

Study activity as a central concept for school psychology

Atividade de estudo como conceito central para a psicologia escolar

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ABSTRACT

A critical perspective of School Psychology, historically, sought to overcome the blaming of students that have been through learning difficulties and seeks to understand the schooling process in its multiple determinations. However, in order to not only remain in the place of criticism and denunciation of academic failure, we also need to develop theoretical and practical elements that can instrumentalize an acting with a clear proposal. Thus, this essay aims to present the study activity as a fundamental concept to the work of the school psychologist, guided by Historical-Cultural Psychology. Therefore, it initially seeks to justify the necessity for the concept and, in a second moment, introduce the study activity, especially how it is formed and structured. Finally, aims to articulate this concept with the work of School Psychology.

Keywords: School Psychology. Study activity. Historical-Cultural Psychology.

RESUMO

A Psicologia Escolar em uma perspectiva crítica, historicamente, buscou superar a culpabilização dos estudantes frente às dificuldades de aprendizagem e compreender o processo de escolarização em suas múltiplas determinações. No entanto, avalia-se que a fim de não permanecermos apenas no lugar da crítica e da denúncia ao fracasso escolar, necessitamos também desenvolver teórica e praticamente meios que possam instrumentalizar uma atuação propositiva. Dessa forma, este ensaio visa apresentar a atividade de estudo enquanto um conceito fundamental à atuação da/o psicóloga/o escolar que se orienta a partir da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural. Para tanto, busca inicialmente justificar a necessidade do conceito e, em um segundo momento, apresentar o que é atividade de estudo, como esta se forma e se estrutura. Por fim, propõe-se a articular este conceito com a atuação da Psicologia Escolar.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia Escolar. Atividade de estudo. Psicologia Histórico-Cultural.

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1 Introduction

This theoretical article aims to address the following questions: Why and for what purpose should we discuss the activity of studying in the context of school psychology? As teachers of school psychology and supervisors of internships in the same field, we have argued that the activity of studying is a fundamental concept in school psychology based on historical-cultural psychology.

To answer these questions, we first need to briefly analyze the historical development of school psychology from a critical perspective, seeking to understand its advances, but also proposing some discussions that we believe are necessary to avoid the risk of remaining stuck in criticism and denunciation of hegemonic conceptions of school failure but without having the theoretical and practical elements that can instrumentalize a proactive and developmental approach to school education. This theme is explored in the first part of the article.

In the second part of the text, we will focus on the definition of what study activity is, how it is formed and structured, presenting an overview of the main activity of school-age children and bringing elements that announce study activity as a central concept for critical school psychology based theoretically on historical-cultural psychology.

Finally, taking as a premise that school psychology should be directed towards ensuring that schools fulfill their social function of guaranteeing that all children have access to elaborate knowledge (MEIRA, 2003), we conclude the text with some brief considerations on the possibilities for psychologists to act in education.

It should be noted that this article is characterized as a theoretical essay (MENEGETTI, 2011) and seeks to articulate theoretical discussions at the intersection between critical school psychology studies and historical-cultural theory, without attempting to provide a systematic review of the literature.

2 Critical school psychology: why is the concept of study activity necessary?

This movement of criticism of hegemonic school psychology, generally known as critical school psychology, sought to overcome the historical blaming of students for school problems and to understand the process of schooling in its multiple determinations. In this sense, the object of analysis and intervention of School Psychology from a critical perspective is “the encounter between the human subject and education” (MEIRA, 2000, p. 58).

This conception of psychology understands the school as an institution that is embedded in a class society, which requires, to analyze the encounter between subjects and education, an examination of the role of the school in this society (SAVIANI, 2008). Among the main contributions of critical school psychology to education, we can highlight the analysis of the institution and the quality of the educational process, which includes understanding the impacts of public education policies on everyday school life; the focus on the schooling process in a broader sense and not just on learning difficulties; and the interface with other areas of the human sciences beyond psychology.

We believe that, in terms of understanding school phenomena, we have made important advances in school psychology. In research on the work of school psychologists (SOUZA; SILVA; YAMAMOTO, 2014), it is increasingly common to find the reproduction of critical discourses on medicalization, on the production of school failure, on overcoming the clinical model of practice, and on the relationships between education and society. Authors such as Maria Helena Souza Patto, Marilene Proença Rebello de Souza, Beatriz de Paula Souza, Paulo Freire, Demerval Saviani, and Lev Vigotski, among others, are often cited. However, when the focus is on professional practice, although we have also made progress in the construction of critical practices, there is still an expectation that the role of psychology in schools is to assess and provide individualized care to children who have difficulties in the schooling process. In other words, the social representation of the professional psychologist for teachers is still centered on the clinical model.

Even when there is a broader understanding of the possibilities of psychology in schools, for example, in the field of teacher training, critical analysis of the production of failure and other school phenomena does not seem sufficient to us. Teachers understand the criticism of biologizing or medicalizing views of school failure, but they still lack the tools to think and act in the face of children who have “chronic” learning difficulties. Or, they understand the multi-determined nature of school failure, but such analysis does not equip teachers to develop pedagogical strategies that promote learning and development and minimize the suffering of children who are not learning.

In this sense, we agree with the propositions of Tanamachi and Meira (2003, p. 23), according to which a critical theory cannot merely describe or explain how and why a phenomenon occurs but must also provide elements for thinking about the possibilities for transforming it:

[...] theoretical mediations cannot only explain how and why individuals act or are in one way or another but should also seek to answer how and why individuals may come to act or become emancipated beings (TANAMACHI; MEIRA, 2003, p. 23).

This is where Historical-Cultural Psychology comes in as a theory of psychology that seeks not only to describe how psychological phenomena are produced historically and culturally, but also as an approach that aims to explain human development prospectively, in its becoming. To paraphrase Marx (1845/2020), in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach, we psychologists have interpreted the processes of schooling, development, and learning in different ways; the question, however, is to transform these processes by taking as a reference Vigotski's (1988) maxim that the only good teaching is that which advances development.

Thus, among the various psychological theories that seek to understand school phenomena critically, it should be noted that the theoretical-conceptual

scope adopted in this work is Historical-Cultural Psychology, which is philosophically and epistemologically based on Karl Marx's Historical Materialism. This approach, born in the context of the Soviet communist revolution of 1917, began with the works of Lev Sememovich Vigotski³ (1896-1934) and the group known as the Troika, composed of Alexander Romanovich Luria (1902-1977) and Alexei Nikolaievich Leontiev (1903-1979).

In addition to the Troika, since the 1920s, the project to build a Marxist-based Historical-Cultural Psychology brought together other researchers who studied different topics and who, over the years, spread out to various universities in the former USSR. Some members of this school are Daniil Borisovich Elkonin (1904-1984), Piotr Iakovlevich Galperin (1902-1988), Bluma Vulfovna Zeigarnik (1900-1988), Alexander Vladimirovich Zaporozhets (1905-1981), Rosa Evgenevna Levina (1909-1989), Natalia Grigorievna Morozova (1906-1989), Lidia Ilinichna Bozhovich (1908-1981), Lia Solomonovna Slavina (1906-1986), Vasili Vasílievich Davidov (1930-1998), Boris Fedorovich Lomov (1927-1989), Piotr Ivanovich Zinchenko (1903-1969), and Sergey Leonidovich Rubinstein (1899-1960), among many others⁴.

In the search for a critical conception of psychology and education, the encounter with historical-cultural theory has been fruitful:

[...] it is up to psychology to provide support for the development of a scientific conception of the individual, understood as a synthesis of the social history of humanity, in whose development they must consciously participate to ensure their emancipation. It is also the task of psychology to establish mediations between the historical and social development of humanity and the private lives of individuals (TANAMACHI; MEIRA, 2003, p. 22-23).

³ In Portuguese, there are several spellings for Vigotski: Vygotski, Vygotsky, Vygotskii, and others.

⁴ We recommend Shuare (2017), which presents a historical overview of Soviet psychology, and the trilogy organized by Andréa Maturano Longarezi and Roberto Valdés Puentes on the life, thought, and work of the main Russian representatives of historical-cultural theory (LONGAREZI; PUENTES, 2013; PUENTES; LONGAREZI, 2016; PUENTES; LONGAREZI, 2019).

Historical-cultural psychology provides a solid theoretical framework and fundamental concepts for psychologists to perform critically in schools. Based on the assumptions that the psyche is material and mediated, that activity plays a fundamental role in psychic constitution, and that psychological phenomena must be studied dialectically (SHUARE, 2017), Vygotsky defines higher psychological functions as the object of study of psychology, and, with his explanation of the general law of their formation, he forcefully expresses his historical-cultural conception of the psyche. In other words, he builds the foundations of a psychology that studies truly human phenomena, a concrete psychology of man, in the words of the author himself (Vygotsky, 2000).

Vygotsky and his followers studied various topics⁵: 1) the relationship between development and learning and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development⁶; 2) the relationship between thought and speech, including the formation of concepts; 3) the relationships between the formation of consciousness, emotions, and experiences; 4) studies on the development of people with disabilities, which was known at the time as defectology; 5) studies in the field of pedology, an interdisciplinary science focused on understanding child development; 6) the development of higher psychological functions; among others.

In the context of this text, we are interested in the historical-cultural analysis of the relationships between development and learning, focusing on the periodization of child development. Vigotski (2012), in a text entitled “The problem of age,” written in 1932, assesses that the periodization of development is a central issue for Historical-Cultural Psychology.

⁵ We do not claim to present a complete list of the topics studied by Vigotski, which would be beyond the scope of this article.

⁶ The concept of *zona blijaichego razvitia* has been translated into Portuguese in various ways: zone of proximal development, potential development, immediate development. Here, we will use Prestes' (2010) translation, zone of imminent development.

The author points to the existence of an underground network of processes within the psyche of each student, which is triggered in the course of learning itself (VIGOTSKI, 2009). Thus, he understands that an essential task of psychology focused on the field of education would be to unveil the internal logic of learning processes. This highlights the need for clarity about the process of student development, since such understanding makes it possible to reflect on teaching processes.

Thus, to understand the child's development process, it is essential to understand its periodization, that is, the definition of the periods of development, as well as the processes of transition from one to another. Vygotsky (2012) first criticizes the periodization schemes of his time. In his assessment, these schemes committed several methodological errors, which resulted in shallow, merely descriptive analyses based on external indices referring to each period. Contrary to this position, the author emphasizes that the basis for periodization would be the reorganization of the development process itself, making it necessary to investigate what lies behind the various indicators to understand what conditions them, that is, to unveil “the very process of child development with its internal laws” (VYGOTSKI, 2012, p. 253, our translation). Thus, the principle that structural periodization corresponds to the internal changes of development itself makes it essential to analyze the dynamics of development and the dynamics of transitions.

Child development is nothing more than the permanent transition from one evolutionary stage to another, a transition linked to change and the structuring of the child's personality. Studying child development means studying the child's transition from one evolutionary stage to another and the change in their personality within each evolutionary period, which takes place in concrete historical and social conditions (VIGOTSKI, n.d., p. 5 apud ELKONIN, 2017, p. 152).

Based on this, Vygotsky (2012) points out the revolutionary nature of human development. As the author explains, at certain stages there is a slow

process, with internal and almost imperceptible changes, which will only be externalized after a long process of latent development. Thus, as they accumulate, they manifest themselves suddenly in qualitatively new formations. These are periods of crisis in which changes and ruptures occur in the child's personality. Thus, in each period, the child's personality changes as a whole.

What is subsequently understood is that development must be understood from a historical perspective and from its movement. This is, as Elkonin (2017) points out, a dialectically contradictory process. In other words, first, it does not occur in a progressive and uniform manner; second, it is characterized by processes of negation, regression, and interruptions in its continuity and, at the same time, by the constitution of new formations of advances.

Continuing Vigotski's studies, Leontiev made a fundamental contribution with the concepts of guiding activity⁷ and accessory activity. Guiding activity corresponds to that which directs the development of the main changes in a given period, while accessory activities consist of the various activities that coexist with the former but play a secondary role in promoting development (LEONTIEV, 1978). Regarding this relationship, Elkonin (2017, p. 168) emphasizes:

[...] when talking about the main activity and its importance for the child's development in one period or another, this does not mean, under any circumstances, that there is no simultaneous development in other directions. The child's life in each period is multifaceted, and the activities through which it is carried out are varied.

Elkonin (2017) draws attention to the impossibility of understanding a period solely through the structure of its activity, its actions, and its operations. Although these are important, the central issue is linked to the

⁷ The concept of guiding activity can be found with different translations: main activity, dominant activity, leading activity, among other terms.

child's interaction with reality based on a certain activity, that is, the relationship of reality to/with the child, as well as the child to/with reality. This is linked to the meanings and senses that the child attributes to the phenomena that surround them, the needs that arise from their various relationships, the motives that are constituted from their experiences, the restructuring of consciousness, etc.

In other words, for Elkonin (2017), the psychologist's attention cannot be directed solely at the activity but must also consider the aspects of reality that guide it. Another essential proposition of the author concerns the notion of cognitive-affective unity. For him, there is an urgent need to overcome a dualistic view that separates both aspects, because psychic development must be understood as a single and integral process.

Based on these considerations, the relevance of understanding psychic development in childhood, as well as its periodization, by school and educational psychologists is evident. We agree with Magalhães and Martins (2020, p. 17) when they state that “it is up to educational psychology to provide research on human development to school pedagogy.” However, the focus of this article concerns a particular guiding activity, the activity of studying, which is the guiding activity of school-age children.

We have argued that understanding children's study activity is fundamental to understanding who is being taught, that is, who the student is and how their activity develops: “Understanding the content and structure of the main activity in each period is fundamental to thinking about the organization and methodology of teaching” (ASBAHR, 2018, p. 137).

However, the topic of study activity is underdeveloped in Brazilian research based on historical-cultural theory, as can be seen in Puentes (2019)⁸ and Mendonça and Asbahr (2018), and is practically absent from discussions in school psychology (GUARAGNA, 2020).

⁸ According to Puentes (2019), research on study activity theory is limited in Brazil. To date, no study has been conducted on the current state of this research in our country.

3 Study activity: formation, development, and structure

The purpose of this section is to briefly present how study activity develops, is structured, and what its results are in child development. But before that, it is important to highlight that study activity is not only a concept in developmental psychology but also in Soviet didactics, especially developed within the Elkonin-Davidov-Repkin Didactic System⁹. According to Davidov (1996/2020), the concept of study activity emerged in his research with the collaboration of Elkonin and other authors in the late 1950s, when they undertook a series of studies with the aim of understanding how Soviet students learned, based on several research questions: What is study activity? How is theoretical thinking formed? How can teaching be organized to develop students' theoretical thinking? These questions even led to the need to implement experimental schools, such as School No. 91 in Moscow.

These studies produced what we now know as the Theory of Study Activity¹⁰, and Puentes (2019) proposes a periodization of how the concept of study activity was developed from the 1950s to the present day. However, in the context of this article, we will focus on discussions about this activity understood as a guiding activity for school-age children; that is, we will emphasize the psychological dimension of this activity. Even with this caveat, it is important to note that, in agreement with Puentes (2019), study activity needs to be understood as “an expression of the constitutive unity of teaching activity, which includes both the didactic work of the teacher and the self-transformation of students” (p.126).

Seeking to understand the origins of the development of study activity, Soviet psychologists point out that starting school enables children to reorganize their lives, which changes their interpersonal relationships, their

⁹ On the Elkonin-Davidov-Repkin Teaching System, see Puentes; Longarezzi (2019) and the dossier on the same system (volume 5, no. 2, 2021) in this journal, available at: <http://www.seer.ufu.br/index.php/Obutchenie/issue/view/2149>.

¹⁰ Regarding the theory of study activity, we recommend the works of Puentes, Cardoso, and Amorim (2020) and Puentes and Mello (2019).

relationship with reality, and their relationship with themselves. It is through the process of schooling that children can learn, in a planned and systematic way, the various forms of social consciousness historically produced by humanity. However, for this to occur, a change in their activity is necessary, and children now begin to reproduce¹¹ the different forms of human activity embodied in various types of knowledge, which is the activity of studying (DAVÍDOV, 1988).

Of course, the learning process does not occur solely through study, which means that the two cannot be identified, but learning constitutes a specific object of the activity of study. It is worth noting, however, that it is not merely the child's entry into school and learning that guarantees the constitution of the activity of study. Davídov (1988) explains that this activity has a certain particularity, since it is constituted from a characteristic content and structure.

Thus, Asbahr (2016) points out that not just any action constitutes the activity of study. Actions such as reading a text, copying from the blackboard, doing an exercise, etc., can constitute study activity if their purposes are consistent with the reasons for the activity, with the goal of developing theoretical thinking.

Study, therefore, consists of the activity in which subjects appropriate the different forms of social consciousness historically constituted by humanity, as well as the mental actions on which this knowledge is based. Davídov (1988) explains this proposition based on the idea that knowledge has a unity with the cognitive activity that generated it, thus being both a product (representation of reality) and a process (mental actions necessary for its apprehension). From this, he understands that the content of the study activity is *theoretical concepts*¹² (DAVÍDOV, 1988).

¹¹ It is important to note that the use of the term reproduction does not correspond to a mere mechanical copy; rather, it is understood that in this process, the child appropriates such activities while at the same time reworking them.

¹² These can be scientific, philosophical, artistic, etc. (DAVÍDOV, 1988).

However, the process of learning theoretical concepts does not occur passively; students must perform certain actions. Thus, to reveal the structure of the study activity, Elkonin defended the need to understand its unit of analysis, the study task (DAVIDOV; MARKOVA, 1987). This encompasses the objective of the action and the conditions for achieving it, as the teacher establishes a theoretical problem situation that requires the student to perform certain actions that are necessary for its resolution. In this way, the student reproduces the logical-historical movement of the concept, from the abstract to the concrete, and relates it to the human need that generated its elaboration. The aim is to overcome verbalism and mechanical forms of knowledge acquisition, as well as to link the reasons for studying to the historical needs of humankind itself (ASBAHR, 2016).

Based on this, Davidov and Márkova (1987) point out that the structure of the study activity¹³ corresponds to the student's understanding of the study tasks, the performance of the study actions, and the control and evaluation actions. To constitute an integral activity, the authors point out that all these actions must be present in the student's study process.

Understanding the study task concerns the theoretical generalizations learned, motivation to study, and the development of autonomy. Study actions, on the other hand, correspond to the domains of transition from general to particular relationships and vice versa. Finally, control and evaluation actions are linked to the analysis of the subject's own actions, as well as their learning process (DAVÍDOV; MÁRKOVA, 1987).

It is important to note that

¹³ The structure of the study activity was rethought and reconfigured throughout the development of his research. To verify this process, we recommend reading Puentes (2019).

[...] in the process of forming study activities, the role of the teacher is central, as it is they who organize study tasks and help students in carrying out study, control, and evaluation actions. In this way, the teacher gradually creates situations that provide students with autonomy in solving and proposing study tasks and developing the ability to study (ASBAHR, 2016, p. 180).

It is clear, therefore, that the activity of studying does not develop naturally, so that throughout the process of its formation, it is expected that children will increasingly acquire autonomy, becoming subjects of their activity. Understanding this aspect, in addition to countering maturationist and biologizing views of development, is still extremely relevant to the work of school psychologists in their partnership with teachers, as it allows for a more profound understanding of the process of forming study habits in each particular student, which, in turn, enables the creation of the conditions necessary for their development.

Returning to the topic, in addition to the development of autonomy, this same movement also gives rise to a psychological neoformation, which corresponds to the “foundations of consciousness and theoretical thinking and the psychic capacities linked to them (reflection, analysis, and planning)” (DAVÍDOV, 1988, p. 176).

Thus, as the content of the study activity is theoretical concepts, it is through their appropriation that such new formations are developed and the child begins to establish a new relationship with reality. This is because theoretical thinking is characterized by a mediated, reflected, and essential existence, since it operates with true concepts, which allow for the understanding of the relationship between the universal and the singular, enabling the unveiling of both its formation process and its interrelation with other concepts. Concepts, therefore, reflect the essence of the movement of the object (DAVÍDOV, 1988).

Considering this, it is notable that theoretical thinking differs from empirical thinking, the latter forming an abstract universality based on social

experience derived from the subjects' own sensory activity. Thus, it is limited to the description, classification, schematization, and exposition of what the individual perceives in the external manifestations of objects. Theoretical thinking, on the other hand, comprises the internal and essential dependencies of the object, which are not subject to direct observation, as they are present in the mediations and in their movement of constitution.

In summary, the activity of study results in the learning of general actions with theoretical knowledge, which in this process transforms the child's psyche. For this, it is necessary that teaching occur based on the logical-historical movement of concepts, which requires study actions by the subjects. And it is from this learning process that the formation of theoretical thinking becomes possible.

However, it is necessary to emphasize the impossibility of establishing a direct and immediate relationship between study actions and psychic development. As Davídov and Márkova (1987, p. 320, our translation) point out:

Psychological development should not be directly inferred from the logic of the study. During their education, it is necessary to reveal and create the conditions for the activity to acquire personal meaning, to become a source of self-development for the individual, and of the multilateral development of their personality, on the condition of inclusion in social practice.

This means that to fully understand the activity of studying, it is not enough to analyze the effectiveness of study actions; it is also essential to reveal its internal content, examining, in particular, the reasons for studying, the child's understanding of the purpose of the activity, and what establishes the relationship between the two, the personal meaning attributed to this guiding activity.

According to Leontiev (1978), throughout the schooling process, it is possible for the motives linked to studying to change. In other words, through teaching, it is possible to transform children's curiosity into motives that are

linked to learning itself. The author explains that, repeatedly, in the initial period of schooling, the reasons for studying are related to the most immediate experiences and that these are not always recognized by students. However, they can become generators of meaning.

This point is extremely relevant, as the process of becoming aware of knowledge is dependent on meaning. This means that for the learning process not to occur in a purely formal manner, it is essential that the related motives be cognitive. It is thus understood that with the formation of new motives during study, and therefore new meanings, new possibilities are created for the intellect, since motives drive study and are responsible for how knowledge will be made conscious. From this, we can conclude that it is not enough for students to acquire the meanings of knowledge; in fact, these meanings must occupy a place in their lives. We emphasize that understanding the process of forming motives for study is a central theme in the work of psychology in schools, given that one of the main complaints we hear about everyday school life is precisely the lack of interest and motivation among students.

The point is that motivation is formed in the real life of the child, in connection with their entire motivational sphere; that is, it is not intrinsic or natural. Davídov and Márkova (1987) draw attention to the need to use pedagogical practice to create conditions in which studying becomes meaningful to students, concluding:

[...] teaching cannot be reduced to the transmission of knowledge or the elaboration and refinement of actions and operations but is fundamentally the formation of the student's personality, the development of the sphere that determines their behavior (values, motives, goals, etc.). (DAVÍDOV; MÁRKOVA, 1987, p. 333).

In the work of the school psychologist, it should be clear, therefore, that the activity of studying does not correspond only to the mastery of school content, nor to the performance of study activities, even though these are

relevant. Rather, it concerns the process of restructuring the child's personality. As Asbahr (2020, p. 86) points out:

The acquisition of theoretical knowledge cannot be an end in itself, but rather a means by which individuals, stepping beyond the limits of everyday knowledge, can understand reality as a whole (including its contradictions and historicity) and, in understanding it, can build the conditions for the human emancipation of capitalist society.

In other words, studying is the means by which children acquire different forms of social consciousness, enabling the restructuring of their psyche and transformation of their personality, which, in turn, allows them to develop a new way of relating to reality, in which the latter acquires more intelligibility. In this way, it has the potential to make children increasingly autonomous.

Finally, attention is drawn to the role of the community in the formation of study activity. It is a known fact that from preschool age, children are already part of a children's community, but because of study, transformations occur in the relationships between children considering shared learning (BOZHOVICH, 1985).

The very assimilation of knowledge involves relationships and collaboration with others, whether through communication between people or through communication with humanity expressed in ideas fixed in the instruments of culture (DAVÍDOV; MÁRKOVA, 1987). Thus, the collective character acquires decisive importance, even going beyond the limits of study. As Bozhovich (1985, pp. 234-235, our translation) points out, “schoolchildren begin to live a shared life, varied, full of common interests, aspirations, and sorrows.”

However, contrary to this understanding, the form of sociability developed in the capitalist system is hegemonic, competitive, and individualistic (MESQUITA, 2018). This type of relationship is responsible for

the fragmentation of social unity between groups, thus sustaining an ontonegative otherness. This concept expresses the idea that the other comes to be understood as a threat, a source of suffering, and becomes the object of aggressive affections. This form of sociability occurs not only in the most general forms of relationship between subjects but is also expressed in school education (MESQUITA, 2018).

In the words of Mesquita (2018, p. 12):

[...] individualism and competition are socially taught as data of sociability, behavioral habits, and also as a context for the development of values. The valuation of individual desire as more important than the collective and the valuation of other people as adversaries or obstacles to the fulfillment of the desires of the "I" are taught socially and form part of the forms of ideological recomposition in capitalist society. The teaching of these values is surreptitious, happening directly and indirectly as an offshoot of a certain type of sociability, one that individualizes abilities, tasks, and the very history of development, creating conflicting interpersonal bonds.

As the author explains, this type of relationship between subjects was forged from broad historical processes and is linked to the very constitution of modernity. However, schools are institutions that can consciously reflect on the types of sociability they create within themselves, engaging in a counter-movement and putting pressure on such relationships (MESQUITA, 2018). The work of the school psychologist is also linked to this logic. By understanding, defending, and guiding their actions with a view to the constitution of study activity in its collective character, they acquire the possibility of confronting the uncritical reproduction of capitalist society within school education.

From this, it is understood that within school education, it is not enough to understand what is taught, how it is taught, and to whom it is taught, but also why it is taught (ASBAHR, 2020). In other words, it is necessary to understand the ethical dimension, both for the work of the school psychologist

and for educators, with a view to forming class consciousness and establishing a collective project for a society organized around the interests of the working class itself (ASBAHR, 2020).

As previously noted, the activity of studying does not have a purpose in itself. This means that its constitution is not linked to the preparation of individuals for university entrance exams or the job market (PARO, 2001). Similarly, it does not aim to train individuals who learn in a purely formal way, accurately verbalizing knowledge but unable to put it into practice in relation to reality (ASBAHR, 2020). Thus, teaching and studying activities should be designed so that students can become more human in the very process of learning and understand that the world is capable of transformation. The aim, therefore, is for students to recognize their human essence in themselves, in others, and in cultural productions and objects, creating conditions for a process of collective emancipation¹⁴.

On the contrary, today's schools, which view education as a commodity, adapting it to the logic and demands of capital, generally establish a temporal relationship with life and, consequently, with school, which manifests itself through acceleration (MAIA, 2016). This temporal characteristic is expressed in everyday school life, for example, through cuts and abandonment of content, the dissemination of the idea of efficiency linked to the least “spending” of time, the valorization of technological tools that aim merely at obtaining efficiency, the insertion of the logic of textbook teaching, and the speed in teaching content aimed at preparing for standardized tests, among others (MAIA, 2016).

The divergence between such acceleration and the formation and development of study activity is clear, as the latter requires time, time that is not linked to mere productive efficiency but to the process of self-transformation of the student and to a comprehensive education, linked to the

¹⁴ We emphasize here the need to understand the process of human emancipation not as an achievement of the individual alone, but of the collective. For a better understanding, see Marx (2010).

appropriation of a wide range of knowledge produced by humanity, to debate, dialogue, political education, etc. To this end, objective conditions are necessary to ensure that students have the opportunity to develop their study activities, that is, conditions that guarantee that children and adolescents remain in educational institutions, as well as the materials, books, spaces, etc., necessary for the organization of study. This, in turn, implies that school psychologists must care for, create, and fight for such conditions, thus constituting a theoretical and political principle of their work.

In this sense, Lima and Sekkel (2019) provide an important analysis of the concrete conditions existing in Brazilian school education that (im)possibilitate the development of study activities. The authors emphasize that understanding this aspect requires an analysis of how school knowledge is valued, which school project is socially recommended, and under which social, economic, and political conditions teaching activities are based.

In summary, the historical processes that mark Brazil are characterized by dynamics of “exploitation, exclusion, the superimposition of individual interests over collective ones, violence, and intense conservatism in politics, social structure, and culture” (LIMA; SEKKEL, 2019, p. 14). Thus, this particularity is no different in the field of school education, which has hegemonically fulfilled and continues to fulfill the role of maintaining the same social order. This is expressed in the devaluation of teachers, the disqualification of school knowledge, and even the depreciation of the school itself (LIMA, SEKKEL, 2019).

Based on this, they point out that the current social crisis can be considered a call for the revitalization of a revolutionary utopia and the transformation of the current mode of production and reproduction of life. To this end, in the field of education, they conclude that:

[...] in times when human creativity and inventiveness are indispensable in the battle against barbarism, discussions on how we can forge social and school processes that favor the development of study activities are a promising path for professionals working in educational contexts (LIMA; SEKKEL, 2019, p. 22).

Considering this, it becomes clear that studying can be an important “tool” for combating and understanding school failure, since it brings with it the possibility of thinking about and guiding ways to overcome it, thus becoming a central concept in the work of the school psychologist. This is because, as previously noted, the activity of studying has its origins and development in the real relationships that are formed in school education. It therefore allows us to set in motion what was previously crystallized, becoming relevant to the establishment of non-pathologizing and non-blaming practices.

4 Towards a concrete school psychology: some final considerations

We believe that the work of school psychologists should aim to contribute to the process of humanization and emancipation of individuals. Thus, we agree with Meira (2003) on the proposition that the purpose of psychology in education should be directed toward enabling schools to fulfill their social function:

Acreditamos que o trabalho dos psicólogos escolares deve ter como objetivo contribuir para o processo de humanização e emancipação dos indivíduos. Assim, concordamos com Meira (2003) na proposição de que o propósito da psicologia na educação deve ser direcionado para permitir que as escolas cumpram sua função social:

In this perspective, returning to the argument made at the beginning of this text, that the activity of studying is a fundamental concept in school psychology based on historical-cultural psychology, we maintain that analyzing children's learning (always in relation to the activity of teaching) based on the structure and development of the activity of studying provides fundamental elements for a concrete understanding of child development. In other words, it allows the school

psychologist to investigate, together with the school's teaching staff, why a child is not learning and what teaching conditions need to be created to overcome the difficulties encountered. School psychology can thus place itself at the service of what the school needs to do: ensure that all children can appropriate the most developed forms of social consciousness.

In other words, psychology in schools can and should provide elements for us to think together with teachers about the organization of teaching that promotes development. Keeping in mind the specificities of the areas and objects of action and knowledge of psychology and pedagogy, already elucidated by Rubinstein (1976)¹⁵, it is up to psychology in schools to elucidate the psychological laws of child development and learning that teachers should take into account.

Magalhães and Martins (2020) summarize these relationships between psychology and education, arguing that educational psychology should be subordinate to school pedagogy, a thesis with which we agree: “[...] by instrumentalizing teaching activity theoretically and methodologically, in terms of the psychological precepts involved in learning, educational psychology corroborates the act of teaching” (p.9).

In this sense, in addition to denouncing the medicalization and individualization of educational issues, with which we agree, we advocate working in partnership with teachers, staff, administrators, family members, and students to reveal the learning potential of all those involved. Themes such as learning, development, motivation, attention, memory, and other higher psychological functions; the meaning of pedagogical activity; and its relationship with the school experiences of students and teachers are engendered in the understanding of study activity and are fundamental to the critical role of psychology in schools.

¹⁵ Quote from the author: "We consider that the most important thing for the practice of psychological research tasks is to *discover the internal psychological content of human activity*, which manifests itself and shapes man and his psychic qualities. For pedagogical practice, the task will be to discover the internal psychological content of the child's ongoing activity in which their development takes place and their psychic qualities are formed." (RUBINSTEIN, 1976, p. 201, emphasis added by the author, our translation)

Finally, we emphasize that the ideas presented about the activity of studying are not definitive. It is a concept that has undergone and continues to undergo various transformations, which shows the need to also advance in the investigation of its peculiarities in the Brazilian educational context. This is linked to the understanding that the work of the school psychologist cannot be understood as a mere application of theory. In fact, it is consistent with a creative movement that seeks to promote unity between theory and practice, in which theory guides action, just as practice provides new revelations about reality.

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