

YOUNG STUDENT'S MOTIVES TO SCHOOL ACTIVITIES IN THE TEIHS¹

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the results of a research that, based on the Historical-Cultural Theory, investigated the constitution of motives for school activities in young students from Technical Education Integrated to High School (TEIHS). The investigative procedures were: document analysis, questionnaire and dialogue group with TEIHS students from a school in the São Paulo city. The analysis used the elaboration of a theoretical model. Different motives leading the students' activities were identified, which are *formal requirements*, intimate personal relations, *socially useful activity*, *vocational or career activity*. It was explicit that the movements in their motivational hierarchy can be explained by the system of relationships established between the *socially constituted demands for TEIHS - the general conditions of the school - the characteristics of educational task - and the young students' social situation of development*. Considerations are presented about the process of constituting motives for school activities and brief recommendations for the teaching organization process at TEIHS.

Keywords: Motivation; Young Adults; Historical-Cultural Psychology.

Constitución de motivos a las actividades escolares en jóvenes estudiantes del ETIM

RESUMEN

En el artículo se discute los resultados de una investigación que, se basa en la Teoría Histórico-Cultural, investigó la constitución de motivos a las actividades escolares en jóvenes estudiantes de la Enseñanza Técnica Integrada a la Enseñanza Secundaria. Los procedimientos investigativos fueron: análisis documental, cuestionario y grupo de diálogo con estudiantes del ETIM de una escuela de la capital paulista. En el análisis se utilizó de la elaboración de un *modelo teórico*. Se identificaron diferentes motivos orientadores de las actividades de los estudiantes (*requisitos formales, comunicación íntima personal, actividad socialmente útil, actividad profesional/estudio*). Se explicitó que los movimientos en la *jerarquía motivacional* de estos pueden ser explicados por el sistema de relaciones establecidas entre las *demandas socialmente constituidas para el ETIM – las condiciones generales de la escuela – las características de las tareas escolares – y la situación social de desarrollo del joven estudiante*. Se presentan consideraciones sobre el proceso de constituciones de motivos a las actividades escolares y breves recomendaciones para el proceso de organización de la enseñanza en el ETIM.

Palabras clave: Motivación; jóvenes; Psicología Histórico-Cultural.

Constituição de motivos às atividades escolares em jovens estudantes do ETIM

RESUMO

O artigo discute os resultados de uma pesquisa que, embasada na Teoria Histórico-Cultural, investigou a constituição de motivos às atividades escolares em jovens estudantes do Ensino Técnico Integrado ao Ensino Médio. Os procedimentos investigativos foram: análise documental, questionário e grupo de diálogo com estudantes do ETIM de uma escola da capital paulista. A análise utilizou-se da elaboração de um *modelo teórico*. Identificaram-se diferentes motivos orientadores das atividades dos estudantes, como *requisitos formais, comunicação íntima pessoal, atividade socialmente útil, atividade profissional/estudo*. Explicitou-se que as movimentações na *hierarquia motivacional* desses podem ser explicadas pelo sistema de relações estabelecidas entre as *demandas socialmente constituidas para o ETIM – as condições gerais da escola – as características das tarefas escolares – e a situação social de desenvolvimento do jovem estudante*. Apresentam-se considerações sobre o processo de constituição de motivos às atividades escolares e breves recomendações para o processo de organização do ensino no ETIM.

Palavras-chave: Motivação; jovens; Psicologia Histórico-Cultural.

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INTRODUCTION

In view of the reform of High School (Law No. 13415, 2017), worrying rates of access and permanence at this level of education (SNJ / IPEA, 2014)¹ and the lack of identity of the educational policy aimed at youth, marked by the structural duality of teaching focused on the job market or education focused on exams for entrance to Higher Education (Frigotto & Ciavatta, 2003), we ask: What does school do in the formation of youth? And, what keeps young people linked to school?

This article aims to contribute to the reflection about one of the aspects involved in the permanence and the achievement of school activities by young students, the motivation for the study. To this end, it presents the results of a research whose objective was to produce a theoretical analysis of the relationship that students establish with the activities they carry out in the context of Technical Education Integrated to High School (TEIHS)².

It starts from a theoretical and also political position, that school activity needs to be oriented towards significant motives for society and, at the same time, find ways in which these motives become significant for students and start to lead their activities (Hedegaard, 2012). For the Historical-Cultural Theory, these motives are linked to an ethical commitment to human emancipation (Delari-Junior, 2013; Tonet, 2005), which means, as pointed out by Bozhovich (1981), for providing conditions for complete development of students' personality. For this, the objectives of the teaching must embody the demands of society towards man and also the students' individual particularities, reconciling social and singular dimensions of development, seeking to enhance human diversity (Bozhovich, 1981). We agree with the author's statement that it is the development of personality - as the most stable characteristic of the subject to feel, understand and act in the world - that should give unity to educational objectives, which are usually dispersed in the enumeration of contents, habits and skills, in a fragmented way. Such fragmentation contributes to the disintegration of personality and alienation, being useful for the maintenance of class society.

In the context of an alienating society, with a fragmented teaching organization, the school therefore has the challenge of promoting conditions for the full development of the personality of its students, which is still a generic function of the school. Along with it, it is necessary to articulate the specificities of development at each stage of schooling, in coherence with the development processes of the students who attend it.

This presents us with a difficulty, since, in an unequal

society like the one we live, the experience of youth is not homogeneous. As analyzed by Sposito (2011) and Dayrell and Carrano (2014), the youth experience is permeated by issues of class, race and gender (among others), which is quite evident in the research data of Abramo and Branco (2011). Without losing sight of the need to consider the particularities of these experiences, in an attempt to highlight the social demands that are placed to a greater or lesser extent on youth, and which, according to the Historical-Cultural Theory, are markers for youth development, we can list: a) a progressive increase in social participation (either by voting, art, or more autonomous participation in the city); b) the experimentation of activities linked to a potential professional future (either through discussions at school in this regard, either through insertion in the labor market, or through experiences as a young apprentice); and c) experiences with the sexual act. Still, in this condition in which you are not a child, but neither you are an adult, there is a gradual increase in charges for responsibility and autonomy in relation to daily actions and decisions that impact your future life, and adolescents, in turn, demand more their right to independence.

From the above, it is clear that the youth experience is not the product of a unidirectional influence of the demands that are placed on young people by society. The young person actively interacts with these demands, and when acting in front of them, introduces changes in the world and modifies himself, raising new possibilities of action. It is understood that this process has some regularities, which are called the *social situation of development*. This concept is used to express the regularities in the experiences in certain stages of life and that are the result of the special combination of: a) internal development processes constituted in the subjects' life history (the development characteristics of complex psychological functions; personality; needs and motives for action); b) external demands usually placed on him/her, which in the case of youth were synthetically expressed in the previous paragraph; c) new internal development processes that emerge at the end of the stage.

Authors such as Leontiev (1978), Elkonin (1987), Bozhovich (1981) and Davydov (1988) discussed the periodization of human development and the typical social situation of development in each period. We will focus here on the youth leading activities and on the process of constituting motives for school activities.

According to Leontiev (1978), the leading activity is the one that predominantly leads the development of the subjects in a certain period of life, being, therefore, essential to the development of the personality. The authors mentioned in the previous paragraph divide adolescence into early adolescence and adolescence.

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They do not necessarily specify age benchmarks for these periods, but they speak of their leading activities, even though they make it difficult to define them, since the social demands for this period of development are not so marked.

For Elkonin (1987) the beginning of adolescence is marked by the transition from the leading activity *activity of study to intimate personal relations*. For Bozhovich (1981), the fact that children are jointly engaged in study at school, allows for the emergence of the need and desire to be together. According to Elkonin (1987), *intimate personal relations* emerges as a leading activity, which is characterized by the relationships that are established on the basis of mutual respect, with trust and an inner life community, and in which the opinion of the companions will be making it hierarchically more important than that of adults. According to the author, in such activity there is the establishment of the “companionship code”, a set of moral and ethical norms that mediate the acts of adolescents and are fundamental for the formation of their personality. Davydov (1988) considers that such manifestations need to be understood in the context of their purposes and proposes that the leading activity of early adolescence is the *socially useful activity*. This includes, in addition to the study, productive, socio-organizational, artistic and sports activities, whose mark is the exercise of a social contribution. According to the author, it is within these activities that adolescents recognize their responsibilities for the collective, the social value of their personal successes and the social importance of each type of activity.

It is on the basis of these experiments, in the *intimate personal relations activity*, or the *socially useful activity*, that adolescents will be able to engage in the next challenge, which is to deepen their studies in the professional context, which will promote professional interests and the need to work and produce. Elkonin (1969) highlights the importance of polytechnic education and Bozhovich (1981) situates the selection of the profession as the search for inclusion and finding its place in the social process of production. The vocational or career activity would be the leading activity of the final period of adolescence.

Would these be the leading activities of youth in the Brazilian context? Investigations are needed in this regard, especially considering the diversity and inequality in the youth experience. This was not the objective of the research described here, but even so, the results pointed to the importance of these activities and their interrelation with the development of motives for school activities.

When talking about the development of motives for school activities, we assume that these motives are

not natural, and there is no motivated or unmotivated student *per se*. For the Historical-Cultural Theory, the motives for the activities emerge in conditions in which there is a social need, which must also exist for the subject, and this need drives an action by the subject that seeks to find the object that satisfies it and the sequence of actions and operations that will be needed to achieve it. The whole of this process is called *activity*, which, when performed and achieved the objective, promotes the conditions for the emergence of a *motive*. The motive, in this conception, is that which cognitively and affectively links the subject to the planned result of the set of his actions and, thus, starts to lead future activities. However, in life we are daily immersed in different activities, we can do the same activity for different motives, and for this reason we have established a hierarchy of motives that leads our priorities for linking to activities, which will become clearer when we discuss the results of the research.

For the moment, it is important to have clarity that motives develop only in the subject's activities, so that they are constituted. Thus, actions at school cannot be restricted to communicating to students the current scientific conclusions. It is necessary to organize the activity so that students need to act collectively to appropriate knowledge based on the social function it fulfills, as stated.

The characteristics of this process in youth, especially in the context of Technical Education Integrated to High School (TEIHS) is what we will try to explain through the research results communicated below.

METHOD

From the bibliographic review carried out and the theoretical principles of Dialectical Historical Materialism, based on Kosik (1976), we understand that, in order to achieve the proposed objective, it was necessary to apprehend the object of the *young students' relation with activities carried out at TEIHS* in movement, identifying the relationships among the essential elements that constitute it.

For this, the empirical moment of the research consisted of: A) analysis of the documents that guide the work at TEIHS in a school that had such modality in a variety of courses; B) answer, by TEIHS students, to a questionnaire about their school and family life and some demographic data; C) dialogue group with students from this school and from this teaching modality, focusing on their school experience and the relationship between school and work.

The school in which the research was carried out has existed for over 50 years and at the time offered 12 courses, from different areas, the vast majority of which were in the TEIHS modality. It served around

4000 students, of which 1000 at TEIHS. The document that underpins its pedagogical practice, and that was analyzed in the research, was the Multiannual Management Plan, which includes the Political Pedagogical Project of the school.

The application of the questionnaire served to have a profile of TEIHS students from that school and also had the purpose of approaching students who, involved in the action of answering it, they could have a first contact with the research objectives and invited to participate in the dialogue group. All students who became interested in the dialogue group and who met the time availability and parental authorization requirements, participated in the group.

In relation to the dialogue group, it was chosen because it is a procedure that combines listening to students about a certain subject and also the possibility of reflecting about it, having been used in other research on youth and schooling (Dayrell & Carrano, 2014; Ribeiro, Lânes & Carrano, 2005). In it, the investigative process is also a learning process, for which dialogue is the fundamental instrument, which enables clarifications and transformations from initial opinions to more elaborate considerations, based on collective work.

The group was held in two meetings, with an interval of one day between one and the other. The first one lasted 3 hours and 18 minutes and the second one lasted 4 hours and 12 minutes. Students from the integrated courses of Nutrition and Dietetics (2), Electronics (1), Mechanics (2) and Environment (2) participated in the group, making a total of seven participants, to which we will refer from fictitious names.

The group was audio and video-recorded and later transcribed and was led by the researcher and a co-mediator³. Trigger questions were asked and, in particular, three movements in leading the group were important: 1) the request for examples; 2) the use of a triggering situation through the question: "If you were going to talk to a group of 9th grade students, who are thinking about making the selection process to enter TEIHS, what advice would you give them?"; 3) and the discussion from the video Life Project⁴.

It was the combination of these strategies in the conduct of the group that allowed the change of generic statements such as "*the school is the central one, it is the basis, in the life of the citizen, because it is that educates*" (Pedro) for descriptive statements and mobilized by the affections of students' own experiences, allowing them to be apprehended in their movement, as

I hate electronics and all that, but the programming

³ Ma. Anita da Costa Pereira Machado.

⁴ "Projeto de Vida" Recovered from <http://vimeo.com/14557744>

part, that you find yourself doing such a thing, that you spent an hour passing 0 and 1, 0 and 1, 0 and 1, and program, for it to do what you planned, all right, you see that it followed the pattern you wanted ..., it is an accomplishment for you to say I did it, I did it, alone. (Rafael)

As for ethical procedures, the project for this research was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee with Human Beings of the Sao Paulo University - Psychology Institute⁵ and with care in the relationship between researcher and research participants.

The set of these procedures composed the ways of approaching the empirical referent of the research, what Kosik (1976) calls as a phenomenon. In conjunction with the accumulated theoretical abstractions, it was possible to make a second movement to approach and understand these data. Firstly, this consisted of organizing the data into thematic axes, which allowed us to foresee some of the changes in the students' motives for school activities, however, it did not make it possible to reach at the concreteness of the phenomenon and explain its essential relationships, that is, those without which the same cannot be understood.

The use of the theoretical model was fundamental to reach this understanding. According to Murad (2011) and Downes (2011), different fields of knowledge make use of models in science. Here we will stick to the model conception in Historical-Cultural Theory, which in the case of this research consisted of a graphic representation that reproduces the essential nexus and relationships of real objects, and at the same time reveals new questions about them. From Davydov (1982, as cited by Pandita-Pereira, 2016, p. 46)

The model is, in this conception, the result of a complex cognitive activity, which includes the elaboration of the data obtained from the empirical referent, which are theoretically meant. It is also a means, an instrument for carrying out this cognitive activity.

In the case of the model built in this research, it aims to explain the different qualities of approach and engagement of young people towards the activities they performed at TEIHS. The results of this process and the model developed will be presented below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Grouping the different qualities of students' engagement with school activities and the goals to which they directed such activities, we identified the existence of four types of motives. They are:

- *Motive oriented to formal requirements* - refers

⁵ Committee opinion number 251,687.

to activities whose objective is to meet demands linked to formalities, such as obtaining the diploma, the grade and the frequency necessary to be approved. Such motives provide students with the tasks they are asked to perform, but also a resistance to them, which makes them organize themselves to perform them with the least amount of effort necessary to achieve the minimum required for approval. In a context of overload of activities, the organizational skills developed are understood by students as positive, as this would prepare them for what is required in the job market, meeting the objectives of a skills training paradigm. On the other hand, from the point of view of the appropriation of knowledge and the emergence of needs that focus on the appropriation of the foundations of science and a complex understanding of reality, these motives are ineffective, having a detrimental influence on the formation of the autonomous and collectivist personality, as discussed by Bozhovich (1981).

- *Motive oriented to intimate personal relations* - in this the relationship with peers and the preservation of the bonds built, becomes central, contributing to them being able to support the demands that are made in the school context. As discussed in the introduction, activities oriented for this motive provide the development of companionship attitudes, which are important for life. On the other hand, according to the students' reports, the link with school activities and the appropriation of the contents they convey is only incidental.
- *Motive oriented towards socially useful activity* - it is one whose object is understood as socially relevant. In the case of students this was visible in activities whose effects went beyond the limits of the school, providing students with a powerful place to teach others what they had learned, while meeting their cognitive and participation needs (according to Bozhovich, 1981). An example was a week of activities open to the community around the school. A year after the occurrence of this activity, Rafael speaks vividly of the way he had performed it, the bonds he had formed, the time invested, the problems faced, the moments of displeasure, the way the quality of the work had surprised the school team, the people that the activity had reached and the content they had learned, he was an electronics student, and spoke of the culture and technical aspects involved in the historical evolution of electronic games. Rafael

is also organized with other students, forming a collective in defense of this activity continuing to exist and doesn't lose its characteristics of being open to the community outside the school.

- *Motive oriented to vocational or career activity* - one whose activity results in an object that explains the links between professional performance and the study. It has the same function for young students as role playing for children, enabling them to experience, now with more concrete elements and fundamentals of understanding reality, their insertion in the professional adult world. It allows, as stated by Moura, Garcia and Ramos (2007), the experience of work in its ontological dimension, in which the student appropriates the theory and practice that make work a creative activity. An example is provided by Luana and Mariana, both students of Nutrition and Dietetics, in which they are asked to design the opening of a restaurant, from its conceptual aspect, customers, physical structure, to legal issues such as sanitation standards and professional legislation, everything this aligned with a menu that would meet the nutritional needs of the desired client. The way they talk about the activity expresses the strong bond they established with it, they organized themselves to seek help from students from other courses, such as buildings and interior design, to design the physical part, describe the effort and time invested in work, and even the content of legislation, which in other contexts is described as aversive, made for formal motives, was re-signified by them. The activity is complex, challenging, developed collectively and meets the cognitive needs of participation and self-knowledge, in order to define the professional path, as stated by Bozhovich (1981). In this activity, the production of profit and the emphasis on entrepreneurship appear naturalized, with alienated work producing inequality, which occupies the position of a socially significant object to be produced. At the same time, it does not suppress that it also contemplates aspects of work in its ontological sense, in which students and their colleagues can perform a test of a complex productive process from planning to project production.

The motives presented alternated in the set of activities that students performed at school and showed, at the same time, different connections with these and different effects that they had with the appropriation of knowledge and the development

of students. As a central aspect, which gathers in a primary and simple way the properties of the whole being studied (Vygotski, 2000), it was identified that the unit of analysis of the problem studied was then the *constitution of the motivational hierarchy of students for the activities they perform in TEIHS*. What would be the essential elements and relationships that would explain the constitution of this hierarchy?

Through analysis, in the movement of the elaboration of the theoretical model, the following model was proposed:

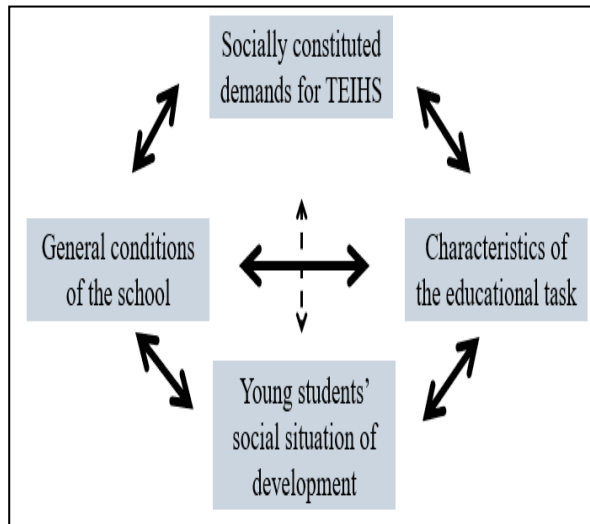


Figure 1. Model of the relationship of young students with the activities they perform at TEIHS

The model shows that the alternation at the top of the students' motivational hierarchy responded to the relationship among such elements. As elaborated in Pandita-Pereira (2016), it was understood that TEIHS has an existence that preexists students who actually study it, fulfilling a given social function, which was called *socially constituted demands for TEIHS*. Such demands delimit a characteristic form of schools' existence, their objectives, their structure, that is, the *general conditions of the school*. Both, *socially constituted demands for TEIHS* and *school general conditions*, come from part of the contours by which school tasks are designed, that is, knowledge and skills to which they are directed, ways in which this is done, what was called *characteristics of the educational task*. In turn, the *school general conditions* and the *characteristics of the educational task* interact directly with students, who refer to them frequently and with emotional involvement, and these mediate the relationship that they establish with the *socially constituted demands for TEIHS*, starting to influence the way young students put themselves in the world, that is, acting on the young people' social situation of development. However, such relationships are not one-way. Each of these elements also has an existence, constituted along its own history, bringing something

of itself to the encounter with the described influences and intervening on the other elements and the way in which they influence it. It is especially important to emphasize that young students have already gone through different experiences and internalized ways of being in the world and relating to the school. It is, therefore, from their *social situation of development* that they will interact with the *school general conditions* and the *characteristics of the educational task*, adapting them and / or adapting themselves to them, or even subverting them. The same is true of the other elements.

The model serves to illustrate that the emergence of motives for school activities is not the result of a single isolated factor. Take the example of restaurant activity. Through the structure of the activity and the school's own culture and the conditions of diversity of courses offered there, students come into contact with social demands related to alienated and emancipatory work. Thus, in students with cognitive and participation needs, when performing this activity, the *motive oriented towards vocational or career activity* may emerge. However, activities with a similar structure do not come to fruition due to the lack of material and human conditions at school. On the other hand, this motive does not emerge in banking activities, as discussed by Freire (1968), which are also embedded in school culture. In the students' reports it is seen that this type of activity favors the adaptation of the subjects to the demands of the labor market, as when they speak positively of their overload of activities and the emergence of motives oriented to formal requirements and intimate personal relations.

Additionally, it became evident that in a context of predominantly banking education, in students whose previous link with schooling is also formal, socially useful or vocational or career activity alone were not enough to activate cognitive and participation needs. In the group, this was visible in Leandro's *social situation of development*. However, also in the limited space of the group, in which he came only to accompany a colleague, the very motive for intimate personal relations made it possible to enter an activity that aroused new needs. Through reflective questions, and the effective space for listening and sharing experiences with colleagues, the need for self-knowledge emerged. At the end of the group, Leandro expressed that the space was important so that he could ask himself about his actions at school and the motives for carrying them out. The need for participation also emerged, putting together with other colleagues to think of ways to provide spaces like the group and to strengthen school collectives, like the guild, to seek to intervene in the educational problems discussed. It is hypothesized that such needs can be mobilized as drivers for linking with school activities.

EARLY CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE MOTIVES AND STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

It is understood that such results, starting from the students' singular experience, in a particular condition of a school, allow some reflections about the emergence of motives for school activities in general.

The need to overcome the unmotivated-motivated binomial in the relationship that students establish with school activities is highlighted. It is necessary to look at the quality of the relationships established with the study and the intermediate steps to promote conditions for the emergence of socially significant motives, dialoguing with the student's social situation of development. For this, as stated by Bozhovich (1981), planning is necessary, but this cannot be done without the openness to chance and spontaneity, especially in considering the uniqueness of the student, the group, in order to contribute to the full formation of the students' personality.

Thus, as evidenced in the restaurant example, it is also necessary to intervene on the demands that are placed on TEIHS, so that the motives that relate to meaningful activities that emerge for students are those that are linked to contributions to social emancipation.

It was evident that the motives that most tenaciously linked young students to school activities were those that demanded collective participation aimed at socially useful activity and vocational or career activity and that, at the end of the group, the power of this collective was sought, including to intervene in the *characteristics of the educational task* and in the *general conditions of the school*, which were discussed as problematic by the group.

Additionally, there is a need to deepen the discussion about the emotional components of motivation, disconnecting them from an immediate association with pleasure, as it is possible to glimpse, even in the conditions in which the connection with school activities is tenacious, the moments of displeasure did not need to be suppressed.

Finally, the defended thesis is that, for meaningful teaching to take place at TEIHS, it is necessary to promote transformations in the system of relationships that intervene in the constitution of the students' motivational hierarchy, considering them in their unit, without lose sight of their interrelationships, so that conditions favorable to the emergence of motives related to socially useful activity and vocational or career activity are possible, having as a utopian horizon the development of the students' collectivist personality. To this end, the work highlights the need to intervene in order to promote the organization of school collectives, which are essential for the achievement of meaningful teaching.

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