

Creativity in socio-interactive pedagogy and Waldorf Pedagogy: implications for working with the gifted students¹

Criatividade na pedagogia sociointeracionista e na Pedagogia Waldorf: implicações para o trabalho com superdotados

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ABSTRACT

This article is pioneer in the discussion of the phenomenon of creativity based on Vygotsky and Rudolf Steiner, relating it to work with gifted people. Its aim is to investigate creativity in the sociointeractionist approach and in Waldorf Education and its implications for working with gifted students. Apart from important differences, the proposals of Vygotsky and Steiner meet the needs of gifted students, especially when they emphasize significant teaching mediation. The teacher, as the main mediator, is responsible for the proposal of creative and aesthetic teaching aimed at the love of knowledge and life.

Keywords: Creativity. Giftedness. Vygotsky. Steiner.

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RESUMO

Este artigo é pioneiro na discussão do fenômeno da criatividade a partir de Vygotsky e de Rudolf Steiner, relacionando-o ao trabalho com superdotados. Seu objetivo é investigar a criatividade na abordagem sociointeracionista e na Pedagogia Waldorf e suas implicações para o trabalho com estudantes superdotados. À parte importantes diferenças, as propostas de Vygotsky e de Steiner vão ao encontro das necessidades de estudantes com altas habilidades/superdotação (AH/SD), principalmente quando ressaltam a mediação docente significativa. O professor, como principal mediador, é responsável pela proposta de ensino criativo e estético voltado ao amor ao conhecimento e à vida.

Palavras-chave: Criatividade. Altas habilidades/superdotação. Vygotsky. Steiner.

Introduction

Nowadays, much is discussed about the theme of creativity. This phenomenon is multifaceted and contributes significantly to Education (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 2007; RENZULLI, 2016; BEGHETTO; KAUFMAN, 2017; STERNBERG, 2018; PISKE; STOLTZ, 2020; ALENCAR; FLEITH, 2010). This study chooses to approach two theories that could be taken as reference in a 21st century educational system focused on creative work, especially for gifted children, who require a differentiated education. In this sense, our goal is to investigate creativity in the social interactionist approach² and in Waldorf Education and its implications for working with gifted students.

Social interactionism and creativity

Social interactionism, inspired by Vygotsky³ (2013, 1991), is a theory of learning based on interaction that integrates, inseparably, the affective and

2 Also called socioconstructivist.

3 Among the several different ways in which the name Vygotsky is written, we will use the form most commonly found in the English language, Vygotsky.

cognitive dimensions. Learning, in social interactionism, is understood based on historical, social, and cultural contexts. Learning opens channels for development and, in this sense, the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is fundamental and central. The zone of proximal development is the space between what the child has already mastered and what he or she has not yet mastered, but which with the help of other more capable people he or she may come to master (VYGOTSKY, 2007).

For John-Steiner (1985, 1995, 2000), Vygotsky's theory of human development defines creativity as a process that includes children's play, imagination, and fantasy. It is a transformative activity where emotion, meaning, and cognitive symbols are synthesized.

Stoltz *et al.* (2015) note that Vygotsky attributed great importance to the phenomenon of creativity, considered fundamental in the human activity of transforming reality and innovating forms of action in the environment in which each subject finds itself. "According to Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, creativity is inherent to the human condition, and it is the most important activity because it is the expression of consciousness, thought and language" (STOLTZ *et al.*, 2015, p. 67).

In Vygotsky's works, the valuing of creativity, imagination, fantasy, and innovation is notorious. For Vygotsky (2009a, 2009b), creativity can be defined as the ability to create something new, being a fundamental aspect for the transformation of the social environment. Imagination is the basis of all creative activity and manifests itself fully in cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific, and technical creation. As for fantasy, it is the fundamental element in play, where children transit from the domain of imaginary situations to the domain of the rules of their sociocultural environment. Such aspects were important to Vygotsky and motivated him to participate in important artistic and intellectual movements.

Vygotsky's proposal, with reference to creativity, turns to esthetic education. Esthetic education should not be subordinated to morals, to knowledge related to other disciplines, or simply intended to offer pleasurable activities that provoke the desire to learn. For Vygotsky (2001), esthetic education should be part of the totality of our life, and the role of the teacher is

To introduce aesthetic education into life itself. Art transfigures reality not only in building fantasy, but also in the actual production of objects and situations. One's home and clothing, conversation and reading, and the way one walks, all these can equally serve as the noblest material for esthetic production (VYGOTSKY, 2001, p. 352, our translation).

Esthetic education is part of the culture of each social group and part of a creative form of teaching where it must be integrated into everyday school life. In his works, one can see that, for Vygotsky (1989), creativity is an aspect that

emerges in culture in a diversified manner and as a result of each social context. In culture, one can perceive the expression of each nation and the manifestation of creation and invention. This attribute can be considered cultural and universal, it is a complex phenomenon that can be developed in all people differently because it depends on how and where its development occurs.

Vygotsky (1997, 2009a, 2009b) defines culture as a product of both social life and also of the social activity of each human being. For Vygotsky, every inventor, even a genius, is always a consequence of his time and his environment. (STOLTZ; PISKE 2012; PISKE *et al.*, 2017).

Stoltz (2010) emphasizes that the cultural constitution of each subject is influenced by the action of other subjects who are also in their social environment. Vygotsky (1989) states that we become ourselves through other subjects. Based on this principle, the essence of the cultural development process is logically related to social interactions. Cultural development is the process where the social environment establishes meaning for the subject, making him/her a social and cultural being. Signification becomes the universal mediator in this process and the bearer of this signification is the other, the symbolic place of historical and cultural humanity (VYGOTSKY, 1989).

Development of creativity has a transforming power and is expressed in a differentiated way, because the act of creating and inventing does not only take place in great discoveries and fabulous inventions, but whenever any human being combines ideas, formulates solutions, comes up with something innovative, modifies their environment and imagines situations that develop their creative potential. Based on the higher psychological processes⁴ each human being relies on their cognitive resources that are related to their perception, attention, abstract thinking, and imagination in order to develop their creativity. For Vygotsky (2009a):

According to an analogy made by a Russian scientist, electricity acts and manifests itself not only where there is a great storm and blinding lightning, but also in the pocket flashlight. Similarly, creation, in fact, exists not only when great historical works are created, but everywhere

4 Higher psychological processes refer to the fundamental psychological functioning of human beings, such as consciously controlled actions, active memorization, voluntary attention, intentional behavior, and abstract thought. Higher psychological processes are different from more elementary mechanisms such as automatic reactions, reflexes, and simple associations. This differentiation between higher psychological processes and elementary mechanisms is fundamental to the understanding of human development and a privileged focus in Vygotskian theory.

that man imagines, combines, modifies and creates something new, even if this something new looks like a tiny speck compared to the creations of geniuses. If we take into account the presence of collective imagination, which unites all these often insignificant grains of individual creation, we will see that part of everything created by mankind belongs to the anonymous and collective creative work of unknown inventors (VYGOTSKY, 2009a, p. 15-16, our translation).

For Vygotsky (2004) it is fundamental to touch the human being through their emotions during the process of creation and during the act of teaching. Teaching that integrates emotion and cultivates it during each moment of learning instigates the desire to learn and awakens curiosity. Creativity, in turn, is the principle of the creative process and should be addressed through artistic practices. To achieve this objective, it is crucial to set goals and act to develop creativity through playful teaching.

The Vygotskian theory understands that psychological functioning occurs in the best way if there is mediation that works on each subject's potential continuously and efficiently. Mediation is so important that it is precisely through mediation that potentialities and imagination emerge and acquire more life. It works on the child's potential zone, relative to what it has not yet mastered, so that with interaction with more capable subjects, what was previously potential (knowledge that the child has not yet mastered) can become real (the child's own domain).

Piske and Stoltz (2020) point out that in teaching, the teacher's mediation could expand horizons by establishing educational measures where the gifted child goes beyond the standardized limits of education. In this sense, imagination, creation, and invention are aspects to be explored and motivated to seek the true meaning of teaching. A child learns a lot by playing, interacting with other children. When playing, their greatest fantasies come to the surface. Vygotskian theory focuses on the social and cultural aspect of each subject in everyday interactions. In child development, it approaches play from the understanding that it is the social that is the basis for action in the child's playing activity. The act of playing is so important that Vygotsky (2007) highlights that play creates zones of proximal development and that these provide qualitative leaps in child development and learning.

For Leontiev (1994), a follower of Vygotsky, playing is the moment when the most relevant changes take place in a child's psychic development. Playing is the transition path to higher levels of development during the child's life. Thus, Leontiev (2005) emphasizes activities based on playing, in which

each child can discover many solutions and can also understand relationships between itself and its environment. Through play, the child is able to analyze its limits and capabilities, as well as being able to compare its abilities with other children in its social group. Playing enables children to acquire cultural codes and understand their social function in society. Leontiev (1994) states that playing changes over the course of different age groups and in relation to the socio-historical context. After a child masters speech, games involving exercise gradually decrease and give way to symbolic games.

Vygotsky (2007, 2009a, 2014a, 2014b) emphasizes that playing is fundamental to the social and intellectual development of each child, because the processes of representation and symbolization lead them to abstract thinking during the games they play. Therefore, it is possible to emphasize that playing instigates imagination, fantasy, goes beyond reason, and motivates the child to have enjoyable social experiences during the teaching and learning process in a creative way. According to Vygotsky (2007):

[...] drawing and playing should be preparatory stages for the development of children's written language. Educators must organize all these actions and the whole complex process of transition from one type of written language to another. They must accompany this process through its critical moments, up to the point of children discovering that they can draw not only objects, but design their speech. If we wanted to summarize all these practical demands and express them in a unified way, we could say that what must be done is to teach children written language and not just how to write letters of the alphabet (VYGOTSKY, 2007, p. 145, our translation).

It is in the creative and engaging context that the various possibilities of invention emerge and enable the development of creativity in social interactionism.

Piske, Stoltz and Camargo (2016) explain that according to Vygotsky, gifted students need different procedures in the classroom. As such, teacher mediation will have to intervene during the development of special forms of talent and potentialities. This mediation will make the difference so that these students have access to specialized care where their creativity can be developed. In this aspect, Vygotsky (1998, 2009) points out that children's fantasy has no restraint. Creative activity is based on the ability of our brain to combine different things, and depends on the richness and diversity of our experiences. Therefore, imagination originates from experiences over the course of life.

Waldorf Education and creativity

The principles of Waldorf Education, founded by Rudolf Steiner (1985, 1996), are centered on the freedom of each human being to act, feel, and think. Veiga (2012, 2014, 2015) explains that Waldorf Education is based on the attempt to ground teaching and learning in a holistic view of the human being.

Waldorf Education is fundamental in achieving quality education that aims to meet students' needs in an integral way (PISKE; STOLTZ, 2020; STOLTZ; WIEHL, 2019a; 2019b; VEIGA, 2015; RANDOLL; PETERS, 2015; STOLTZ; WEGER, 2015; BACH JR, 2015). Waldorf Education sees nature and the universe, cognitive, emotional and volitive development as forming a kind of unity, there is no exclusivity as far as intellectuality is concerned because the fundamental objective is to emphasize that each individual is perceived as an integral being in all dimensions of their development (STOLTZ; VEIGA; ROMANELLI, 2015; PISKE; STOLTZ, 2014; PISKE, 2018; PISKE; STOLTZ, 2020).

According to Bach Jr. (2012, p. 12, our translation) anthroposophical thinking in Waldorf Education encompasses “affective and volitional dimensions in child development, by influencing the soul of teaching and expanding human relationships with a spiritual focus”. Waldorf Education does not reduce life to the application of equations, to the one-sided considerations of what is only sensory; rather, Waldorf Education goes beyond the sensory aspect by deepening a broader, spiritual knowledge. “Spirituality as referred to here relates to a dimension of human profoundness, a new way of experiencing and living as a human being, appropriate to the moment in question” (BACH JR., 2007, p. 11, our translation). Waldorf Education is based on Anthroposophy, the science of the spirit and philosophy of life that means human wisdom, integrates scientific, artistic and spiritual thoughts, and is related to the most intimate human essence with regard to oneself and one's relations with the universe and nature. Anthroposophy understands the human being in its physical, psycho-emotional, soul and spiritual aspects (STEINER, 2000a, 2013).

Keim (2014) explains that Steiner defines education as “a process of social interaction that focuses on reaching the immaterial dimension of the person, with a view to expanding their capacity to act for the dignity and emancipation of life” (KEIM, 2014, p. 193, our translation). Thus, Waldorf Education focuses on integral human development and its transdisciplinary character leads to innovative teaching. Espírito Santo (2008) points out that Waldorf Education can be considered pioneer in providing transdisciplinary practice, developed

on the basis of creative living. Waldorf Education seeks to attend to all stages of child development. The Waldorf Education team is dedicated to make this teaching an art that educates children in an integral way, involving doing, feeling and thinking (STOLTZ; WEGER, 2015).

When we turn our gaze to the education of gifted children in Waldorf Education, we can consider that their potentialities will be developed as a whole. As far as gifted children are concerned, in Waldorf Education they will be able to practice the same activities as children of their own group, there is no specific form of teaching for them, and grade acceleration is not encouraged. The focus of Waldorf Education is on interaction between children and their performance that makes them free to do their activities with autonomy. In Waldorf Education, there is no interest in fostering a specific area of the gifted child, but rather a commitment to creative experience and depth of knowledge in different areas.

Piske and Stoltz (2020) consider that when a gifted child is placed within Waldorf Education it should not have great difficulties, because the pedagogical method used is broad and seeks to involve feelings, emotions, as well as cognitive development. Moreover, the curriculum is planned to meet the various stages of development, favors the full extent of the potential of each child, and deals with child development as a whole, seeking to awaken and enhance all abilities at all stages. It is possible that when a gifted child is taught in this way it may become a subject with broad culture, a human being well informed about the world and the history of humanity, having access to various practical and artistic skills, showing reverence and constant contact with nature, acting with initiative and freedom of expression concerning various subjects. As it is a completely creative form of education, the gifted child can develop its creativity in a broad and continuous way.

Waldorf Education respects all children's specificities and characteristics, valuing their potentialities and talents, emphasizing that human growth and development do not happen in a linear manner and, consequently, cannot be measured or understood in the same way.

By considering the human being as a free being, Waldorf Education organizes its curriculum considering individual freedom and the stages of development, which are called seven-year stages, as follows. The first seven years of life are dedicated to knowledge and maturation of the body. Imitation is the basis of learning. A child invents and creates diverse games using its imagination. Signs of physical maturity will appear at around age seven. From seven to fourteen years of age, artistic activities bring out feelings and emotions. Thus, these activities work toward ethical behavior, that is, the feeling of fraternity with others and reverence toward people and nature. From fourteen to twenty-one years of age, thoughts, logical reasoning, and a critical sense of

the world begin to be structured in an abstract way. The basic virtue that the adolescent desires is the search for self-knowledge and knowledge of those around them (BARFIELD, 2020).

Carlgren and Klingborg (2006) also explain that one of the ways of working with art in Waldorf education includes Eurythmy, or art of movement. Eurythmy, developed by Rudolf and Marie Steiner, can have a scenic, pedagogical or therapeutic character. This art seeks to make music and speech visible, addresses the themes of the curriculum, working with geometric shapes, rhyme, metrics, stories, among other subjects, enabling greater self-discipline, concentration, and sensitivity in seeing things, touching them, feeling them, and interacting with the outside world. This art of movement enables sensitivity and respect for others, respect for their differences, self-regulation or self-mastery in acting, thinking, and speaking. Furthermore, art provides “Steiner’s conception of the other and the phenomenon of otherness, as it is based on Goethe’s distinction between the analytical intellect (rationality) and the productive intellect (intuitive thinking)” (VEIGA, 2010, p. 38, our translation).

Sensitivity is an essential aspect that gives meaning to knowledge. Schiller (2013) explains that the path to intellectual development has to be opened by the heart: “The role of affectivity, linked to the process of education and cognition, lies in the foundation and cultivation of values of relationship with the phenomenon of life” (BACH JR., 2010, p. 279, our translation). Besides empirical and logical science, Waldorf Education opts for a form of teaching that unites affectivity and rationality, because both are extremely important for education that proposes integral development of the child. In other words, there is no efficient cognitive development if it is not based on an affective attitude, on a form of teaching that integrates the emotion of learning and achieving that which is acquired through feelings.

In Waldorf Education, feelings are touched by what is beautiful. The beautiful fully infects the soul by a stimulus that transcends the sensory aspect. Human sensitivity comes from the beauty that is conferred to it when witnessing an artistic work, an esthetic state that occurs in the proportion and the extent that involves each subject when experiencing what is beautiful. “Through beauty, the sensitive human being is led to form and thought; through beauty, the spiritual human being is led back to matter and delivered back to the sensitive world.” (SCHILLER, 2013, p. 87, our translation).

Piske and Stoltz (2020) point out that human beings have a need for contemplation that unites them with the esthetic aspect of art, of the beauty contained in artistic expressions. The esthetic experience is promoted in Waldorf Education in order to develop freedom (STOLTZ; WIEHL, 2019b). Beauty, however, does not lack matter, it is not on a level of abstraction that

makes it impossible for us to experience it intentionally. Henriques (2008) explains that in every esthetic experience there is an amalgam of objectivity and subjectivity.

Esthetic pleasure derives from sensitivity in perceiving what is beautiful in harmonies that are contained in art, which is the supreme form of expression. “It is in the sensitive itself, in the very act of perceiving, that esthetic pleasure resides: in the direct perception of harmonies and rhythms that hold, in themselves, their truth” (DUARTE JR., 2002, p. 91, our translation). In Waldorf Education, “The esthetic state is a new mental disposition, when it comes into existence it is for the sake of affirming the humanity of the subject” (BACH JR., 2012, p. 21, our translation). Sensitivity and reason are simultaneously activated in the esthetic state that can be considered precise, real, and active in the process of creation.

Although Steiner (1997, 2013, 2000a, 2000b) does not establish a relationship with the teaching of gifted children, he values and emphasizes the importance of affectivity, emotions, and feelings during learning. Similarly, studies in the area of giftedness point to the relevance of education that can meet the socioemotional needs of the gifted child (KANE; SILVERMAN, 2014; KANE, 2016, 2018; PETERSON, 2014; LUBART, 2003; MAUD, 2013; PIECHOWSKI, 2014; PFEIFFER, 2016; PEREIRA *et al.*, 2016; GROSS, 2014, 2016; ALENCAR, 2007, 2014; PISKE, 2013, 2018; PISKE; STOLTZ, 2018, 2020), among others.

Convergences between Vygotsky and Steiner

Vygotsky and Rudolf Steiner dialogue in certain aspects and contribute to Education in a broad and deep way, making us reflect on a quality and creative form of teaching based on their enriching proposals. Convergences between Vygotsky’s social interactionist theory and Steiner’s Waldorf Education can be seen in the chart below.

CHART 1 – CONVERGENCES⁵ BETWEEN VYGOTSKY’S THEORY AND STEINER’S WALDORF EDUCATION

- Vygotsky and Steiner combine science and art as proposals for the development of creativity.
- Both authors emphasize the importance of affectivity that drives and accompanies the creation process.
- The Vygotskian theory and Waldorf Education present proposals for the integral development of the human being.
- For these authors, teachers need to instigate their students to be autonomous and to have an investigative, reflective and critical spirit about learning, leading them to love knowledge.
- Creativity, fantasy and imagination are central aspects in teaching.
- Both Vygotsky and Steiner are monists, associating affectivity with intellect, emotion with reason.
- Both consider that the environment, in which people find themselves and interact with each other, is fundamental, bringing benefits or limitations during the teaching-learning process. For example, an environment that stimulates potentialities and talents may enable the development of creative and innovative practices; on the other hand, an environment that inhibits and resists innovation, fantasy, and creativity may generate discontent and frustration.
- Vygotsky presents the concept of higher psychological functions, which are mental functions that characterize the conscious behavior of each person, and that only the human being develops, such as: voluntary attention, perception, memory, thought, among other aspects.
- Steiner, despite not mentioning the higher psychological functions, talks about high ability, only found in the human being, to reach a supra-sensible reality by means of thinking. Thinking is the link between man and the Cosmos, leading to individual freedom. Such freedom is the basis of a worldview, which, through thinking activity, leads to immaterial processes that characterize the ultimate essence of the universe. This thinking is intuitive thinking, not rational logic.
- Both raise the importance of the human development of consciousness related to the transformation of self and context.

SOURCE: Piske (2018), Piske and Stoltz (2020).

Divergences⁶ between Vygotsky and Steiner

Vygotsky and Steiner diverge in several aspects, their theories present antagonistic issues, however, it can be said that they complement each other

5 The convergences presented here are centered on essential aspects of Vygotsky’s and Steiner’s theories, not discarding the possibility of other aspects not mentioned.

6 The divergences focus on central aspects from Vygotskian and Steinerian concepts. Such divergences go beyond those cited in this study and future research should expand on them.

when it comes to aspects of human development. If, in the case of Vygotsky, his theory focuses on social interactionist relations and the development of consciousness, in the case of Steiner, his worldview requires an understanding beyond the material aspect, transcending materiality and advancing to the spirituality of each being. The chart below indicates the divergences found.

CHART 2 – DIVERGENCES BETWEEN VYGOTSKY’S THEORY AND STEINER’S WALDORF EDUCATION

- Vygotskian theory has a Marxist approach, where dialectical materialism is related to the psychological and social character. Steiner, on the other hand, looked mainly to the works of Goethe to create Anthroposophy. Steiner perceives the relationship between parts and whole through a phenomenological approach to the world based on the Goethean thesis.
 - Vygotsky presents mediation as fundamental in his theory. Steiner’s Waldorf Education proposal indicates how fundamental mediation is for the future development of a certain degree of freedom with effect from the end of the third seven-year stage. However, although mediation is indispensable, the human being, in essence, is a spiritual entity, and not social in its origin, according to Steiner.
 - Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZDP) makes us realize the importance of teacher mediation for the student to advance in learning. According to Vygotsky, the ZDP defines those functions that have not yet matured, but that are in the process of maturation; these functions will mature during each person’s development and according to what they learn.
- Steiner, on the other hand, does not present this concept, but teaches that every person at birth is made up of potential predispositions and abilities that can develop during their life, evolving at each seven-year stage. The type of mediation is fundamental in this process of development until the age of 21. After that, it is the subject himself who is responsible for his self-improvement.

SOURCE: Piske (2018), Piske and Stoltz (2020).

In both in the convergences and the divergences between the theories, Vygotsky’s sociointeractionism and Steiner’s Waldorf Education address educational measures capable of dealing with the specificities and needs of each student, providing the possibility of reflection, autonomy, freedom of expression, investigative and critical spirit for a comprehensive and quality education that meets their needs. Both go beyond reductionism and fragmented teaching, pointing out the importance of learning in an inter and transdisciplinary way.

Final considerations

The objective was to investigate creativity in the social interactionist approach and in Waldorf Education and its implications for working with gifted students. Discussion based on these great thinkers, Vygotsky and Steiner, is extremely important for education. Although in their theories there is no in-depth discussion about the education of gifted students, the authors draw attention to the need for appropriate procedures for a form of teaching that allows progress at each stage of development, emphasizing playful teaching. In this aspect, teaching will depend on the mediation of a teacher trained to deal with the special educational needs of these students (PISKE; STOLTZ, 2020).

Vygotsky's and Steiner's proposals meet the needs of gifted students, especially when they emphasize that mediation must be meaningful. Teachers, as the main mediators, are responsible for awakening in students a love for knowledge and for life. In addition, they can enable students to make progress in the various areas of knowledge, mainly through creative teaching. In this sense, their progress will depend on teachers being prepared to perceive and deal with the needs of each student, expanding their knowledge, especially in their area(s) of interest. Expansion of this knowledge will rely fundamentally on playing and artistic practices that will comprise significant and quality education with the purpose of meeting the needs of the emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions of these students.

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