

# The psychological foundation of the thought of Michael Young and Dermeval Saviani: a defense of powerful/classical knowledge<sup>1</sup>

A Fundamentação psicológica do pensamento de Michael Young e Dermeval Saviani: uma defesa do conhecimento poderoso/clássico

*Patricia Nascimento Marques<sup>2</sup>  
Emerson Ferreira Gomes<sup>2</sup>*

---

## ABSTRACT

Topics such as the function of schools, their relationship with knowledge, and the making of a curriculum have been discussed by several researchers in education. Michael Young (2007b) assimilated studies in sociology and the construction of knowledge based on Durkheim and Vygotsky to elaborate a defense of powerful knowledge in the curriculum. In a different country and based on references that are at times convergent and other times non-convergent, Dermeval Saviani (1999) elaborated the Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), a curriculum based on classical knowledge, which the author deems to be a condition for emancipation. After bibliographical research of the production of these authors and other researchers dedicated to curriculum within HCP, the present study has identified similarities in the elaborations concerning the conceptions of school and school knowledge. The search for a common ground that justifies this similarity resulted in the identification of the same psychological foundation in both perspectives: the psychology of Vygotsky. Based on an analysis of these two authors, we concluded that the psychological basis that

## RESUMO

A função da escola, sua relação com o conhecimento e a construção do currículo são temáticas debatidas por diversos pesquisadores da educação. Michael Young (2007b) apropriou-se de estudos sobre sociologia e construção do conhecimento a partir de Durkheim e Vygotski para elaborar uma defesa do conhecimento poderoso nos currículos. Em países distintos e com embasamento que ora diverge e ora converge, Dermeval Saviani (1999) elaborou a Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica (PHC) um currículo baseado no conhecimento clássico, considerado pelo autor condição para libertação. Após levantamento bibliográfico da produção desses autores e demais pesquisadores do currículo na perspectiva da PHC, o presente estudo identificou semelhanças nas elaborações quanto às concepções de escola e de conhecimento escolar. A busca na fundamentação dessa semelhança resultou na identificação do embasamento psicológico adotado em ambas as perspectivas: a psicologia vigotskiana. A partir da análise das produções dos autores estudados, concluímos que a base psicológica que fundamenta o argumento em defesa do conhecimento poderoso/clássico para o desenvolvimento do pensamento do indivíduo é a psicologia proposta

---

<sup>1</sup> English version by Priscila Nascimento Marques. E-mail: [priscilanm@gmail.com](mailto:priscilanm@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> Mestranda no Programa de Mestrado Profissional em Ensino de Ciências e Matemática do Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de São Paulo (IFSP), Brasil. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1007-1478>. E-mail: [patricia.marques@aluno.ifsp.edu.br](mailto:patricia.marques@aluno.ifsp.edu.br).

<sup>2</sup> Professor no Programa de Mestrado Profissional em Ensino de Ciências e Matemática do Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de São Paulo (IFSP), Brasil. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3261-9241>. E-mail: [emersonfg@ifsp.edu.br](mailto:emersonfg@ifsp.edu.br).

fundamentals the argument in favor of classical/powerful knowledge for the development of the individual is the psychological theory of Lev Vygotsky. We also emphasize that the contribution of these thinkers should be considered in the process of elaboration of a school curriculum that opposes the relativism and obscurantism that we have currently been facing.

**Keywords:** Michael Young; Historical-critical pedagogy; Psychology of Vygotsky.

por Liev Vigotski. Ressaltamos ainda como as contribuições desses pensadores devem ser consideradas no processo de elaboração do currículo escolar para o enfrentamento ao relativismo e obscurantismo que vivenciamos na atualidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Michael Young; Pedagogia histórico-crítica; Psicologia Vigotskiana.

## 1 Introdução

Michael Young and Dermeval Saviani's conceptions are similar when it comes to defending school knowledge that elevates students' thinking beyond their routine, everyday life, and immediate experiences. Their conception of the social function of school is based on the understanding that learning is necessary for the development of human thought.

Young (2002) published a study on the contributions of Vygotsky and Durkheim for his approach to knowledge and curriculum. When studying knowledge, Young (2002) used the distinctions made by Vygotsky between knowledge of everyday life and theoretical knowledge and compared this proposal with the distinctions made by Durkheim between the sacred and the profane. According to the author, to overcome a narrow view that considers knowledge as something determined, it is important to consider the emphasis placed by Vygotsky on a historical approach to the development of knowledge (YOUNG, 2002).

Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) aims to improve education for the working classes, based on historical-dialectical materialism. Martins (2013) presents cultural-historical psychology as the psychological foundation of HCP, relating the role of the school, Vygotsky's studies on psychological development and the importance of an education that does not favor utilitarian and pragmatic knowledge. For both cultural-historical psychology and HPC, the

selection and organization of school knowledge are not mere details of the educational process, but rather one of the pillars for promoting a type of development that affects and transforms students' psychological structures (MARTINS, 2013).

Although our survey found authors (MALANCHEN, 2018; RIBEIRO and ZANARDI, 2018) who present similarities between Young and Saviani concerning the need for a school education based on powerful/classical knowledge, these same authors do not substantiate that similarity and do not investigate the approximation of both with the proposal for the development of thought elaborated by Vygotsky (2001). Ribeiro and Zanardi (2018) even mention the need for further studies on the approximation between Saviani, Young and Freire's epistemology, as the authors consider that there are similar paths in the ideas about the passage from naive knowledge to elaborate knowledge.

This study aims, through a bibliographical survey of the publications of the main authors and their interpreters, to list the characteristics of Michael Young's and Dermeval Saviani's thinking on school knowledge.

Based on the identification of the convergent psychological foundation in both theoretical currents, we aim to present the contributions of Vygotskian psychology that have been assimilated by the debate on school knowledge as the psychological foundation in the defense of scientific knowledge in the curriculum.

## **2 Michael Young and powerful knowledge**

Michael Young, an English sociologist of education - specifically in the field of curriculum - published the book *Knowledge and control: new directions for the sociology of education* in 1971. This work marked the emergence of the New Sociology of Education (NSE) movement, which opposed the technical and methodological conception of the curriculum (GALIAN and LOUZANO, 2014).

Already in the introduction to the book, Young reveals the control of educational content and opportunities by the mechanistic relationship between university, economy, and educational system. The author denounces the sociology of education, which sees this control as an explanation and not as something to be explained, reinforcing mysticism instead of making the control relationship a research question (YOUNG, 1971).

On this occasion, Michael Young began to investigate the curriculum as a set of power relations and built a critique of the selection of knowledge that makes up the curriculum as an imposition of the interests of powerful groups aimed at maintaining power (YOUNG, 2010).

Young travelled to *post-apartheid* South Africa, when the country's first democratic government was established, to work with teachers, unions, and other democratic organizations to reform the curriculum. Based on the studies that preceded this experience, school knowledge was seen as an expression of power. Therefore, at that time it was necessary for teachers to have the freedom to create their own curriculum and not have it imposed on them by researchers (GALIAN and LOUZANO, 2014).

From this experience, Young noticed that the teachers had poor training and were unable to deal with the autonomy given to them by the researchers (YOUNG, 2010). This was therefore a crucial experience for Young to return to his studies on knowledge and revisit his academic career.

The author, who in the 1970s defended the thesis that the knowledge of the powerful occupied the curriculum and used it as a means of maintaining the powerful in power by neglecting popular knowledge, revisited his theory based on Bernstein, Vigotski and Durkheim.

The text published by Young (1971) in the work that inaugurates the NSE makes no reference to the Russian psychologist Vygotsky. On the other hand, it is already possible to see the influence of Durkheim in Young's work. In his fight against mechanism in education, Young

guided his studies on knowledge on Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane.

Before Michael Young proposed powerful knowledge as a curricular principle, his productions displayed a search for a secure formulation in terms of knowledge studies. In 2002, Young formalized his approach to Vygotsky's work by publishing an article comparing the ideas of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and French sociologist Émile Durkheim. In this text, Young (2002) reinforces the qualities, similarities and differences between each author's propositions on knowledge and suggests the need to combine a historical view of knowledge with the social realist concept of its objectivity.

Following the path taken by Young, this paper will initially present a brief exposition of Durkheim's ideas about knowledge and then relate them to the Young's reading of Vygotsky's works. Durkheim developed his elaborations guided by a refusal of rationalism, pragmatism and empiricism, which, according to the author, were the weak points of the philosophy of his time (YOUNG, 2002).

Durkheim saw religion as a power that integrated society and served as a model for all other types of abstract thought, including science. In order to deepen this analysis, Durkheim differentiated between sacred knowledge (abstract, collective, arbitrary) and profane knowledge (a reaction to the everyday world in a practical way) (YOUNG, 2002).

Young (2002) emphatically portrays the importance of this division of knowledge and the way in which Durkheim emphasizes the fact that knowledge and science are based on a conceptual - rather than empirical - foundation with social roots. The sociological basis of knowledge is fundamental for Young and, by understanding Durkheim's ideas, it is possible to infer what led Young to approach this theorist in his initial elaborations on curriculum. Just as Durkheim developed his theory in opposition to pragmatic and rationalist perspectives on knowledge, Young appropriated this theory

to defend a curriculum that opposed the technical and mechanistic vision in force at the time.

In his research on knowledge, Young (2002 and 2007a) sought to add Vygotsky's psychological contributions to Durkheim's sociological ideas. The comparative studies carried out between Durkheim and Vygotsky by the author (Young, 2002 and 2007a) demonstrate his interest in taking advantage of the best that both have to offer for the current debate on the curriculum, based on their studies on knowledge and the development of human thought.

Young (2007a) presents some weaknesses in Durkheim's theory and writes about how Vygotsky's contributions can fill the gaps, and provide with more elements to help him to create a social realist approach of knowledge and curriculum. Initially, Young (2002) points out the similarity between the division made by Durkheim (sacred and profane) and Vygotsky (scientific concept and everyday concept), but in the same work, the author mentions their approach to this division. While, for Durkheim, the development of knowledge involves the separation between common sense and theoretical knowledge and the progressive replacement of the first by the latter, for Vygotsky it is the interrelationship between scientific and everyday concepts that constitute the learning process through dialectical leaps that promote the development of thought (YOUNG, 2002).

The author highlighted the historical approach to the development of knowledge as a strong point of a dialectical interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas for curriculum theory. According to Young (2002), Vygotsky did not separate knowledge as a distinct category from practice in the course of history precisely because of his philosophical affiliation with Marxism. In contrast, Durkheim presents an approach that can lead to a view of knowledge as something determined, without the relevant consideration made by Vygotsky about the influence of history.

Aiming to deepen the relationship between his previous basis (Durkheim) and the contributions of the most recent author in his research (Vygotsky), Young (2007a) sought to find the foundations of Durkheim's and Vygotsky's ideas about the socio-historical basis of knowledge. According to the author, while Durkheim's theory of knowledge is based on an idea of social structure, Vygotsky's theory is based on an idea of social activity.

According to Young (2007a), social structure has no historical specificity and does not occur in any society in particular, in other words, it departs from a principle that is not specific to societies, which makes Durkheim's theorizing ahistorical. For Vygotsky, on the other hand, social activity stems from a collective activity to shape the world according to the purposes of humanity throughout history. These differences underpin the way in which both distinguish between sacred and profane and scientific and everyday concepts, respectively (YOUNG, 2007a).

The result of Young's investigation on Durkheim's and Vygotsky's contributions to knowledge is the foundation of a social realist approach to knowledge and the curriculum. The author explains that his approach is social, as it recognizes the role of the human agency in the production of knowledge and denies knowledge as something determined, and realistic, as it identifies the characteristics of knowledge regardless of context and the need for "powerful breaks in continuity" between knowledge and common sense (Young, 2002).

After appropriating studies on knowledge and the development of thought, Young formulated a curriculum principle: powerful knowledge (YOUNG, 2007b). This new concept seeks to reveal not only who is in charge of making decisions about the specific knowledge that makes up the curriculum, but which knowledge is selected and what potential this knowledge offers students.

Regarding the potential of powerful knowledge, Young states



that power is related to the ability to see the world, interpret it and possibly transform it (GALIAN and LOUZANO, 2014). In outlining the differences between everyday knowledge and theoretical knowledge, Young (2007b) defines everyday knowledge as context-dependent and highlights its practical and procedural characteristics and, in contrast, defines theoretical knowledge as context-independent knowledge and how it provides a framework for the development of generalizations and universalities. It is this theoretical knowledge that Young refers to when creating the curriculum principle called powerful knowledge.

The intentionality of the curriculum is highlighted by the author in a 2011 publication in which he states:

the curriculum needs to be seen as having its own purpose - the intellectual development of students. It should not be treated as a means to motivate students or to solve social problems. [...] intellectual development is a process based on concepts, not content or skills. This means that the curriculum must be concept-based (YOUNG, 2011, p.614).

The excerpt above shows the influence of Vygotsky's thinking on the author's ideas about knowledge. Young defends the idea that there is a type of knowledge that is capable of promoting intellectual development and that this knowledge has no basis in the students' immediate motivations.

Powerful knowledge is not related to students' everyday knowledge. According to the author, "the curriculum should exclude students' everyday knowledge, while it is a resource for teachers' pedagogical work. Students do not go to school to learn what they already know" (YOUNG, 2011, p. 614).

Young criticizes teachers who adapt the curriculum to bring it closer to young people's interests in order to engage them in school activities. By differentiating curriculum from didactics, Young (2011) clarifies how access to students' everyday knowledge and experiences



is part of a pedagogical resource for initial motivation, but that these everyday concepts should not be part of the school curriculum. The author highlights this criticism in other works - Young (2007b) - and associates the loss of the school's social function with the nullification of the school curriculum.

Michael Young's concept of powerful knowledge is intrinsically linked to the way he conceives school:

Therefore, my answer to the question 'What are schools for?' is that they enable or can enable young people to acquire the knowledge that, for most of them, cannot be acquired at home or in their community, and for adults, in their workplaces (YOUNG, 2007b, p.1294).

When discussing the identity-generating role of disciplines, based on the studies of Basil Bernstein, Young affirms the need for students, especially from disadvantaged homes, to use disciplines and their specificities as a social basis for forming a set of identities. By relying on specialized knowledge, students establish their identity and enhance their ability to resist the sense of alienation (YOUNG, 2011).

### **3 Dermeval Saviani and classical knowledge**

In his book *Escola e Democracia* (School and Democracy), Saviani (1999) presents historical-critical pedagogy (HCP) as a pedagogical proposal that goes beyond non-critical and critical-reproductivist theories of education. Based on his reading of marginalization, the author presents these different theoretical currents and takes a position in favor of a pedagogy that recognizes social determinants, but which aims to improve education for the working classes.

In his pedagogical proposal, Saviani does not neglect the necessary link between the role of the school and knowledge. According to the author, this pedagogical proposal "considers the dissemination of living and up-to-date knowledge to be one of the

primary tasks of the educational process in general and of the school in particular" (SAVIANI, 1999, p. 75).

For Saviani (1999 and 2003), cultural content legitimizes domination and, therefore, mastering this content is a condition for liberation. Regarding the possibilities for the popular classes to appropriate cultural content, Saviani states:

if members of the lower classes do not master cultural content, they cannot assert their interests, because they are disarmed against the dominators, who use precisely this cultural content to legitimize and consolidate their domination (SAVIANI, 1999, p. 66).

The philosophical basis on which HCP is based is historical and dialectical materialism. According to Saviani (2003), HCP was initially called "dialectical pedagogy", which demonstrated the appropriation of historical materialism from Karl Marx's perspective. However, considering the need to conceptualize a pedagogy in opposition to the critical-reproductivist perspective, the author chose to call it historical-critical, without losing sight of the Marxist basis of its theoretical foundation. According to the author, this explicit positioning in the field of historical materialism affirms his opposition to the reductionist and dogmatic readings present in the educational debate of his time (SAVIANI, 2003).

Saviani (1999) describes in his work the movement to negate history carried out by the bourgeoisie to delegitimize traditional pedagogy (pedagogy of essence) and establish a new pedagogy (pedagogy of existence). According to the author, the pedagogy of existence starts from the principle that everyone is essentially different and that these differences must be respected. The discourse that, on the surface, seems to convey an idea of inclusion and acceptance of differences within educational spaces is, in fact, legitimizing "inequalities, domination, subjection and privileges" (SAVIANI, 1999, p.53).

Historicization, therefore, is a central element in HCP and, like it, objective knowledge is also central. Objective knowledge must be converted into school knowledge in order to demarcate the historical conditioning factors of the emergence of this knowledge and, in this way, deny the neutrality presupposed by the positivists. By focusing on a curriculum organized not only on objective knowledge and the means for acquiring this knowledge, but also on the movement of contradiction present in the initial and final social practice, we can see the historical materialist and dialectical basis that the author proposes in opposition to positivism (RIBEIRO and ZANARDI, 2018).

Saviani (1999) mentions that the most fruitful content for HCP is the classical, scientific, philosophical and artistic knowledge produced by humanity. This knowledge stands the test of time and goes beyond the context in which it was originally formulated. In this definition, there are similarities to what Young (2007b) calls "context-independent knowledge" or "theoretical knowledge" or, finally, "powerful knowledge".

Saviani and Duarte (2021) make an important distinction between classical, traditional and modern. According to the authors, the term classical does not coincide with traditional and is not opposed to modern. Traditional can be associated with archaic, outdated. Modern, on the other hand, is associated with the present moment, with what is current and even more advanced. In the authors' definition, the validity of the classical goes beyond the moment in which it was formulated and involves notions of permanence and reference. As mentioned above, HCP is based on a solid historical foundation, which is not denied in the approach to knowledge, since the authors state that, even though it was born in a certain historical context, classical knowledge "captures nuclear issues that concern the very identity of man as a being that develops historically" (SAVIANI and DUARTE, 2021, p. 33).

Saviani (1999) proposes five steps for teaching from a HCP perspective. According to the author, the teaching process begins and ends

in social practice. The difference between the initial and final social practice is the way in which they are conceived. At first, the student conceives social practice in a syncretic way and, after the teaching process has progressed and the other steps in the HCP proposal have been taken, the practice is finally conceived in a synthetic way. Instrumentalization, i.e. the transmission of classic content, is what promotes the cognitive leap in the reading of social practice.

In his investigation into the cognitive leap, Saviani (2003) emphasizes the need for schoolwork with classical knowledge, stating that it is the appropriation of this knowledge by the working class that develops higher psychological forms. Saviani's pedagogical proposal is based on the principles of Vygotskian psychology, both in the reading about the cognitive leaps identified in the teaching process and in the choice of certain types of knowledge to promote psychological development.

It is important to highlight the contributions of Newton Duarte, whose publications focus on the field of curriculum from a HCP perspective. According to this author, the political nature of the curriculum is related to the fact that the choice of school content implies the way in which individuals can intervene in society. According to the author, the appropriation of scientific knowledge promotes special forms of behavior that result in a more elaborate and articulated understanding of reality (DUARTE, 2016).

In this pedagogical perspective, everyday knowledge should not be ignored when carrying out educational work, but should be overcome by the appropriation of systematized knowledge (DUARTE, 2016). According to Saviani (2003), popular culture is an important starting point, but it should not define the end point of pedagogical work. The author argues that popular culture can express itself in a more elaborate way through the appropriation of systematized knowledge and that the development of popular

culture does not need the mediation processes that should take place in schools, since popular culture is unsystematic and spontaneous - unlike scientific knowledge.

#### **4 Vygotskian psychology as a psychological foundation in the defense of powerful/classical knowledge**

The ideas developed and defended by Michael Young in the 1970s were relevant to identifying the social basis present in the production of knowledge and the power relations that exist in the construction of the school curriculum. However, after the South African experience, Young drew on Durkheim and Vygotsky to reformulate his studies and thus reformulate his theory (GALIAN and LOUZANO, 2014). Therefore, Michael Young's revision of his own theory included studies on knowledge and the development of human thought based on the conceptions defended by Vygotsky (2001).

Young (2002) published an article whose main approach is to resort to the epistemological basis of knowledge, based on Durkheim and Vygotsky. In this publication, the author claimed to draw on Vygotsky's theory of human development to recognize the importance of a historical approach to the development of thought.

Although Young already signaled his change of theoretical perspective on knowledge in 2002 and reaffirmed it in 2007 in the publication "What are schools for?" in which he presents the concept of *powerful knowledge*, some Brazilian theorists have continued to cite the author based on his publications from the 1970s.

Malanchen (2014), in his doctoral thesis, cited Michael Young as a researcher whose "fundamental concern was the articulation between curriculum and power" (MALANCHEN, 2014, p. 75). Similarly, Loureiro and Tozoni-Reis (2016) also cited Young's contributions from the 1970s, without considering the more recent proposals made by the author in his productions after the 2000s.

Four years after the publication of her doctoral thesis, Malanchen (2018) published an article relating the contributions of Young and HCP for the debate on school knowledge. At the time, the author considered the most recent position of the English researcher and even outlined the similarities between the ideas of Young and Saviani:

even though they are different theories and were produced in different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, the two theories have similar concerns as their ultimate goal: the organization of a curriculum that elevates the knowledge of individuals beyond the alienated and alienating everyday life (MALANCHEN, 2018, p. 132).

In this paper, we consider the theoretical trajectory of Michael Young and Dermeval Saviani in the context of similarities regarding the debate on school knowledge, and we emphasize that this similarity derives from the fact that both have the same psychological foundation: Vygotskian psychology. It was because of the appropriation of cultural-historical psychology that Young reconsidered his initial contributions and developed the curricular principle called "powerful knowledge". The definition of "classical knowledge" for Saviani and his commentators bears many similarities to the definition of "powerful knowledge", especially in the defense of this knowledge as the content that should occupy school curricula.

By differentiating the empirical/everyday concept from the theoretical/scientific concept, Vygotsky elucidates the importance of conceptual thinking in the development of human thought. Using a quote from Karl Marx, Vygotsky states that "the scientific concept would be unnecessary if it reflected the object in its external manifestation as an empirical concept" (VIGOTSKI, 2001, p.294). It is from the scientific concept that abstractions are possible that elevate thought and modify the way in which we learn about reality.

Regarding the development of human thought, Vygotsky

emphasizes how the type of thought that is related to everyday actions does not surpass complex thought. According to the author:

adolescent and adult concepts themselves, since their application is restricted to the field of purely everyday experience, often do not rise above the level of pseudo-concepts (VIGOTSKI, 2001, p.229).

Vygotsky's findings on the development of thought show qualitative changes in the meaning of words and in generalization structures. The specific characteristics of concept formation are expressed in three phases of thought development: syncretic thinking, complex thinking and abstract thinking (VIGOTSKI, 2001).

It is important to briefly present the stages in the development of thought to better elucidate the relevance given to scientific thought in school education.

The first stage of concept formation is syncretic thinking. This thinking is typical of the early years of life and its main characteristic is the vagueness of word meaning. The meaning of children's words can coincide with the meaning attributed to them by adults, although the meaning of words for children stems from different and original psychological operations. For the child, what lies behind the word is "the product of a syncretic mixture of images" (VIGOTSKI, 2001, p.176).

The second phase is characteristic of the end of early childhood until the beginning of adolescence. In complex thinking, like the first stage, the syncretic image of visual field perception predominates. Objects are brought together and regrouped with a common meaning by the similarity that the child establishes between different concrete impressions (VIGOTSKI, 2001; MARTINS, 2013).

Vygotsky presents complex thinking in five different types: associative complex, collection complex, chain complex, diffuse complex and pseudoconcepts. These types of complexes differ in the quality of



the generalizations, but they still do not go beyond an empirical and sensitive basis for capturing reality (VIGOTSKI, 2001).

Special mention should be made in this paper of complex thinking of the pseudoconcept type. Vygotsky (2001) himself highlighted this type of thinking in his work, stating that this form of thinking serves as a "transitional bridge" between thinking in complexes and a new, higher stage: the formation of concepts. Although pseudoconcepts and concepts themselves are similar and have functional equivalence, especially in verbal communication, the author revealed that there are differences in the essence, psychological nature, and genetic nature of both (VIGOTSKI, 2001).

Pseudoconcepts differ from concepts in that they are anchored in visible, concrete features of the object. The development of thought in the Vygotskian perspective moves towards the development of abstract thought through rational operations. Therefore, although pseudoconcepts coincide with the meaning of words and allow communication with adults, a more in-depth analysis allows us to identify that the thought that formulates the pseudoconcept is still concrete and empirical (MARTINS, 2013).

Considering the above, the third stage of thought development occurs when the individual becomes able to interpret phenomena beyond appearances and to identify the synthesis of multiple relationships. Therefore, concept thinking is characterized by Vygotsky (2001) as the peak of thought development. According to the author, only after sexual maturity is it possible to complete the third stage in the evolution of the human intellect.

The psychological functions associated with and required for conceptual thinking are more elaborate, such as voluntary attention, logical memory and the logical operations of reasoning (analysis, synthesis, comparison). Processes of this level of psychological demand require an equally demanding school education. Martins (2013) warns

of the risks of simplifying teaching and the consequent perpetuation of complex thinking in students. Young (2007b) also expresses concern about the nullifying of the curriculum and the loss of the school's function, since students should show psychological development based on the appropriation of powerful knowledge.

There is no continuity in the process of thought development without the intentionality of teaching, nor does this development occur through genetic determination. Vygotsky's concern to associate the development of higher psychological functions with school education is presented by Martins (2013) in the following excerpt:

Vygotsky dedicated himself to studying the relationship between teaching and development, pointing out the order in which the former is conditioned by the latter. He showed that it is teaching that promotes development. Only the contradictions between the legacy of nature and that made available by culture promote the rise of 'simple', elementary mental structures into 'complex', superior structures (MARTINS, 2013, p.131).

Vygotsky (2001) discusses the need for an educational environment that goes beyond everyday life and introduces scientific concepts through a process of mediation. In this sense, although the spontaneous concept requires the influence of an adult in the development of the child's thinking, this is still an empirically based concept, while the scientific concept is acquired through the intentional intervention of an adult through the teaching activity promoted through school education (GASPAR, 2014).

The concept of psychological development for Vygotskian psychology implies the ability to conduct psychological processes rationally and freely through the incorporation of culture into the individual's mental activities (DUARTE, 2013). This reinforces the need for a school education that promotes students' access to concepts beyond the spontaneous ones they already experience in their daily activities.

Saviani and Duarte (2021) emphasized how the needs of everyday life should not be ignored in the school environment, nor should the school become hostage to the immediacy of everyday life. The authors consider everyday life to be favorable to the spread of alienation, consumerism, and ideological manipulation of consciousness.

Therefore, school curricula should not be determined by a perspective that adopts students' immediate experiences and realities as their core. A similar defense is made by Young (2011) when he differentiates didactics from curriculum and reinforces the need to exclude everyday knowledge from a curriculum basis, claiming that everyday life is a didactic resource for pedagogical practice so that students can begin the process of accessing powerful knowledge.

School education interested in the development of thought, that is, focused on overcoming everyday concepts and acquiring scientific concepts, must ensure that students appropriate the cultural wealth of humanity and internalize the signs of culture. It is up to the school, in the words of Martins (2013, p.132) "to promote, in each individual subject, the humanity achieved by the human race".

As it was mentioned, Saviani (1999) and Young (2011) criticized the school curriculum based on everyday experiences and stressed the importance of valuing classical/powerful knowledge in school education. This valorization is based on Vygotskian psychology, which points to conceptual thinking as the pinnacle of thought development and the advancement of students' psychological potential. Vygotskian psychology also reveals the importance of an adult's intentionality in the process of acquiring a scientific concept, demonstrating that the development of thought is not linear or determined by a biological or genetic factor.

It is important to consider that the appropriation of Vygotsky's psychology for the educational debate should not be seen as a pedagogical theory. Psychology is relevant to the educational debate as a psychological foundation for pedagogy. As such, it is possible to

develop a pedagogy with Vygotskian, Wallonian or Piagetian psychological foundation - which is different from transposing psychological principles as substitutes for entire pedagogical theories. Although Vygotsky clearly defends school education and the quality of this mediation to promote the acquisition of scientific concepts, the transposition of Vygotskian ideas into the pedagogical field is not appropriate. Vygotskian psychology - as discussed in this paper - should be approached in the educational debate as the psychological foundation of a particular pedagogical theory. There is no proposition of a pedagogical theory in Lev Vygotsky's studies, but rather the foundation of a new theoretical current in psychology that underpins important debates on teaching and learning.

## **5 Conclusions**

Michael Young and Dermeval Saviani formulate their contributions to education based on a similar conception of school. For both, the school must guarantee access to scientific/classical/powerful knowledge, which is opposed to everyday concepts based on students' immediate experience. This defense is determined by the social function of the school, whose purpose is to humanize individuals and transmit historically systematized knowledge.

Michael Young noticed the insufficiency of his theoretical perspective for understanding a lived experience in his academic career and turned his studies to apprehending, among other things, the development of human thought. It was in 2002 that Young formalized his approach to Vygotskian psychology in the publication "Durkheim, Vygotsky, and the curriculum of the future".

School and Democracy was originally published in 1983 and marked the beginning of historical-critical pedagogy by Dermeval Saviani. Martins (2013) and Duarte (2013) have published works in which they indicate the Vygotskian foundation that psychologically underpins the pedagogical theory proposed by Saviani.

In different contexts and with multiple peculiarities, Young and Saviani formulated elaborations that are similar in terms of the function of the school and the composition of the school curriculum. For both, students must access at school what they do not access spontaneously in their immediate experiences, pointing to the importance of a school education based on scientific concepts. Students are expected to explore their potential and develop complex human abilities through the instruction, transmission, and mediation of teachers from different areas.

The defense of a school curriculum based on scientific knowledge and in which students' experience is used as a didactic resource is particularly relevant in the face of the current obscurantist and relativist discourse that denies the objectivity of knowledge. By denying the objectivity of knowledge, the relativist discourse (which states that all knowledge is equal and should occupy the same space in the selection of curriculum content) consequently denies the possibility of a conscious understanding of reality (DUARTE, 2016).

Ignorance in the sense of being aware that certain aspects of reality are not yet known does not prevent scientific production. Saviani and Duarte (2021) state that this ignorance does not immobilize the advancement of knowledge, but it is the deliberate effort to prevent people from having access to knowledge that becomes an obstacle to scientific production. This effort to maintain ignorance is called obscurantism by the authors. It is the overcoming of obscurantist authoritarianism that can guide teaching in schools through a curriculum capable of increasing students' freedom of choice (SAVIANI and DUARTE, 2021).

The search for the psychological foundation as one of the bases of Young's and Saviani's ideas showed us that they both drew from the same source, i.e., the Vygotskian perspective on the development of human thought to defend a school curriculum made up of powerful/classical knowledge.

## El fundamento psicológico del pensamiento de Michael Young y Demerval Saviani: una defensa del conocimiento poderoso/clásico

### RESUMEN

La función de la escuela, su relación con el conocimiento y la construcción del currículo son temas debatidos por diversos investigadores en educación. Michael Young (2007b) se apropió de estudios sobre sociología y construcción del conocimiento basados en Durkheim y Vygotsky para elaborar una defensa del conocimiento poderoso en los currículos. En un país diferente y a partir de referencias a veces convergentes y otras veces no convergentes, Demerval Saviani (1999) elaboró la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica (PHC), un currículo basado en el conocimiento clásico, que consideraba una condición para la liberación. Tras un estudio bibliográfico de la obra de estos autores y de otros investigadores del currículo desde la perspectiva de la PHC, este estudio identificó similitudes en sus concepciones de la escuela y del conocimiento escolar. La búsqueda de una base común que justifique esta similitud resultó en la identificación del fundamento psicológico adoptado en ambas perspectivas: la psicología vygotskiana. A partir del análisis de las obras de los autores estudiados, concluimos que la base psicológica que sustenta la argumentación en defensa del conocimiento poderoso/clásico para el desarrollo del pensamiento del individuo es la psicología propuesta por Liev Vygotsky. También destacamos cómo las propuestas de estos pensadores deberían ser tenidas en cuenta en el proceso de elaboración del currículo escolar que se oponga al relativismo y oscurantismo al que nos enfrentamos en la actualidad.

**Palabras clave:** Michael Young; Pedagogía histórico-crítica; Psicología Vygotskiana.

### References

- DUARTE, Newton. Vigotski e a pedagogia histórico-crítica: a questão do desenvolvimento psíquico. *Nuances*, v. 24, n. 1, p. 19-29, 2013.
- DUARTE, Newton. *Os conteúdos escolares e a ressurreição dos mortos*. Contribuição à teoria histórico-crítica do currículo. Campinas: Autores Associados, 2016.
- GALIAN, Claudia Valentina Assumpção; LOUZANO, Paula Baptista Jorge. Michael Young e o campo do currículo: da ênfase no "conhecimento dos poderosos" à defesa do "conhecimento poderoso". *Educação e Pesquisa*, v. 40, n. 4, p. 1109-1124, 2014.
- GASPAR, Alberto. *Atividades experimentais no ensino de Física: uma nova visão baseada na teoria de Vigotski*. São Paulo: Editora Livraria da Física, 2014.
- LOUREIRO, Carlos Frederico Bernardo; TOZONI-REIS, Marília Freitas de Campos. Teoria social crítica e pedagogia histórico-crítica: contribuições à educação ambiental. *REMEA-Revista Eletrônica do Mestrado em Educação Ambiental*, p. 68-82, 2016.
- MALANCHEN, Julia. O realismo social de Michael Young e a pedagogia histórico-crítica: perspectivas e aproximações na definição do conhecimento escolar. *Nuances*, v. 29, n. 3 p. 116-134, 2018.

MALANCHEN, Julia. *A pedagogia histórico-crítica e o currículo: para além do multiculturalismo das políticas curriculares nacionais*. 2014. Tese (Doutorado em Educação Escolar). Faculdade de Ciências e Letras, UNESP, Araraquara, 2014.

MARTINS, Ligia Maria. Os fundamentos psicológicos da pedagogia histórico-crítica e os fundamentos pedagógicos da psicologia histórico-cultural. *Geminal: Marxismo e Educação em Debate*, Salvador, v. 5, n. 2, p. 120-143, 2013.

RIBEIRO, Márden de Pádua. ZANARDI, Teodoro Adriano Costa. As concepções marxistas da pedagogia histórico-crítica de Dermeval Saviani em relação à temática do conhecimento: contribuições ao currículo. *Educação em Revista*, Belo Horizonte, n. 34, e186783, 2018.

SAVIANI, Dermeval. *Escola e democracia*. Campinas: Autores Associados, 1999.

SAVIANI, D. *Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica: Primeiras Aproximações*. 8a ed. Campinas: Autores Associados, 2003.

SAVIANI, Dermeval.; DUARTE, Newton. *Conhecimento escolar e luta de classes. A pedagogia histórico-crítica contra a barbárie*. Campinas: Autores Associados, 2021.

VIGOTSKI, Lev Semenovich. *A Construção do Pensamento e da Linguagem*. São Paulo: Editora Martins Fontes, 2001.

YOUNG, Michael. *Knowledge and control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*. London: Collier Macmillan, 1971.

YOUNG, Michael. Durkheim, Vygotsky e o currículo do futuro. *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, n. 117, p. 53-80, 2002.

YOUNG, Michael. Durkheim and Vygotsky's theories of knowledge and their implications for a critical educational theory. *Critical Studies in Education*. v. 48, n. 1, p. 43-62, 2007a.

YOUNG, Michael. Para quê servem as escolas? *Educ. Soc.*, Campinas, vol. 28, n. 101, p. 1287-1302, 2007b.

YOUNG, Michael. Why educators must differentiate knowledge from experience. *Journal of the Pacific Circle Consortium for Education*, v. 22, n. 1, p. 9-20, 2010.

YOUNG, Michael. O futuro da educação em uma sociedade do conhecimento: o argumento radical em defesa de um currículo centrado em disciplinas. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*. v. 16, n. 48, p. 609-623, 2011.

Received in January 2023.

Approved in June 2023.