

Presentation

DOSSIER

“Research and challenges of Historical-Cultural Theory in Schools”

“Pesquisas e desafios da Teoria Histórico-Cultural na Escola”

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This dossier, entitled “Research and Challenges of Historical-Cultural Theory in Schools,” presents part of the research carried out at the Center for Studies and Research on Vygotsky's School (NEEVY) at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos, which uses Historical-Cultural Theory as the basis for its investigations into school teaching and learning processes. Since 2003, this center has been training researchers, mainly in the area of school education: Basic Education, Youth and Adult Education, and Higher Education, focusing on the challenges, dilemmas, and issues related to school learning and the cultural development processes of students.

The political importance of Historical-Cultural Theory for human cultural development processes is evident in the in-depth study of its assumptions and concepts, which explain and formulate possible paths for the cultural development of human beings toward self-control of their behavior in society. Especially in schools, such theoretical and methodological assumptions are essential for the transformation of teaching and learning processes,

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counteracting the exclusion of part of the population from cultural benefits and, in contrast, enabling them to access these cultural tools through the inseparability of the fundamental elements of school learning processes, namely, teaching, didactics, theory, and pedagogical practice.

The theoretical and/or field research that comprises this dossier is at the doctoral and postdoctoral levels, bringing together authors from the first, second, and third generations of Historical-Cultural Theory to discuss and analyze their results, supported by the concepts of this theoretical framework and focusing on current issues in school learning. These concepts are key tools for explaining and transforming school teaching and learning processes, namely: higher psychic functions; activity; main activity; mediated activities; intentional mediating activities; learning mediators; conceptual thinking; imagination; meaning; sense; needs; voluntary attention, voluntary activity, zone of proximal development, mediation, mediating instruments, development of cognitive interest, social situation of development, among others.

These scientific articles based on this conceptual framework discuss, analyze, and explain subjects related to the challenges faced by the national school education, focusing on the cultural development of children, adolescents, incarcerated individuals, young people, and adults. They reaffirm that the school, as a social institution, plays a fundamental role in the lives of students, but they highlight an important concept from Historical-Cultural Theory: “social situation of development,” which is widely experienced in pedagogical practices, although teachers know little or nothing about it as a fundamental concept for learning, since each of these students does not have the same starting point in relation to cultural development and learning, whether for political, economic, cultural, social, or biological reasons. Therefore, it is important for teachers to work toward ensuring that everyone has the same point of arrival. It is common to hear in schools, from the first level of education, that “the class is heterogeneous and difficult to teach,” “children with learning difficulties,” and “children without a foundation,”

among other statements regarding children's performance that could be modified if this scenario were understood in terms of the concept of social situation of development, in order to transform it.

Therefore, the lack of knowledge about what this and other concepts of Historical-Cultural Theory are involved in pedagogical practices prevents their clear identification by those who propose to teach, as well as the transformation of the conditions necessary for learning. Thus, the school loses its social function or contributes little to ensuring that all students have the same starting point.

Thus, in the first article, entitled “Didática e Educação Infantil: princípios para o ensino desenvolvente” (*Didactics and Early Childhood Education: principles for developmental teaching*), written by Lucineia Maria Lazaretti, she discusses the need for a didactic approach to Early Childhood Education, based on the assumptions of Historical-Cultural Theory, which presents clear guiding principles aimed at children in learning and cultural developmental processes. On the basis of Daniil and Vladimir Vladimirovitch Davídov, the author defends this didactic as "developmental teaching." Borosovich Elkonin, Alexis Nikolaevich Leontiev, and Liev Semiónovich Vygotsky, and initially developed in Brazil by Andréa Maturano Longarezi, Roberto Valdés Puentes, José Carlos Libâneo, and Raquel A. M. de Freitas, whose main focus is the process of psychological development of babies and children to their maximum potential. The organization of intentional and systematic developmental teaching for Early Childhood Education is argued through its fundamental and specific concepts for this stage of Basic Education, linking them to didactic issues related, for example, to the choices of teachers, time, space, content, intentional mediators, methodological strategies, and the purposes of education for children aged 0 to 5 years.

The second article, entitled “A formação de conceitos e suas contribuições para o desenvolvimento de crianças na Educação Infantil” (*Concept formation and its contributions to child development in early childhood education*), by authors Eliane Nicolau da Silva and Maria Aparecida Mello, proves that in teaching practice it is possible to prioritize concept formation in 5-year-old children, so that

this learning is meaningful to their lives. The organization of teaching activities according to children's learning needs regarding concepts arising from their social relationships proved to be one of the essential factors for a deeper understanding of these concepts. Thus, diagnostic observation focused on these children's needs, and intentional teaching planning of mediating activities, especially collective activities, made it possible to capture the children's different views on the same concept, demonstrating that each child's perception of what they hear, see, and experience in society about the same concept may be different and that, furthermore, observing children in activities in different spaces can help teachers work in each child's zone of proximal development, teaching them to advance from spontaneous concepts to specific concepts, enhancing the learning and development processes of 5-year-old children.

The third article, entitled “Implicaciones de la formación del pensamiento conceptual de niños de 4 a 6 años en las prácticas pedagógicas de la Educación Infantil” (*Implications of the formation of conceptual thinking in children aged 4 to 6 in early childhood education practices*), written by Abel Gustavo Garay Gonzalez, provides us with a systematization of the theoretical and methodological foundations, based on historical-cultural theory, of the formation and development of conceptual thinking in children aged 4 to 6 in early childhood education. According to this theory, this type of thinking would not be essential in early childhood education, since children are still appropriating concepts, and, also, the limited experience and understanding of reality of this group of children does not translate into conceptual thinking. However, the fundamental concepts in the works of Vygotsky and his collaborators suggest that the fundamental unit of analysis, as the driving force in this process of formation and development of conceptual thinking, is intentional activity in the teaching process, that is, by teachers. In order for teaching to produce the act of thinking about words, rather than just memorizing them, it is essential that it acts in the students' zone of proximal development to develop Higher Psychic Functions already in Early Childhood Education, taking into account their specificities.

The fourth article, entitled “Hora da brinquedoteca: o jogo de papéis em foco” (Playroom time: role-playing in focus), by Marcela Cristina de Moraes, focuses on the activities of children aged 3 to 5 in the playroom of a preschool in order to verify whether role-playing occurs among the children. The results indicated that social role-playing occurs spontaneously among children in a simplified manner, requiring intentional mediation by the teacher, acting in their zone of proximal development, helping them to select and experience themes in their relationships with toys and other objects, in order to contribute to the development of role-playing at a more complex level. Role-playing is essential in early childhood education, as it aids in children's psychological development and their understanding of the social relationships they experience in their daily lives with adults, other children, and objects. The data revealed that the continuous attachment of children aged 3 to 5 to toys/objects, without the teacher's mediating activity, prevented the evolution of toy exploration to role-playing, since much of the time in the playroom was spent with conflicts between them over possession of the toys. Although the 5-year-old class showed a certain quantitative increase in social role-playing compared to the 3-year-old class, this difference did not mean qualitative progress, since the variety of social roles was small; the actions had little variation, and the themes and dialogues were sporadic and limited. The researcher also did not observe initiative, independence, or goal achievement by the children, reaffirming the indispensability of the teacher's intentional mediating activity for the development of role-playing games in early childhood education.

The fifth article, entitled “‘Vou fazer um poema!’: análise de um caso de ensino sob a ótica da Teoria Histórico-Cultural” (*I'm going to write a poem!': analysis of a teaching case from the perspective of Historical-Cultural Theory*), by the authors Heloisa Aparecida Candido Miquelino, Maria Estely Rodrigues Teles, and Jarina Rodrigues Fernandes, discusses the possibilities of integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in schools, based on the assumption of Historical-Cultural Theory that children belong to the cultural

environment that has primacy in their psychological development. From this perspective, schools have the role of prioritizing and intervening in children's cultural development in order to enhance their learning and the development of higher psychological functions. In this way, the authors bring to the scientific debate the relationship between cyberculture, inequalities, and possibilities in schools for the development of higher psychological functions. The focus of this debate is characterized by a project of a municipal education department, configured as a computer course for children aged 6 to 12. The contribution of Historical-Cultural theory is evident in the analysis of the results, directed at two main moments: the paths of teacher mediation amid technological artifacts and the development of thinking, oral language, and written language.

The importance of technology mediation in pedagogical practice was evident in the teacher's mediating role in the activities proposed for the development of children's language, thinking, and writing, focusing on encouraging children's behavior. In addition, external stimuli fostered exchanges of experiences among those involved, and the pedagogical practice and children's learning demonstrated that the cultural development of both was supported by constructs that broadened the teacher's vision and intentional mediated activity, as well as the development of the students' higher psychic functions as a result of their learning.

The sixth article, entitled “Metodologías de investigación con enfoque histórico cultural en temas de educación especial: selección de experiencias académicas en Cuba” (Research methodologies with a historical-cultural focus on special education issues: a selection of academic experiences in Cuba), authored by Elsie Alejandrina Pérez Serrano, delves deeper into the discussion on research methodologies in the field of Special Education, based on the analysis of six doctoral theses and one master's thesis defended in Cuba, supported by Historical-Cultural Theory, the epistemological basis of Cuban education, articulating the concept of special educational needs (SEN) that gave rise to the current concept of Special Education. The research methodologies analyzed involve pedagogical experimentation, case studies, life stories, and the assumptions of emancipatory

research. The theses were based on the historical-dialectical materialist method, so that the discussion of the different research methodologies presents the main elements consistent with Historical-Cultural Theory, namely: 1) explanation of dialectical contradictions with logical-formal contradictions within the object of study and in the process towards the research objectives, i.e., external and internal contradictions; 2) the design of the methodology based on a theoretical conception aimed at transforming pedagogical practices in the educational process, as well as the researcher's position in relation to the object of study.

Each one of these theses is discussed in depth in terms of its theoretical and methodological aspects, highlighting the development of methodologies for attending to students with SEN in the Cuban school context, putting Vygotsky's ideas about learning possibilities into practice, as opposed to the concept of these students' limitations, in order to find more effective ways of enhancing their learning and cultural development.

The seventh article, entitled “O desenvolvimento da cidadania por meio de atividades mediatizadoras” (The development of citizenship through mediating activities), by Marcos Roberto Pavani, addresses the development of the concept of citizenship based on mediating activities adopted in formal pedagogical practices and in youth social mobilizations that took place in public spaces of struggle, such as the high school occupations of 2015 and 2016, as well as the articulation of the youth of Heliópolis, in São Paulo. The analyses were based on the theoretical and methodological references of Historical-Cultural Theory and Critical Geography, demonstrating the importance of digital tools in the school environment, as well as in the articulation of the actions of struggle and political resistance presented by the youth groups studied. The concept of citizenship was clearly present among the students in the interviewed group and was also understood and expanded by the social struggles considered. The concept of mediating activity, derived from the concept of mediating activity, both with deep intentionality, indicated a fundamental direction for pedagogical practices, since they are essential for the development of human knowledge. Such activities

promote situations of problematization and expansion of school content, with a view to developing the higher psychic functions of all those involved in the educational process, as well as presenting formative and educational potential for everyday social struggles, suggesting to us the relevance of considering them in the process of developing human knowledge.

The eighth article, entitled “As relações humanas nas prisões do ponto de vista da pessoa em situação de privação de liberdade e suas implicações para a Educação Básica nas prisões” (Human relations in prisons from the perspective of persons deprived of liberty and their implications for basic education in prisons), by Magda Silvia Donegá, addresses a topic that is rarely discussed in education research, especially research based on historical-cultural theory. The text provides an in-depth discussion of the restrictions on human relations as one of the greatest losses for people deprived of their liberty, focusing on the implications for basic education in prisons with regard to how these relations are organized within these institutions. Based on the concept of cognitive interest development, the author intensifies the theme of education in prisons, with two main guidelines: the first, on human relations from the point of view of people deprived of their liberty in Brazilian prisons, and the second, on the influences of the prison context on relations between teachers and students in youth and adult education. The development of cognitive interest is of paramount importance for engagement in study, since such engagement allows individuals to create more meaning in their study and promotes emotional balance for cooperative human relations.

The research presented in this dossier provides us with indications that we have a path and direction forward in the face of the challenges of an equitable, transformative, and emancipatory Brazilian school education, based on the adoption of the assumptions of Historical-Cultural Theory in educational institutions, which still bear traces of school education concepts from past centuries.

Transformation is the central aspect of this Vygotskian theory, which is accompanied not only by the ideas of a genius in psychology and pedagogy, but

mainly by the effective foundations for the development of higher psychic functions through culture, which are directly related to the learning that only human beings are capable of.

The challenges to this transformation, which involve the inseparability of teaching, didactic, theory, and pedagogical practice as fundamental elements in the processes of school learning at different stages of basic education, are examples of how the permeability of the institution, the school, resists the changes necessary to fulfill its role in a constantly changing society. On the other hand, how research supported by Historical-Cultural Theory urgently needs to translate and explain theoretical concepts into revolutionary pedagogical practices that focus on human cultural development.

We hope that this dossier will help each reader to be able to visualize this revolutionary path for schools, as Liev Semenióvich Vigotsky does in his work.

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