

"STUDYING CAN ALSO BE LEARNED": CONTRIBUTIONS OF HISTORICAL-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. This paper brings a case report regarding the project *Estudar também se aprende* (Brazilian Portuguese for "Studying can also be learned"), developed as an activity for the supervised teaching practice in educational psychology carried out by graduation students of the fifth year of Psychology in 2013. That project has been performed since 2008 in a public school; it is based on the theoretical and practical assumptions of Historical-Cultural Psychology. In this perspective, education is determinant for human development, for it influences and is responsible for guiding it, restructuring the elementary functions towards the higher psychological functions. The project aimed to teach students studying techniques that could allow the development of higher psychological functions, changing the process of concept formation, as well as improving school performance. In this perspective, the educator's role is to organize the social environment, i.e., the educator uses concrete and symbolic mediating resources in order to promote knowledge appropriation by the students. Thus, the proposal was to encourage the students' habit of studying, with systematized strategies for the appropriation of school contents. During the project execution, it was noticed that there was a gap between the students and the social meaning of the activity of studying. From the methodology used in the project, it was possible to notice a change in the meaning of that activity. The results indicated that the students who previously attended school as an obligation realized the need of systematized studying as a way to develop psychological functions.

Keywords: Historical-Cultural Psychology; educational practices; school problems.

"ESTUDAR TAMBÉM SE APRENDE": CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA PSICOLOGIA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL PARA A EDUCAÇÃO

RESUMO. O presente trabalho traz um relato de caso referente ao projeto "Estudar Também se Aprende" desenvolvido como atividade de estágio supervisionado em educação por alunos do quinto ano de psicologia no ano de 2013. O projeto vem sendo executado desde 2008 em uma escola da rede estadual de ensino e é embasado nos pressupostos teóricos e práticos da psicologia histórico-cultural. Nessa perspectiva, entende-se que a educação é determinante para o desenvolvimento humano, pois não apenas o influencia como é responsável por orientá-lo, reestruturando as funções elementares em direção às funções psicológicas superiores. O projeto teve por objetivo ensinar aos alunos técnicas de estudo que permitissem o desenvolvimento das funções psicológicas superiores, movimentando o processo de formação de conceitos, e também produzindo melhora no desempenho escolar. Entende-se pela perspectiva teórica que o papel do educador é de organizador do meio social, ou seja, aquele que emprega os recursos mediadores concretos e simbólicos de modo a proporcionar a apropriação de conhecimentos pelos alunos. Para tanto, a proposta foi incentivar o hábito de estudar dos alunos, com estratégias sistematizadas para apropriação do conteúdo escolar. Durante a execução do trabalho percebeu-se que havia distanciamento dos alunos em relação ao significado socialmente atribuído à atividade do estudo. A partir da metodologia utilizada no projeto foi possível observar mudança na atribuição de sentido desta atividade. Assim, os resultados indicaram que os alunos que antes frequentavam a escola por obrigação, perceberam a necessidade de estudar de modo sistematizado como meio para desenvolver funções psicológicas.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia histórico-cultural; práticas educativas; queixa escolar.

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"ESTUDIAR TAMBIÉN SE APRENDE": CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA PSICOLOGÍA HISTÓRICO CULTURAL PARA LA EDUCACIÓN

RESUMEN. En este trabajo se presenta un caso clínico para el proyecto "Estudiar también se aprende" desarrollado como actividad de pasantía en Educación por los estudiantes del quinto curso de Psicología en 2013. El proyecto viene siendo ejecutado desde el año de 2008 en una escuela de enseñanza estatal y se fundamenta en los presupuestos teóricos y prácticos de Psicología Histórico Cultural. En esta perspectiva, se entiende que la educación es fundamental para el desarrollo humano, pues no sólo influye como es responsable por orientarle, la reestructuración de las funciones elementales hacia las funciones psicológicas superiores. El proyecto tenía como objetivo enseñar, a los estudiantes, técnicas que les permiten el desarrollo de las funciones psicológicas superiores, moviendo el proceso de formación de conceptos, además de producir una mejora en el rendimiento escolar. Se entiende por la perspectiva teórica que el papel del profesor es de organizador del entorno social, es decir, uno que utiliza los recursos mediadores concretos y simbólicos para proporcionar la apropiación del conocimiento por los estudiantes. Por lo tanto, la propuesta es fomentar el hábito de estudiar de los estudiantes con estrategias sistemáticas para la apropiación del contenido escolar. Durante la ejecución del trabajo, se observó que había un hueco de los estudiantes en relación a el significado socialmente atribuido a la actividad de estudio. A partir de la metodología utilizada en el proyecto fue posible observar un cambio en la atribución de significado a esta actividad. Por lo tanto, los resultados indicaron que estudiantes que antes atendían a la escuela por obligación, se dieron cuenta de la necesidad de estudiar de manera sistematizada como un medio para desarrollar funciones psicológicas.

Palabras-clave: Psicología historia cultural; prácticas educativas; problemas escolares.

introduction

This text aims at presenting the report of an intervention research in the field of School Psychology, with the theoretical support of Historical-Cultural Psychology. The work was developed by means of the project *Estudar também se aprende* (Brazilian Portuguese for "Studying can also be learned"), whose target was teaching the pupils studying techniques that allowed them to develop higher psychological functions. This paper, then, is the result of the activities of the supervised teaching practice in educational emphasis of undergraduates of the fifth year of the Psychology course of Universidade Estadual de Maringá. The project was carried out in 2008, at a public school in the municipality of Maringá, Paraná, Brazil. Initially, the theoretical background, which based the above-mentioned project, are presented; then, we present the theoretical-practical unit that guided our planning and the organization of the procedures carried out during the intervention. Finally, the results achieved are exposed, as well as the difficulties and the possibilities of development of projects similar to that one at schools.

Theoretical-methodological background

For the theoretical basis of the activities carried out, the Historical-Cultural Psychology background was used. It has, as its leading exponents, L. S. Vygotsky (1896-1934), A. R. Luria (1902-1977) and A. Leontiev (1903-1979). In relation to that approach, it is important to mention that it appeared in the period of Post Russian Revolution of 1917, and has its methodological roots in the Dialectical Historical Materialism of K. Marx (1818-1883) and F. Engels (1820-1895). Historical-Cultural Psychology explains how consciousness, specifically human property of psyche, is constituted in and by social relations (Martins, 2013). For this conception, the human being develops from the appropriation of signs (forms of symbolic language) and instruments (concrete tools) produced along the history of humanity by means of the human vital activity, work. To Vygotsky (1930/1996), those are the mediating elements that re-direct the relation man-nature and, by means of them, the external nature changes (something new is created in nature itself, like an ax, a hammer) and the human psyche is altered (the psychic functions become more complex, and then the verbal thinking, the logical memory, the voluntary attention, the self-control of the behavior are developed). Leontiev (1959/2004) highlights the fact that the human being is born as a candidate to humanity, i.e., with the biological apparatus prepared for such, but will only develop the superior psychological functions if he/she has concrete conditions to

access the instruments and the signs that are able to produce such development, for it is not a natural and biological process, but a culturally designed one. Vygotsky (1934/2009) point out the fact that it is in the social relations that the child will appropriate the social signs that will change the shape and the content of his/her thought towards a new formation: the verbal thought. When he/she starts the appropriation of symbolic language (speaking), still in the first childhood, the child will start a long development process, from which the language starts to turn from communicative function into thinking instrument (Luria, 1934/2001). The appropriation of language allows to duplicate the reality in the mental scope (concepts formation) and, this way, the child steadily becomes able to plan and control his/her intentions, his/her actions, mentally predicting their result. That process starts in the first childhood and culminates in the condition of reaching the self-awareness in adolescence; however, it is directly connected to the educational conditions offered to each individual (Martins, 2013; Leal & Facci, 2014).

To Vygotsky (1934/2009), the concept is the product of a long and complex process of development of the verbal thinking (it goes through the phases of syncretism, complexes, pseudocomplexes) in which all elementary psychological functions in a new combination (neofunctions) participate. The core moment of that process is the functional use of the word as a way of attention arbitrary guidance, abstraction, attributes discrimination, syncretization, and symbolization with the help of the sign. Because of that, it is from thinking by concepts that the human being becomes able to plan his/her action and dominate his/her own behavior, acting in a mediated way by means of the interior language.

Considering what has been exposed, it is understood that this process, in the child, does not depend on the biological maturation, but on a systematic organization of the teaching-learning process, which occurs in his/her environment. According to Vygotsky (1934/2009), learning happens in the relations with other men, in which the knowledge produced historically is transmitted. It is the appropriation of the human elaborations that leads the child to the development, not the opposite.

In this perspective, education inside and outside school is understood as being determining to human development, for it influences him/her, as well as it guides him/her, re-structuring the elementary functions towards superior psychological functions. According to Meira (2011), the development of human individuality is only possible from the acquisition of knowledge socially elaborated along human history, which need to be appropriated by children inside school. Because of that, "the educational work is the act of producing, direct and intentionally, in each singular individual, the humanity that is produced historic and collectively by the men set" (Saviani, 2008, p. 13, free translation). So that it can be effectuated, the teacher must be the organizer of the social environment (Vygotski 1926/2001), the one who employs concrete and symbolic mediating resources in a way to supply the student's appropriation of knowledge, leading to psychic development.

When we entered the schools, we faced the scenario with countless reports of school complaints (learning, students' behavior problems, etc.), and that is why it was necessary to think of them in relation the existing educational procedure. It is necessary to understand such complaints as produced historic and socially, solved or intensified according to the specifics of the social relations constituted by the way of production of material life of that society (Souza & Cecchia, 2003). We understand that psychology can contribute to this process, by formulating interventions concerning teaching and learning, rescuing the function of the school as the institution responsible for the socialization of systematized knowledge, helping to remove the obstacles between the subject and the knowledge, and favoring the humanization process and the development of critical thinking (Meira, 2011).

If the child must be understood as an individual who develops from the sociocultural environment, considering what is available to him/her and offered for him/her to develop or not, it is necessary to reflect on which material and symbolic instruments necessary to the logic-conceptual learning are being offered in times of large-scale-production of schooling problems. More than that, it is necessary to rescue the educator's role as the one who plans the educational action to promote his/her students' development.

After that short explanation, we synthesize the following theoretical principles, which guided the work carried out: (1) The superior psychological functions are cultural, and, therefore, they are acquisitions that depend depending on educational processes that happen inside and outside school; (2) The theoretical or conceptual-scientific thinking developed in humanity history from the development

of the complex societies and of the growing systematization of the knowledge on the nature that the human being has been producing; (3) That knowledge, due to its complexity, demands ways, also systematized, for its appropriation, and does not happen in a spontaneous, routine way (such as oral language, for example); (4) The institution created to transmit, not only the accumulated scientific knowledge along the human history, but also the ways to think scientifically and conceptually, is the school.

Considering what has been exposed, we highlight the urgent necessity to think about practices that try to break the dichotomy form / content, dealing with both as a unity, for the appropriation of scientific knowledge must also be the appropriation of the theoretic-conceptual thinking. The work developed, therefore, is on the assumption that, in order to study, to appropriate scientific concepts, it is also required to be able to systematize contents methods.

The theory moving the practice: Project: “Studying can also be learned”

From the theoretical reference above, the work carried out aimed at teaching the students studying techniques that allowed the development of the superior psychological functions, moving the process of concepts formation, also producing improvements at school performance. The proposal was encouraging the students' studying habits, with systematized strategies for the appropriation of school content, dealing with techniques used in summaries, paraphrases, schemes and graphic organizers (Condemarin & Chadwick, 1994).

The project is being developed in a state school² since 2008. That school is located in the central area of the municipality of Maringá, Paraná, Brazil. In 2013, the project was offered to students of the seventh year of Brazilian Elementary School. In that year, the institution had four classes of seventh years with nearly 35 students in each, and the work happened along ten meetings carried out every fifteen days, starting in March and finishing in September.

The work was carried out during the regular classes' time and every fifteen days in each classroom; each meeting lasted the equivalent to a two-hour class period. It aimed at the participation of teachers, for their integration in the project, so that, once in contact with the techniques proposed, they could develop strategies to facilitate the appropriation of content by students in their classes.

All the activities aimed at developing the superior psychic functions, such as logic memory, conceptual thinking, and behavior voluntary control, among others. The teachers-in-training, when teaching the studying methods, allowed the students to learn the contents and advance in their development. It is considered, then, that this is one of the roles to be played by the psychologists at schools, working together with teachers in classrooms, not only in clinical models. For that to happen, it is necessary that the psychologist is equipped theoretical and practically to use the resources of the psychological science to clarify to the educator how the student's development is processed, designing and applying activities that move that process of new psychic formations, such as Vygotsky (1934/2009) suggests.

In the first meeting run with the students, a questionnaire was applied, in order for us to understand their studying habits. It was noticed that a great part of them did not have the habit of studying, and, when they did, they were in front of television or computer. Another highlighted aspect concerned the major preference to the discipline of Physical Education, as well as the primacy of a vacant class and a break instead of classes of other disciplines.

Due to that finding, the project sought to rescue from the students the sense and the meaning (Leontiev, 1959/2004) of the studying activity, highlighting the importance of the schooling process for the development of their maximum potentiality. Asbahr (2014), when systematizing the concepts of sense and meaning in the works of Vygotsky and Leontiev, claims that “the social significations must be understood as syntheses of joint social practices, the ideal form of existence of the objectal world” (p.

² Besides the regular education, the institution also has students from other schools. It also has a Modern Languages Center, with 181 students in the afternoon and 153 students in the evening. There is also a classroom with resources for high-skilled and gifted students, with 11 students, multifunctional room (6 students), room for visually impaired students and room for hearing impaired students, with 4 students each.

267, free translation). This way, the content of the social awareness is the signification system connected to language, a generalization of the reality that mediates the relation of the man with the world and that is ready when the individual is born; it is up to him/her to appropriate that system. On the other hand, the way that the individual appropriates certain significations (and also whether he/she can or cannot appropriate them), according to the author, depends on the personal meaning that it will have to the subject. The sense emerges from the concrete relation between what causes the subject's action (reason) and the goal to each the action (or chain of actions) is guided as an immediate result: it translates the relation reason-goal. That was the broader aim of the whole project, to which converged all the actions carried out along the year, the awareness among reasons and goals inside the studying activity.

The phase of organization of the proposal included the collection of information on the characteristics and the demands of the school, carried out from the reading of the teaching practice report of the previous year and of the school's Political and Pedagogical Project. We have also used interviews with the school's pedagogue and advisor responsible for the seventh years, besides the directive team. From those data, it was noticed that there was a complaint regarding the students' behavior, regarding the lack of interest in studying and the content discrepancy since the previous schooling cycle.

After organizing the project schedule, we carried out a meeting to presented it to the teachers and to the pedagogical team, who agreed to it, approved the calendar of interventions and showed to be available to contribute. The project started with a research on the studying habits, which was carried out by means of a printed questionnaire, handed in to the students, who answered it anonymously. The teachers-in-training systematized the answers obtained in each group and presented the results, in a graph, trying to problematize the meanings of each data³.

The students reflected on the social meaning of studying and of the school (teaching and learning) and the personal meaning that they were providing to it (recreation time and friendship). Thus, it was possible to highlight the gap between the social meaning and the personal sense of the school activities to the students. There was then a discussion on the stereotypes of students based upon the innate capacities and the reflection on the possibility to reach the purpose of being successful at learning from the appropriation and organization and the ways necessary for them to do the studying activities (Leontiev, 1959/2004).

In the second phase, two studying methods were taught to the students: summary, paraphrase, scheme and graphic organizers. The planning of each of those meetings was carried out taking five moments into account. The first one considered the review of the previous content, bringing to the students the subject already approached, the advances made and the difficulties found. That moment was important to stimulate the memory and to establish relations with the contents already dealt with, aiming at reflecting with the students on the learning as a moving process, with advances and regressions. In the second moment, the teachers-in-training presented the aim and the steps of the day's meeting, saying what would be expected and necessary for the students to do so the steps could be carried out (for example: work in pairs, silent reading, individual work), justifying each step. As Leontiev (1959/2004) highlights, the understanding of the aim of the action necessary to carry out a studying activity allows the awareness of the activity as a whole, bringing more organization and control of the behavior aiming at the proposed task. Thus, it was not only actions that comprised the action of making a summary itself (reading, highlighting the most important parts and key words, etc.) that needed to be taught. More importantly, it was the relation of that studying activity, whose goal, at first, could be having a good grade to pass exams, but that that skill, when appropriated by the subjects, produced the development of the conceptual thinking (interpretation skills, analysis, discrimination, synthesizing).

³ For example: in one of the graphs, the students expressed that what they most liked at school was the break and the vacant lessons. In another graph, it was highlighted that what they liked the least was studying. With those data, the social function of school (transmitting systematized knowledge) and how it related to the students' learning and development were issues questioned.

The following moment consisted of the presentation of the concept of the studying method to be worked with in the meeting. To each method, a card was handed in individually to each student. The cards contained the conceptual enunciate of the studying method, the steps for its execution and an example to be commented about. Before the card was read, a discussion on what the students already knew about the method was carried out, to assess their pre-existent knowledge. That moment is called, by Vygotsky (2010/1933), assessment of the child's current development. In that development, the skills that the child can perform without the help of an adult would be implied. It is the educator's task, therefore, evaluate him/her to plan a teaching process that goes beyond those consolidated skills, i.e., that works on the imminent development zone, with processes still under development. The instruction, thus, must not adjust to the current development, but to what is to come, to what is about to be consolidated (Vygotsky, 1933/2010). After that, the commented reading of the card was carried out and the teachers-in-training problematized the proximity and the distance of what the students already knew about the method and what was on the card.

The fourth moment comprised the teaching of the technique, systematically. With the students, the teachers-in-training discussed the example from the card and carried out each step demanded by the method explained. Finally, in the fifth moment, an activity was proposed, requiring the execution of the method learned. That activity aimed at evaluating the level of the students' understanding of the technique taught, noticing their difficulties so interventions could be performed.

During the period that the meetings were held, specifics of each group were identified, and the lesson plans had to be readjusted many times (in some groups, the explanations were longer, in others, more examples were provided). As Vygotsky (1934/2009) claims, the appropriation of scientific concepts is descendent, from the most abstract to connect to the experience, which implies that the educator has to organize specific forms of mediation according to the students' necessities.

The activities done by the students were corrected by the teachers-in-training, from a qualitative assessment. This showed which aspects of the technique each student had understood and the ones that needed to be reviewed. Because of the, at the beginning of each meeting, the activities were handed back to the students and they could have their doubt solved.

At the end of the Project, a game was carried out. Using ludic activities, all the methods taught during the year were revised. A questionnaire for the project assessment was also applied, allowing the students and the teachers to give their opinion on the work as a whole, analyzing their participation, the teachers-in-training's performance and suggesting ideas for the following years' projects.

The results searched and the results reached

Along the Project development, significant changes could be observed in the groups of the seventh years. At the beginning, the teachers-in-training found difficulty in involving the students in the activities, due to the excess of conversations and the apparent lack of interest and motivation. Nevertheless, from the theoretical background adopted, it can be understood that the interest and the motivation are socially created on the students (Leal & Facci, 2014). In order to develop them, the teachers-in-training worked towards the production of unity between sense and meaning to the activities carried out, pointing at the relation between the techniques learned and the possibility for each student to, intentionally, improve his/her school performance and, mainly, highlighting the development that was produced from the appropriation of a cultural instrument. When they became interested in the techniques and the subjects approached, the students got involved with the activities, which reduced the aggressive and undisciplined behavior, a fact that even the teachers and the pedagogical coordinator could notice.

It was also noticed the students were distant from the meaning socially attributed to the studying activity. From the methodology used, it was possible to do what Leontiev (1959/2004) names as conversion of inefficient reasons into efficient ones, which, indeed, makes the activity make sense. Therefore, students who previously went to school as an obligation noticed the necessity to study systematically as a way to develop psychological functions: dominating oneself, understanding the world and increasing their references on the reality.

That change on the students' interest is attributed to the fact that the social meaning of the studying activity, i.e., the learning and the consequent development, got closer to a personal motivating sense of it. Thus, the students noticed that the directed teaching generates the development of new skills that are important for dominating their behavior. Like Leontiev (1959/2004) proposes, the dominant activity is not the one that occupies more time in the child's life, but the one that organizes and leads the development to the acquisition of new capacities.

There were also changes on teachers' posture. At first, they did not believe in the potential of some students. Along the work, the teachers could review their practices, noticing the importance of planning the teaching process, understanding the relation of the content as human historical productions that could only have been appropriated by the students from an intentionally mediated relation. Another highlighted fact was the growing interest of some teachers in looking for the support of the Teachers-in-practice to their teaching practice. They started to ask for texts that they could base their lessons upon and methodologies that could help when students faced difficulties. The interns were available to talk to the teachers, suggesting studying references for them to study and contributing whenever was possible.

Despite the advances mentioned above, we could notice the need to encourage, even more, the participation of the teachers in the formulation of the activities for the meetings, as well as in the use of the studying techniques taught in their lessons. The students, in the assessment, requested the teaching of a larger variety of studying methods. Another aspect that can be improved concerns the support to the students who were identified as having difficulties at the teaching-learning process. In spite of the individual assistance that they had during the meetings, some of them demonstrated not having appropriated completely the techniques taught; they need specific assistance (for example, an extra-curricular-shift supporting classroom), which, in this year, could not be established.

The current scenario of education depreciation and the blame on the students for their difficulties have been noticeable, pointing at the urgent necessity of an education re-structuration that rescues the social meaning of the studying activity. The importance of the psychology action inside school, with students and teachers is comprehensive; it should focus on the effectiveness of a teaching-learning process that really aims at the emancipation of every individual towards the development of their maximum potentialities.

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