows for the transcendence of traditional intrapsychic and individual reductionism (Goulart, 2024). In this direction, “[...] subjectivity, from a historical-cultural point of view, has an integrative function in relation to the taxonomy of concepts traditionally used by psychology” (González Rey, 2017, p. 17).

Regarding subjectivity, González Rey (2019) draws on Lev Vygotsky, Karl Marx, and John Dewey, viewing the relationship between subject and object as a dialectical tension and understanding subjectivity as the weaving of interactions, human experiences, and social contexts. He also recognizes contributions from Michel Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Ernst Cassirer to his argument concerning subjectivity, associating it with language, the construction of meaning from experience, and sensory and affective aspects. He further acknowledges that ideas, myths, and narratives circulating within a society shape perception of self and the world. By “subjective”, he understands something that transforms over time in response to social, political, and economic changes (González Rey, 2013a), “[...] a process inherent to the cultural functioning of the human being and to the social world generated by their cultural productions” (González Rey, 2013b, p. 39).

The historical-cultural approach to subjectivity significantly shapes the understanding of identity, which is configured by cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts and is constructed on the norms, values, and traditions of communities. From this perspective, experiences of identification vary across social and cultural groups, influenced by factors such as ethnicity, class, gender, and religion, and understanding that participation in cultural activities (festivals, rituals, traditions) may contribute to this process (González Rey, 2013b). In this sense, an individual's identity is not formed in a vacuum; it is constantly reconfigured through interactions and symbolic exchanges across diverse social contexts (González Rey, 2015).

As societies face new challenges, such as globalization and migration, cultural practices may be reconfigured, influencing how subjectivity is experienced. Cultural practices reflect the subjectivity of a social group. They are forms of expression that mobilize individuals to articulate their experiences and feelings, promoting a sense of community and belonging (González Rey, 2013b). Subjectivity, therefore, is linked to the cultural functioning of the human being and to the social world that emerges from cultural productions, “[...] represent[ing] a theoretical alternative to integrate the continuous intertwining of symbolic processes and emotions that simultaneously characterize the course of actions of the social and individual subject within the social networks in which these actions occur” (González Rey, 2015, p. 503).

Since Lev Vygotsky, González Rey (2015) understands that identity construction processes are co-participatory, within the context of interaction among people actively engaged in meaning-making, where the exchange of ideas and experiences contributes to the construction of social knowledge and simultaneously helps situate one's identity as the result of the involvement of multiple subjects participating in the same social space (González Rey, 2015).

The way in which groups share and construct knowledge and meanings about social reality mobilizes representations as products of interaction between individuals and communities, reflecting the specific cultural context in which they are generated. Therefore, the construction of social representations is also an identity construction, since the ways identities are perceived and communicated within a group directly influence the social representations that emerge

from these interactions (González Rey, 2015). Thus, an understanding of subjectivities as pluralities in constant dialogue with their environment points to possibilities of transformation and emancipation within social structures, reflecting an ethical-political commitment to the construction of more just and inclusive communities, fostering an understanding that embraces the diversity and plurality of existences (Bonvillani, 2023).

IDENTITY, SUBJECTIVITY AND EMOTIONS

Regarding the themes of “identities” and “social representations”, it is necessary to turn our attention to the understanding of emotions. According to Madrigal Pérez, Fossa, and Barros (2020), Fernando González Rey conducted significant investigations into the role of emotions in the constitution of cultural-historical subjectivity, recognizing the inseparability of emotions from symbolic processes and arguing that emotions are fundamental to the production of subjective senses that anticipate the subject’s actions.

Initially, reference is made to the concept of the “social situation of development”, proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which describes how external conditions, including social, cultural, and historical interactions, interplay with the individual’s “internal” processes-emotions and needs-to understand how psychological functions develop through sociocultural mediation-cultural tools and signs that enable individuals to mobilize collective experiences and understandings (González Rey, 2000).

Moreira, Oliveira, and Sousa (2023, p. 138) observe that “[...] socio-historical psychology does not disregard the biological dimension of the human being, since psychological functions are supported by brain activity. However, this biological dimension is not detached from the historical dimension”. Concerning emotions, Vygotsky (1987) reflects that thought is generated by motivations, which are related to desires and needs, interests, and emotions, understanding there to be a volitional-affective tendency. Thus, approaching thought involves understanding its affective-volitional basis and considering its dynamic functioning, in which the affective and the intellectual are intertwined.

Based on readings of Vygotsky, González Rey (2000, p. 139) argues that “[...] the transition from biological needs to social, properly human needs begins in the earliest phases of the developmental process”, understanding that “[...] emotions do not exist in isolation; they are intrinsically associated with a new type of ontological definition of the human psyche” (González Rey, 2015, p. 502).

In this direction, each phase of human development is characterized by a particular social situation that directly influences the development of higher psychological functions (González Rey, 2000). As the individual grows, they face new social situations that provide opportunities for the development of new psychological functions, understanding that “[...] the emergence of new psychological needs is a source of qualitatively different emotions, which [...] will lead to the emergence of new needs” (Madrigal Pérez; Fossa; Barros, 2020, p. 514).

Furthermore, according to Madrigal Pérez, Fossa, and Barros (2020, p. 508), “[...] to determine the character and function of emotions, we must start from the fact that, in emotional processes, there is a reciprocal action between the unfolding of events that occur in accordance with the deepest motivations of the human being, or that occur against them”. In this path, “[...] motivation is understood as the subjective configuration of social and individual actions and not as an intrapsychic entity” (González Rey, 2015, p. 509).

Subjectivity, in this sense, presents itself as a symbolic-emotional system, in which emotions are understood in their generative and symbolic character (Goulart, 2024), “[...] defined by units of emotions and symbolic processes generated throughout human experience” (González Rey, 2017, p. 1). Thus, “[...] emotions cease to be a substantial micro-concept in isolated and static definitions centered on specific types of emotions, impulses, needs, or other concrete ways of conceptualizing systems of emotions considered universal in the subject” (Madrigal Pérez; Fossa; Barros, 2020, p. 513). For Moreira, Oliveira, and Sousa (2023, p. 141), emotions are “internal organizers of behavior” that permeate “other psychological functions”.

Therefore, emotions, including cognitive and affective processes, act as mediators in social interactions, as products of the social and cultural dynamics in which the individual is embedded (González Rey, 2000), leading to new learning and the transformation of the subject.

They also contribute to how knowledge is constructed, influencing attention, memory, and the assimilation of information. The experiences lived by the individual interact with their symbolic productions, leading to a continuous reconfiguration of meanings and senses in a recursive relationship, indicating that emotions act in the configuration of subjective experiences. For Moreira, Oliveira, and Sousa (2023, p. 137), "[...] sense is the sum of all psychological events that the word awakens in human consciousness [...] an expression of the emotions elaborated by the individual based on what they have lived."

Understanding emotions in their generative and processual capacity is, along this line, critical for psychology. Madrigal Pérez, Fossa, and Barros (2020) suggest understanding socialization processes and the importance of recognizing emotions in the construction of identities and social practices, given that "[...] symbolic productions in proximity to emotions become the constituents of cultural-historical subjectivity that place us in a different perspective" (Madrigal Pérez; Fossa; Barros, 2020, p. 500).

ON SUBJECTIVE CONFIGURATIONS – ENTERING QUALITATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

Fernando González Rey's theory of subjectivity proposes definitions associated with a constructive-interpretative perspective of qualitative research grounded in Qualitative Epistemology, emphasizing the conception of subjectivity as a culturally produced and historically situated phenomenon (González Rey, 2013a), assuming that "[...] qualitative research is inseparable from the theoretical representation of the problem to be studied" (González Rey, 2013a, p. 34). According to Alcântara and Oliveira (2020), González Rey's methodological proposal represents an innovative theoretical and methodological approach in research in the human sciences, particularly in education and psychology.

Research grounded in the theory of subjectivity presupposes an active process of knowledge construction emerging from interactions among the researcher, participants, and the contexts in which subjective meanings and lived experiences are inscribed, understood as cultural productions, from a reflexive and interpretative stance. This aspect allows all interactions to intertwine within the research narrative, in which subjective senses are constructed and reconstructed throughout the investigative process (González Rey, 2013a).

Therefore, it proposes a reconfiguration of the understanding of qualitative research, including critical reflection on historical, social, and cultural dimensions, and welcomes new forms of understanding that emerge from the interaction between the researcher and the studied context, who co-create meanings in a dialogical and reflexive process.

This process implies analysis of the researcher's capacity to consider their own position and influences in the research process (Alcântara; Oliveira, 2020). Researcher, participants, and research context act in the construction of knowledge, constructing and interpreting meanings and adjusting questions and methods as new information and understandings emerge during the research process (Patiño-Torres; Goulart, 2020).

To understand the analytical process, González Rey introduces the term "subjective configurations", situating the way in which subjectivity is configured by historical and social experiences, emotions, lived experiences, and subjective senses that are organized in cognitive or linguistic spheres, and also generated by emotions and lived experiences in social and cultural interactions (Santos, 2020). It involves both the constitution and transformation of subjectivities in interaction with contexts, enabling the generation of meanings and practices, articulating symbolic, emotional, and practical contents while simultaneously accounting for the processes that allow their formation and evolution (Bonvillani, 2023).

These configurations also refer to the "[...] psychosocial understanding of the formation of subjectivities" (Bonvillani, 2023, p. 15), recognizing that "[...] although Fernando González Rey did not designate his proposal as a 'psychosocial approach to subjectivity(ies)', the characteristics of the psychosocial approach as complex, relational, socio-historically situated, intersubjective, and symbolic lie at its core" (Bonvillani, 2023, p. 15).

"Subjective configurations" also situate nuclei of sense or meaning that remain consistent, mobilizing the production of meaning from experience and allowing the subject to derive personal meanings (Bonvillani, 2023). The nuclei or "zones of sense", as spaces of reality

that become intelligible as knowledge develops, require an epistemological rethinking of how knowledge is produced, as the result of a constructive-interpretative process in which data are interpreted within a theoretical temporality distinct from that of empirical results (González Rey, 1997).

“Subjective configurations” include elements of tension that may arise from different contexts and social pressures, for example, when an individual mobilizes multiple identifications reflecting conflicting values or norms. The psychosocial approach, therefore, seeks to understand how these tensions, arising from power conflicts, inequality, and oppression, manifest and are managed in everyday life (Bonvillani, 2023).

Indicators, as units of information that provide feedback and adjust the interpretative process, are interpreted within a context that gives them meaning. For González Rey (1997), they are concrete elements that become significant when integrated and interpreted together, acting as catalysts in the process of knowledge production, helping to construct and redefine zones of sense through interaction with empirical data. Indicators are fundamental to the construction and validation of zones of sense. As they are analyzed, they may reveal additional layers of meaning, functioning as a feedback loop in which new indicators continuously emerge.

Thus, zones of sense emerge when a reality previously hidden becomes visible through theoretical constructions and, as theoretical understanding advances, new areas of reality are potentially recognized and integrated into existing knowledge (González Rey, 1997). Furthermore, each advance in knowledge brings new complexities and contradictions, requiring revisions and, potentially, a reinterpretation of already established zones of sense. In this regard, it is understood that “[...] this definition underscores specific attributes of research in the human sciences, such as the dialogical character of knowledge production” (González Rey, 2013a, p. 34). In this sense, subjectivity is both a product of culture and a transformative force within it, recognizing the diversity of experiences that compose subjective configurations. Furthermore, “[...] the integration of these meanings occurs in subjective configurations as a self-organizing system in process, which generates its own alternatives along the way. Subjective configurations represent autopoietic systems” (González Hernández, 2022, p. 8), emerging from the constant interaction between subjective senses and human actions, as a result of social relations and the activities the individual performs in the world (González Rey, 2019).

UNDERSTANDINGS OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATION

From the reading of “subjective configurations”, an understanding of social representations as conceived by González Rey can be inferred, insofar as he acknowledges that there are challenges faced in the development of this conception within the context of psychology (González Rey, 2008), given that they “[...] constitute a vast theoretical field in which different theoretical and epistemological approaches to this concept are presented” (González Rey, 2008, p. 226).

According to González Rey (2006), the works of Serge Moscovici and Ivana Marková are cited, based on the contributions of Émile Durkheim. Regarding Moscovici, for example, he mentions his emphasis on the formation of social reality through symbolic practices that underpin group identity, by means of sociocognitive terminology, discussing aspects such as shared knowledge and beliefs, situating the collective and historical dimension of representations, formed from social processes that influence the individual’s perception and understanding within their context, thus reflecting social consensuses.

González Rey (2006), in turn, reinterprets social representations from a historical-cultural perspective, understanding subjectivity as a fundamental ontological component for its study, arguing that subjectivity should not be considered a mere copy of the real world; on the contrary, it is configured as a human production that reflects individual experience, not limited to symbolic discourse, but also involving other registers of the experience of reality. In this path, representations also result from processes of internalization and symbolic mediation, recognizing subjectivity and personal agency in the formation of one’s representations. Thus, “[...] the concept of social subjectivity is discussed in its consequences for the development of social representation [which] involves social subjectivity, the subject, and social representation within a complex and dynamic system” (González Rey, 2008, p. 225).

Regarding processes of subjectivation, González Rey (2006) proposes a reconfiguration of the understanding of representations from a historical-cultural perspective, in which social representations are a subjective production characterized by the integration of individuality and the social context. He understands that representations are not merely expressions of judgments or concepts, but constitute a dynamic system of meanings that shapes how people perceive and experience phenomena, shaping individuals' lived experiences and influencing interpretations and emotional responses. This subjective production is influenced by norms, values, and social practices that resonate within each subject's personal experience. Therefore, representations

[...] do not flow over individuals as something external that influences them; they are subjectively configured and reconfigured during the ongoing actions of subjects, in a process in which people, actions, and social contexts are reciprocally configured within one another (González Rey, 2015, p. 505).

Through social representation, individuals understand and interpret the reality around them, situating their attitudes, behaviors, and practices; as collective constructions that emerge from social interactions and that shape the perception of lived realities, also imbued by beliefs, stereotypes, and previous experiences, including emotions and symbolic processes (Gomes; González Rey, 2007; González Rey, 2013b).

The social representations that emerge from this process represent consensus or negotiation among different voices and perspectives (González Rey, 2015). This understanding opens space for a more inclusive and pluralistic approach in the analysis of social dynamics, in which diverse voices and experiences are recognized as fundamental to the construction of collective knowledge, through which individuals and groups give meaning to social reality and position themselves within their communities.

Sense, as a construct that emerges from each subject's lived experiences and life history, refers to the personal and subjective interpretations individuals assign to situations, experiences, or social contexts. Sense is related to emotional experience and to the meaning that each attributes to a given representation. On the other hand, meaning encompasses the more collective and consensual dimension of social representations, related to norms, values, and understandings shared within a given social group, emerging from interactions and dialogues within the community. Thus, meaning provides a common basis for communication and social interaction, understanding that "[...] these dynamic, complex instances, produced under socio-historical and relational conditions, although not determined by them, allude to a dimension that is simultaneously constituted and constitutive of subjectivities" (Bonvillani, 2023, p. 15).

In this discussion, culture is understood as a space that generates meanings (González Rey, 2013a). Symbolic productions, such as language, art, religion, and social practices, situate the construction of subjectivity, insofar as individuals reinterpret and re-signify them according to their personal and collective experiences, creating a network of identities and subjectivities, an active and dialectical process, with active engagement in cultural practices. Therefore, subjectivity is always relational. By understanding subjectivity as situated, González Rey (2013a) rejects attempts to universalize human experiences as if they were homogeneous and identical. Instead, he recognizes that subjective experience is plural and diversified.

For González Rey (2015, p. 509), "[...] the concepts of subjective senses and subjective configurations allow for the advancement of an unfinished legacy of historical-cultural theory, as it emerged in Soviet psychology, concerning the theme of subjectivity on new theoretical and philosophical bases". Representations are social constructions that involve both individual (sense) and collective (meaning) aspects, allowing social and cultural changes to be integrated into representations, which may be reinterpreted and re-signified over time within subjective configurations, inviting critical reflection on contemporary psychosocial practices (González Rey, 2015).

In this context, emphasis is placed on González Rey's (2017) reading of subjectivity as a product of social and cultural interactions, understood as a resource that may lead to emancipation from dominant social orders, permeated by interactions and symbolisms that unfold into a weaving of meanings. By recognizing that subjectivity is forged through communication,

language, and social relations interconnected over time, an advance in the discussion is marked, insofar as subjectivity is interpreted as always in a process of formation, influenced and transformed by a set of social, political, and historical factors, which represents a contextualized view of the human being in their pluralities.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES AS SUBJECTIVE CONFIGURATION IN SOCIAL REPRESENTATION

Based on the understanding of the term “competency” presented by Bizarria, Barbosa, and Costa (2022, p. 146), as “[...] competencies in process, in relation, in permanent addition of repertoire [in the sense of] the configurative fluidity that the intensity of transformations imposes, and that continuing education is unable to keep pace with” (Bizarria; Barbosa; Costa, 2022, p. 146), one observes an appeal to the term “competencies” to act within a social context that imposes different challenges on psychology, as both science and profession, especially in the field of mental health.

Thus, there is an invitation to understand “competencies” from the assumption of the theme based on the challenges of interculturality in the educational context developed by Darla K. Deardorff, to González Rey’s reading on subjective configurations and social representations, starting from Bizarria, Barbosa, and Costa’s (2022, p. 146) reading, which present a demand for conceptual expansion of the term “competency”, to analyze “[...] the course of configuration of competencies in collective representation, insofar as the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values acquire meaning, representation, and action in socially placed practices”.

Within the context of research on the intercultural challenges faced by international university students, Deardorff (2015a) observes that learning requires recognizing and appreciating participants’ diverse experiences and contexts. In advancing the definition of “intercultural competencies”, she proposes a theoretical model that brings together parameters for understanding the phenomenon as a dynamic process that requires the integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, articulating the development of critical awareness that enables individuals to interact in multicultural contexts, fostering meaningful learning that benefits the collectivity.

Deardorff (2015a) observes that intercultural competence has a 25-year history and argues that the discussion should extend beyond the educational sector, including areas such as health and human rights. The author suggests that future research consider diverse voices and critique the idea of universality, fostering a “cultural humility” in the face of contemporary challenges. She affirms that intercultural competence may be understood differently across cultural contexts, disciplines, and perspectives, suggesting a historical-cultural understanding of “competency”, including in the search for “new” understandings of the theme, as she observes that many existing definitions adopt an individualistic and Western approach.

From Deardorff’s (2015a) reading, it can be inferred that her approach enables understanding from different perspectives, as she refers to personal experiences, identity, and emotionality, which are relevant subjective aspects in the development of intercultural competence. She suggests that intercultural competence is not merely an objective matter but a process that involves multiple subjective and contextual dimensions, as she asks: “How do power, identity, and language influence definitions of intercultural competency?” (Deardorff, 2015a, p. 3).

The theoretical proposition initially presented draws on a dynamic, processual conceptual model that involves attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes. Internal outcomes are the individual’s intrinsic progress, arising from the attitudes, knowledge, and skills acquired, which are fundamental to the development of intercultural competencies. When these outcomes are achieved, individuals broaden their perspective and respond appropriately to others’ needs. External outcomes are manifested through behavior and communication in intercultural contexts (Deardorff, 2015b).

In light of the argumentation of her proposal, the author suggests, concerning intercultural competencies, reflecting on one’s own worldviews and on the diversity of cultural perspectives, based on “[...] three key attitudes [...] respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery” (Deardorff, 2015b, p. 141). She further sustains the importance of cultural self-awareness in the development of intercultural competence, understood as “[...] how a person’s culture has influenced their identity and worldview” (Deardorff, 2015b, p. 141).

Therefore, intercultural competence involves the capacity to see the world from other people's perspectives - a recognition of others' subjectivity -with "[...] critical self-reflection being essential for the development and assessment of intercultural competence" (Deardorff, 2015b, p. 142). It defines the development (education/learning) of competency based on: (i) cultural self-awareness; (ii) culture-specific knowledge; and (iii) sociolinguistic awareness. Skills include observing, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating.

At another moment, Deardorff (2020) notes critical discussions regarding approaches to intercultural competencies, particularly phenomena such as xenophobia and discrimination, which are understood as manifestations of stigma and racial and ethnic exclusion. The emphasis on interactions and communication contributes to exploring central questions about the appropriateness of performance in multicultural contexts, promoting decolonial reflection on diverse cultural dynamics as a function of historical-cultural variations and power relations.

In light of psychology's movement within the field of decolonial studies, França Sá and Marsico (2022) present that González Rey's work reflects important debates on decoloniality by recognizing his critique of knowledge production that ignores the sociocultural specificities of Latin America. Goulart (2019), for example, highlights his effort to value authentic dialogue and the interaction between theoretical production and human values, including the close relationship between science and ethics, as well as his willingness to address difficult themes, such as the uncritical adoption of North American and European psychological models in Latin America.

Considering the context of the public health crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, Deardorff (2020) raises questions about how people feel in relation to loneliness, fear, and the need for belonging and connection with others, and deepens reflections that mobilize new readings of her definition of intercultural competencies, when she proposes a shift from an individualistic perspective ("I") to a more collective view ("we").

Deardorff (2020) suggests that the way we perceive our place in the world directly impacts our interactions and relationships and recalls that intercultural understanding goes beyond factual knowledge about other cultures; it requires an appreciation of individual and collective human experiences, as well as emotional engagement, seeing oneself reflected in others, and acting with generosity, as manifestations of this empathy that fosters healthy and meaningful relationships. She emphasizes:

[...] it seems that empathy may not be enough, emotional intelligence may not be enough, and intercultural competence and global citizenship may not be enough. What seems to be missing in all of this is perhaps how we see others and how we see ourselves in relation to others (Deardorff, 2020, p. xvi).

The expansion of understanding of interpersonal relationships is fundamental to intercultural competence, especially when addressing the challenges of cultural diversity and the effects of institutional racism, as noted by Lazaridou and Fernando (2022). Deardorff (2020) also addresses the theme of Global Citizenship, associating it with the need for transformative practices that respect the plurality of identities and cultural experiences.

In this context, the approximations between the reading of intercultural competencies and the contributions of González Rey's theory of subjectivity starts with Goulart's (2024) presentation on the urgency of theoretical and empirical development in analyses of emerging social problems, which demand greater attention from psychology. According to Goulart (2024), Vygotsky's perspective on crisis provides a dialectical basis for understanding crises as critical moments of development, characterized by contradictions that may lead to new formations, with the possibility of opening new paths. From Deardorff (2020) and Bizarria, Barbosa, and Costa (2022, p. 146), it can be inferred that competencies are discussed within the historical-social and historical-cultural contexts, in response to situated challenges, based on symbolic encounters, thereby drawing attention to interculturality.

According to Goulart (2024), the "Theory of Subjectivity" may contribute to a dialectical understanding of crisis and of social problems that demand competent responses, especially in relation to the multiplicity of challenges that psychology currently faces.

Along this path, conflicts open new directions regarding historicity and temporality, mobilizing changes and transformations in societies and the human psyche.

Rossato and Ramos (2020) affirm that difficulties and challenges may be understood as opportunities for growth and transformation. In discussing the development of competencies within the educational sphere, Rossato and Ramos (2020) consider the generative character of individuals, recognizing the unique potentialities that may be mobilized in their developmental processes, valuing the diversity of experiences and the singularity of personal trajectories, within a formative process understood as “[...] a broadening of the understanding of the relationship between the social and the individual, in a cultural and historical sense that shapes how, when, and why a person learns” (González Hernández, 2022, p. 8).

González Hernández (2022) presents a debate on the definition of “competency” in the educational context based on Fernando González Rey’s Theory of Subjectivity. He understands that competencies need to be analyzed in light of “subjective configurations”, which integrate the individual’s senses and experiences in the process of reconstructing subjective senses, where social and individual objectives are in constant tension.

Along these lines, González Hernández (2022, p. 1) states that “[...] the analysis of competencies leads to inconsistencies in explaining the processes of integration of the components of these structures, as well as their own genesis and their relationship with other competencies”. Therefore, he understands competencies as self-organized systems that fluctuate and adapt within social contexts. These factors have been underestimated in traditional approaches to competency, which often make it difficult to explain the processes of integrating their various components. This problem stems, in part, from the traditional conception that treats competencies as static structures, disregarding the subjective dynamics that characterize individual development.

Competency transcends the mere possession of skills or knowledge, residing, rather, in the individual’s capacity to mobilize this knowledge to solve problems in specific contexts (González Hernández, 2022). Furthermore, competencies cannot be dissociated from the educational context in which they are manifested, which considers the social, cultural, and historical conditions that influence the student’s performance, given the inseparability of knowledge and the school context, allowing the subject to adapt and respond to the demands and challenges presented to them.

From González Rey’s perspective, González Hernández (2022, p. 5) concludes that “[...] students’ learning based on competencies results in a set or integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and values that the individual possesses for optimal performance in a given profession or productive function”. Thus, drawing on the theory of subjectivity and understanding subjectivity as a symbolic-emotional system (Goulart, 2020; Goulart, 2019), it is understood that the development of competencies emerges from interactions between the individual and the social, without either being reduced to the other.

For Rodríguez-Arocho (2020), González Rey’s approach enables readings of the problem of social vulnerability in the school context, values individuals’ identities and knowledge throughout their lives, and considers students’ life histories, contexts, and identities toward a more inclusive learning environment. In doing so, it becomes possible to reflect on “[...] the emergence of new configurations, an issue that depends on the level of dramatization that the situation with which the subject is confronted possesses” (González Hernández, 2022, p. 9).

Thus, Rossato and Ramos (2020) affirm that González Rey offers a theoretical field that seeks to legitimize the investigation of subjectivity without reducing it to ideologies, distancing himself from pathologizing approaches, and understanding development as a process that involves subjective reconfigurations, situating the individual’s protagonism in the production of their own subjectivity.

In this direction, “[...] the course of configuration of competencies in collective representation [situates] the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values mobilized [that] acquire meaning, representation, and action in socially placed practices” (Bizarria; Barbosa; Costa, 2022, p. 146). Such a reading confirms that “[...] no human activity results in an activity isolated from the set of senses that characterize the person’s historical and social world” (González Rey, 2001, p. 9).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the perspective of fostering a dialogue between González Rey and Darla K. Deardorff to present contributions to intercultural competencies grounded in the theory of subjectivity, this study departed from the premise that competent behaviors are socially constructed, socially demanded, and collectively represented. In this sense, the approximation between intercultural competencies and González Rey's concept of subjective configuration enabled a theoretical articulation with Darla K. Deardorff's reading of intercultural competence, especially in her article *"(Re)Learning to Live Together in 2020"*.

Deardorff's studies (2015a, 2015b, 2020) do not exhaust the author's discussion on the theme of "interculturality", in particular "intercultural competence". They announce the relationship between the theme of competency and the challenges posed by the field of decoloniality, articulating interculturality with the historical, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of colonization processes in the weaving of social processes crossed by the colonality of being, knowledge, and power (Quijano, 2005). Such processes inscribe collectively constructed social representations that mobilize exclusionary social practices.

What is announced with Darla K. Deardorff is the observation of the challenges to interculturality that demand other references for human action, when critical contexts reveal the need to produce new ways of existing, resisting, and re-existing within exclusionary social processes of a hegemonic nature that imprint cultural patterns, triggering epistemic violence. Observing advances about the "[...] implementation of Law 14.819 of 2024, which aims at psychosocial care, is an important step in this process, but it must be accompanied by concrete actions that promote the cultural change necessary for the school to become a true space of learning and growth for all" (Bizarria et al., 2025a, p. 28).

Intercultural competencies take on a new meaning when their production aligns with trends from González Rey's perspective. Understanding subjectivity as processually anchored in lived experiences and symbolically mediated by the historical-cultural context, it is clear that subjective configurations reverberate in understandings about the social representations that animate them. The timeline of history suggests that these processes reflect collective practices that legitimize and value social patterns of existence, marginalizing difference (those who are different), which is reflected in certain subjective configurations in dynamic interaction with these representations.

At the same time, with González Rey and his readers, the capacity for transformation of subjective configurations is discussed, procedurally mobilized by daily life, history, and the traversals of existence anchored in significant experiences. In this field, emotions offer unique possibilities for confrontation, as a construction, in relation to social representations that reinforce, for example, exclusionary and oppressive contexts. Transformations that mobilize new discourses and other narratives, facing subjective reconfiguration.

If the intensity of this subjective dynamic is analyzed within the context of critical demands, the development of intercultural competencies should situate its capacity to encounter the collective before the power of recognizing the configuration and reconfiguration of its practices through newly mobilized social representations. Intercultural competencies, as a result of subjective configurations triggered by affects, are mobilized to reconstruct meanings in light of new senses of existence, thereby favoring the affirmation of the plurality of ways of being and existing.

As a decolonial debate, it is affirmed that the encounter between González Rey and Darla K. Deardorff raises space for propositions related to the development of intercultural competencies through the mobilization of subjective configurations that affirm new social representations, enabling more integrative coexistence with differences and with socially legitimized, accredited, and valued standards as good, correct, and valid. Propositions that, within an emancipatory horizon, understand that it is necessary to relearn to live together, as reflected by Deardorff (2020), considering the dynamics of social representations in articulation with subjective configurations in view of the human capacity to act in response to social demands. Changes related to social representations raise reflections concerning the construction of ideas and emotions, insofar as "[...] all ideas contain, transmuted within them, an affective attitude toward the portion of reality to which each of them refers [...] *Words do not merely express thought: it is through them that thought comes into existence*" (Vygotsky, 1987, n.p., emphasis added).

Therefore, understanding that contexts of social vulnerability are reflected in mental health, as observed in Magalhães et al. (2021) and Peres and Martins (2012)-a relationship that becomes more problematic when analyzed from the perspective of racial and ethnic issues, as well as gender variations (Park et al., 2022; Lardier et al., 2020)-it is affirmed that observing intercultural competencies within the horizon of subjective configurations may be reflected in social representations more favorable to mental health. Thus, it is believed that the development of these competencies, in a processual manner and situated within historical-cultural dynamics in school contexts, may contribute to the development of public policies in Brazil, especially that defined by Law No. 14.819/2024.

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Authors contribution

FPAB: Developed the proposal within the scope of the extension project “Intercultural Competencies in School Communities from the Perspective of Reflections on Epistemic Violence” (PROEX/PUC Minas – 2025/32934). LVSP: Contributed to the revision process, provided additional insights, and expanded upon the contributions of the cited authors.

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