

# For an understanding of teacher identity from a Historical- Cultural Psychology

## Para uma compreensão da identidade docente a partir da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the problem of teaching identity from the categories of analysis of dialectical historical materialism. Based on the assumptions of historical-cultural psychology, it analyzes the connections between motivating activity and the development of individual consciousness. For the dialectical historical materialism, the forms of existing (*Daseinsformen*) humans define their social identities. These present themselves in a necessary relationship that unites the activity and motive, leading to the personal meaning of the action. In such a way, the constitution of the teacher's identity has been understood from the historical and material conditions in which teaching activity develops, covering the intersections between identity and conforming meaning and its class position.

**Keywords:** Teacher Identity. Teacher Training. Activity and Reason. Historical-Cultural Psychology.

### RESUMO

Este artigo discute a questão da identidade docente a partir das categorias de análise do Materialismo Histórico Dialético. Com base nos pressupostos da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, analisa os nexos entre a atividade motivadora e o desenvolvimento da consciência individual. Para o Materialismo Histórico Dialético as formas de existir (*Daseinsformen*) dos seres humanos definem as suas identidades sociais. Estas se apresentam, numa relação necessária que une a atividade e motivo originando o sentido pessoal da ação. De tal maneira, a constituição da identidade do professor é compreendida a partir das condições históricas e materiais em que se desenvolve a atividade docente, abrangendo as intersecções entre a identidade quanto conformadora de sentido e a sua posição de classe.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade Docente. Formação de Professores. Atividade e Motivo. Psicologia Histórico-Cultural.

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## 1 Introduction

This paper presents the constitutive aspects of teacher identity from the perspective of historical dialectical materialism. Considering that the discussion of teacher identity is anchored in an idealist perspective, we propose a theoretical essay that problematizes the concept of identity based on the assumptions of historical-cultural psychology.

In Marxism, there is a certain caution in the analytical use of questions related to identity. Despite his appropriation of Hegelian concepts, there are few references to the concept of identity in Marx's work. However, Grespan (2002), when dealing with the "dialectical inversion" of Hegelian concepts, leads us to an original understanding of identity for historical-dialectical materialism, pointing out that in Hegelian dialectics, categories are presented as speculative elements of thought, explaining reality as a manifestation of mental representations. For Marx, categories are "forms of being" and exist independently of thought. They explain contradictions in terms of the contradictory and essential relations that determine the "being" of phenomena, which is why "if for Hegel identity is the predominant 'moment' in the determination of difference, for Marx, 'inversely', it is difference that predominates over identity and determines it, rather than being determined" (GRESPLAN, 2002, p. 33). Following this theoretical path, we seek here to understand the constitutive features that define teacher identity.

We emphasize that identity is first and foremost a phenomenon of consciousness, and that we can speak of identity problems only at a certain level of social organization and development of human consciousness. Based on the theoretical assumptions of historical-cultural psychology, we have tried to establish the rational links that organize the formation of identity. Thus, we discuss the links between "activity and motive," "motive and personal identity," and "identity conforming to meaning" to discuss the formation of teacher identity, emphasizing its relationship to class-consciousness.

## 2 Identity from Marx's perspective

How can we approach the problem of the formation of professors' identities from the perspective of Karl Marx? It's not an easy question to answer because in Marx's work there is no direct reference to the formulation of a theory of identity. For Marx, subjectivity is above all a historical form through which human beings reflect their practice on the world. It is essentially linked to the way in which human beings produce their own lives in society and is inextricably linked to the objectivity of the processes of transforming nature and building their social-historical being on these foundations. In this way, subjectivity, especially treated as consciousness, appears for Marx in the relationship between man as a physical subject belonging to nature and as a historical subject in the constitution of his humanity.

Consciousness is, of course, first and foremost the mere awareness of the most immediate sensory environment and the awareness of the limited connection with other people and things outside the conscious individual; at the same time it is the awareness of nature, which at first appears to man as a completely alien, omnipotent and unshakable power, with which man relates in a purely animal way and before which he lets himself be impressed like cattle; It is, therefore, a purely animal consciousness of nature (natural religion) - and, on the other hand, the consciousness of the necessity of establishing relations with the surrounding individuals is the beginning of the consciousness that man definitely lives in a society. (MARX and ENGELS, 2007, p. 35)

On the other hand, the question of the formation of the identity of subjects is already discussed by Hegel in his youthful writings, as reported by Melo (2007). In "Fragment of the System," published as part of his youthful writings, Hegel (1984) begins by articulating the fundamental concepts of relation and opposition as intimately linked to those of identity and difference. In overcoming oppositions, Hegel seeks a final identity that consists of the relation between differences. Relation, then, is given primacy in the context of difference, as Hegel developed in his youthful writings.

In his first elaboration of the system, Hegel presents multiplicity as composed of two parts: relation and opposition. The first part, which remains in relation, Hegel calls the organization into which the individual is inserted. It is in this play that the identity of the individual is formed (MELO, 2007, emphasis in original).

For Hegel, the identity<sup>2</sup> of subjects is formed in opposition to the Other in a relationship of supersumption<sup>3</sup>. This means that the "other", as the exteriority of the objective world, is the other in this relationship, in which subjects come into conflict with the "being other" and, in doing so, find themselves (identify themselves) and thus affirm their effective individuality. We can say that much of the theorizing about identity that we know today is based on the Hegelian dialectic. However, as Grespan (2002) explains

Marx's "inversion" of the Hegelian dialectic thus consists in the fact that the logical figures - Hegel's "determinations of reflection" - "difference" and "identity" are in opposite positions for each of the authors. The idealist "mystification," traditionally interpreted as the idea that the material basis of society is produced by the superstructure of mental representations, has here another, formally opposite meaning: "difference" would be external and apparent, essentially determined, but by a deep and hidden unity or "identity" that dialectics should reveal. Because of the materialist "inversion", on the other hand, the "rational lump" is extracted; whose logical figure is the discovery of the contradictory and fundamental difference of superficial identities. (GRESPLAN, 2002, p. 32-33)

For Marx, it is not identity that determines difference, but difference that embraces and determines identity. Thus, identity is not something identical with

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<sup>2</sup> To quote Hegel (2006, p. 382) "Identity, which is in the impulse as such, is the subjective certainty of itself, according to which, it [the living being/s] refers to its external world, which exists indifferently, as to a phenomenon (*Erscheinung*), or as an effectivity in itself lacking concept (*begrifflosen*) and inessential".

<sup>3</sup> Hegel's Dictionary points out that the concept of supersumption (*aufheben*) has three main meanings: "1. to raise, sustain, erect; 2. to annul, abolish, destroy, revoke, cancel, suspend; 3. to conserve, save, preserve [...]" (INWOOD, 1997, p. 302). For Hegel the term means a form of conservative destruction, in logical terms the negation of something in order to affirm it.

itself, but rather the "unity of the diverse," the result of the contradictory "synthesis of multiple determinations," which thus includes the concrete individual, that is, the individual historically embedded in determined social relations. On the contrary, the problem of identity, as it is theoretically posed today, tends to transform it into a speculative, abstract concept that gives the "world of culture" a false autonomy from the "world of work" and from production itself. We see this in the debate on the professional identity of professors. The supposed debate about the construction of a "professional culture" based on the personal experiences of professors, their lives, and their particular interests hides the profound problem of the capitalist transformation of labor relations, in which the ever-expanding control of capital over labor prevails. In other words, it replaces the problems of the flexibilization of teaching work and its consequent impoverishment with problems of identity. Of course, the empirical and daily experience of individuals is an important and undeniable part of the constitution of their unique subjectivities, which provides the basis for political confrontation, but limiting the political struggle to the "game of identities" consequently leads to risky conclusions such as Hall's (2011), which even excludes identity problems from the class conflict.

People no longer identify their social interests exclusively in terms of class; class cannot serve as a discursive device or a mobilizing category through which all the diverse interests and all the diverse identities of people can be reconciled and represented. (HALL, 2011, p. 21)

To better understand this discussion, let's return to Marx's critique of Bruno Bauer<sup>4</sup> in "The Jewish Question. When the Jews demanded their political emancipation from the German Christian state, weren't they in a sense demanding recognition of their religious identity? To a certain extent, most identity debates are based on the search for recognition of certain unexpressed

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<sup>4</sup> A German philosopher and theologian, he was Hegel's student and considered his best interpreter (NETTO, 2009). In 1842 he wrote two articles in which he criticized the Jews' demands for political emancipation from the Christian state of Germany.

political demands, which unfold in conflicts over gender, ethnicity, religion, and even the consideration of certain professional categories, such as the professional identity of professors. It's clear that the resolution of these issues represents great progress for the lives of individuals, but they are "[...] only part of the universal worldly contradiction between the political state and civil society" (MARX, 2009, p. 59). According to Marx, these contradictions are fully compatible with the political state, which, instead of eliminating them, "exists only in their presupposition" (MARX, 2009, p. 50). They are therefore questions of the political emancipation of the individual. Nevertheless, according to Marx (2009, p. 48), "the limit of political emancipation appears immediately in the fact that the state can free itself from a barrier without man actually being free from it, [in the fact that] the state can be a free state without man being a free man. It's true that we can't underestimate political emancipation, but its limits are set to the extent that its struggle against prejudice, persecution, discrimination, plunder, and other abuses by the ruling classes becomes a demand for civil rights and not a struggle to put an end to the circumstances that produce such situations. For this reason, political emancipation is not necessarily human emancipation.

Only when the individual man has embraced the abstract citizen within himself, and as an individual man - in his empirical life, in his individual work, in his individual relations - has become a generic being; only when man has recognized and organized his forces as social forces, and therefore no longer separates the social force from himself in the form of the political force - only then [is] human emancipation completed. (MARX, 2009, p. 72)

In the "Jewish Question," Marx had not yet formulated his theoretical understanding of communism, but he laid the foundations of his historical materialist thinking there, as Netto (2009, p. 25) attests:

(...) Human emancipation, which goes far beyond political emancipation, will constitute the program of communism - a social order that will inaugurate true human history or, if you will, mark the end of human prehistory.

In "Wages, Prices and Profit", Marx (2006, p. 137) gives us a more precise measure of these social distortions, which in capitalism are regulated by the "two extreme limits of the maximum rate of profit", i.e., the "limit of the working day" and the "physical minimum of wages" paid to workers. The value of labor is thus determined by "two elements: one physical and the other historical and social" (MARX, 2006, p. 135).

It is not only a question of physical life, but also of the satisfaction of certain needs arising from the social conditions in which men live and create themselves. The English standard of living could be reduced to the Irish standard; the standard of living of a German peasant to that of a Livonian peasant. (MARX, 2006, pp. 135-136).

These historical and social differences come to the fore, especially when capital faces its crises of profitability, at which point "the capitalists seize the opportunity to plunder the workers" (MARX, 2006, p. 128) and establish new levels of exploitation of the workforce. Meanwhile, there are countless reasons used by the dominant classes to expropriate the dominated, which vary according to the particularities of the historical and social formation of the working classes in question. On the other hand, the identification of these elements with the formation of class-consciousness is not a direct relationship. It is necessary to use the mediation of science and history to go beyond the appearances of the "daily struggles" of the working class - against the "incessant abuses of capital or the fluctuations of the market" (MARX, 2006, p.141) - and translate them into a political program for human emancipation.

The working class must know that the present system, despite all the misery it imposes on it, at the same time produces the material conditions and the social forms for an economic reconstruction of society. (...) It must inscribe on its banner this revolutionary slogan: "Abolition of the system of wage labor!" (MARX, 2006, 141-142, emphasis added)

The multiplicity of political vectors and the manipulation of the ruling classes over the daily lives of individuals have made this unity for the abolition of the wage labor system increasingly complex, while at the same time it has become increasingly necessary. In this sense, we move on to the second point of our presentation, which is to try to understand, in the light of historical materialism, the determinants that, in a way, make up the identity of the teachers and how this individual identity can make up the unity of the struggle for human emancipation. To achieve this, we will refer to the studies of historical-cultural psychology, based on the categories of activity, motive, and consciousness.

## 2.1 Activity and Motive

The central thesis of cultural-historical psychology is that the development of the human psyche is the result of the conscious vital activity of human beings. Thus, work as a mediated human activity is recognized as a central category in the process of humanization. Work is first and foremost a "creative and productive activity". (LEONTIEV, 2004). An activity mediated by instruments and directed towards an end.

Through their activities, humans do nothing more than adapt to nature. They modify it as their needs evolve. They create the objects to satisfy their needs and the means to produce these objects, from tools to the most complex machines. They build houses and produce their clothes and material goods. Progress in the production of material goods is accompanied by the development of man's culture; his knowledge of the world around him is enriched, and science and art develop. (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 283)

Work is an activity, but not every activity is work. According to Mesquita (2010), activity is a "state of action". "We say that a person or an animal is active when it acts, when it does something, when it is not at rest. Activity, in this sense, is simply movement by the force of action" (MESQUITA, 2010, p. 50). Activity is a characteristic of every living being. However, human vital activity is different from

the vital activity of other living beings. In other animals, vital activity is organized within the limits of their biological and instinctive relationships with nature.

The activity of the animal can be carried out only in relation to the object of a vital biological need or in relation to stimuli, objects, and their correlations (situations), which give the animal the feeling of what is connected with the satisfaction of a certain biological need (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 66-67).

Here we emphasize the role of motives in activity. All activity is guided by motives. The motives that guide animal activity are purely biological and instinctive. In turn, "the animal does not manifest new needs, and if from now on, it responds to the conditional signal, it is only because this signal acts on it as an unconditional stimulus" (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 67). Something different happens in human beings. Since work mediates the relationship between man and nature, it also mediates the response to these natural needs. By acting on nature through work, human beings also act directly on their being, producing a set of specific, inorganic behaviors that make sense only in a given social formation. At the origin of these behaviors, the "instrumental act" will produce a qualitatively new response "because between the response of the person and the stimulus of the environment there is interposed the new element called the sign" (MARTINS, 2013, p. 44). Vygotsky used the analogy of the instrument to explain the use of the sign in mediating human behavior.

In human behavior, a series of artificial devices emerge that are aimed at mastering the psychic processes themselves. By analogy with technology, these devices can rightly be called psychological tools or instruments [...]. Psychological instruments are artificial creations; structurally, they are social devices and not organic or individual ones; they are aimed at mastering one's own processes or those of others, just as technology is aimed at mastering the processes of nature (VYGOTSKI, 1997, p. 65 apud MARTINS, 2013 p.44-45).

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Meaning is a reflection of reality, regardless of man's individual or personal relationship to it. Man encounters a ready-made, historically elaborated system of meanings and appropriates it, just as he appropriates an instrument, the material precursor of meaning. The real psychological fact, the fact of my life, is that I appropriate or not, that I assimilate or not a given meaning, to what extent I assimilate it and also what it becomes for me, for my personality; this last element depends on the subjective and personal meaning that this meaning has for me. (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 102)

As Leontiev (2004, p. 103) states, "(...) meaning is first and foremost a relationship that is created in life, in the activity of the subject. Meaning makes the subject of activity aware of its motives. Although the motives that drive the activity have a social meaning, their relationship to the subjects of the activity allows for a distinctly personal appropriation.

This specific relationship is established in the course of the development of the activity that concretely links animal organisms to their environment; it is initially biological, and the psychic reflection of the external environment by animals is indispensable to this relationship. Later, and for the first time in man, the subject distinguishes this relationship as his own and becomes aware of it. From a concrete psychological perspective, this conscious meaning is created by the objective relationship, reflected in the human brain, between that which causes him to act and that to which his action is directed as a direct result. In other words, conscious meaning translates the relationship between motive and end. (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 103, our emphasis)

When man's motivated activity loses its meaning, in other words, when there is a split between the meaning and the personal meaning of the activity, there is consequently a change in the structure of the inner consciousness, giving rise to a relationship of alienation between the social meanings and the personal meaning of human activity.

## **2.2 Motive and personal identity**

The motive is part of the structure of the activity. It stimulates the individual to perform a certain activity to satisfy a certain need. In animal activity, the motive coincides directly with the end of the action. In man, motivated activity does not have a direct identification with its end. On the contrary, it gives rise to a series of actions and operations that are necessary to carry out the activity but have no direct relationship to its purpose. When an animal is hungry, its immediate motivation is to hunt or gather food that will satisfy it. Its hunger immediately becomes the reason for its activity. For humans, hunger does not directly motivate their activity. To eat, humans perform a series of actions that are not directly identified with their physiological needs. Thus, to eat, a person living in a commercialized society needs to have money to buy food, to have the objects necessary for its preparation, to have a clean place and adequate furniture to perform the act of eating, and only then to eat. A socialized man's hunger motivates him not only to satisfy a biological need, but also to carry out a complex of actions that precede and follow the act of eating. According to Leontiev (2004, p. 316), an action is "[...] a process whose motive does not coincide with its object (i.e., with what it aims at) because it belongs to the activity in which the considered action takes place".

Actions have both an intentional aspect (what to do) and an operational aspect (how to do it). They therefore require objective means to be carried out. The means by which actions are carried out are referred to by Leontiev (2004) as operations. In other words, the motives organize and unify the actions and operations of a given activity. In this process, "emotions and feelings are

inextricably linked to needs, on whose satisfaction/unsatisfaction they depend" (MARTINS, 2007, p. 108). As Martins (2007) points out, human activity transforms needs into motives. With the development of human relationships based on the principle of work, motives become increasingly purely social, that is, increasingly full of meaning. This leads to the emergence of different needs in individuals, which are transformed into new motives. This is how the emotional structure of individuals is formed.

Considering that feelings are the result of emotional generalization and are formed based on personal emotional experience, this structure depends on living conditions, education, and one's own ideological conception. The emotional structure is organized in a kind of hierarchy of feelings, in which some feelings are predominant and influence the individual's behavior largely, others have a subordinate character, and still others have no significance for more than a short period. This organization supports the individual's emotional activity in the face of reality, as well as the emotional charge necessary for what is experienced to be configured as a personal experience or subjective experience (MARTINS, 2007, p. 108).

The emotional structure brings the individual into sensitive contact with the world. As a result, individuals take charge of motives and give them personal meaning. They make social activities "their" individual activities. For this to happen, individuals must identify with the motives behind the activity. Were it not for the class divide, there would be no problem with this. As Leontiev (2004) explained, in primitive societies, the motives that guided the activities of individuals were directly linked to the collective needs of the community. Although there were different roles for each individual in a given community, there was no inequality among its members. Men and women, children, and the elderly shared proportionately in the necessities of community life. Engels (1975, p. 107), speaking of the Iroquois tribes, sums this up well when he says: "Everyone is equal and free, including women. There is still no place for slaves, and, as a general rule, foreign tribes are not subjugated". With the emergence of private property and class society, there was also a need to differentiate

between private and communal life. The satisfaction of individual needs no longer coincides with the satisfaction of community needs. Community relations give way to relations of submission. The motives that guide activities in class society are obscured by the ideology of the dominant classes. In this way, activities are motivated by goals that are alien to human beings and thus lose their personal meaning.

These relations are decisive at the psychological level. What happens is that for the subject himself, the apprehension and realization of concrete goals, the mastery of the means and operations of action, is a way of affirming his life, of satisfying and developing his material and spiritual needs, which are objectified and transformed into the motives of his activity. [...]. Under certain conditions, the lack of coincidence between meanings and meanings in the individual consciousness can take on the character of a real estrangement between them, and even antagonism. (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 118)

The loss of meaning in human activity is filled with a "false consciousness" of reality imposed by the ruling classes. We only have to remember the enslaved people who were considered objects of labor, the assumptions of the superiority of the Aryan race, or even today the arguments against homosexuals, indigenous people, blacks, and women, which are nourished by religious prejudices and superficial and false considerations of reality.

Under these conditions, personal meanings that reflect the motives generated by man's vital relations may not find objective meanings that adequately embody them, and so they begin to live as if they were wearing someone else's clothes. It is necessary to imagine the essential contradiction that produces this phenomenon. Because, unlike the being of society, the being of the individual is not "self-speaking", that is, the individual has no language of his own and no meanings elaborated by himself; his awareness of the phenomena of reality can only function through "finished" meanings that he assimilates from the outside, that is, knowledge, concepts, and opinions that he receives through communication, in one form or another of individual or mass communication. This creates the possibility of introducing into their consciousness imposing,

tergiversated, or fantastic representations and ideas, including those that have no basis whatsoever in their real, vital experience (LEONTIEV, 1978, p. 121).

We can say that the non-identity between motives and ends of activity has been an advantage of the human species over other animal species. Because of this, man was able to decompose and reorganize his actions, adapting them infinitely to achieve a certain goal. However, this was only possible because of the social nature of work. In other words, "activity suited to an end" (MARX, 2010, 2012), and the ultimate end of work is the transformation of nature according to its specifically human needs. Thus, it is in work that human beings identify their humanity. However, while the development of alienated forms of work in class societies has allowed an exponential development of the capacity to transform nature, it has also created a distance between work and the humanization of men. From a psychological standpoint, alienated work has transformed the vital activity of men into a meaningless activity for the lives of the individuals who work. It's not for nothing that Marx (2006, p. 37) states that the working hours of the workers have no meaning for them and that their lives begin only at the end of their activities, "[...] at the table, in the bar, in bed". Nevertheless, what keeps men engaged in their activities, even if they are meaningless to them?

If we can say that an individual cannot exist as a human being outside of life in society, we can also say that there is no individual consciousness apart from social consciousness. The appearance of the sign as an instrument of human consciousness has helped to establish certain ideological positions in the continuity of social being - which aim both to transform nature and to mobilize people for this purpose - and in the process has also helped to create a social consciousness of human existence. Individual consciousness is formed in contact with social consciousness. When society is divided into antagonistic classes, it is the social consciousness that prevails over the forms of social production. This means that the social consciousness of the slave mode is slavery, that of the serf mode is serfdom, and that of the capitalist mode is wage labor. Wage labor makes sense

only for the social consciousness created by the capitalist system. Even if it is produced for inauthentic reasons, it is from a social consciousness that individuals are bound to their alienated activity. It is in this direction that we draw attention to the concept of identity.

The identity of the individual emerges from the relationship between social consciousness and individual consciousness; it is the moment when the individual finds meaning in the meanings created by the historical and social activity of human beings. Thus, when we are born into a particular social formation, we are confronted with the language, symbols, and laws that have already been established and consolidated by the historical development of that particular society. At this point, we identify with a particular culture, with certain values that give personal meaning to our activity and to our lives. But until then, what we have is the formation of an immediate awareness of individuals, an awareness of the elements necessary for coexistence in society.

For Castells (2013, p. 22), identity is a "process of constructing meaning based on a cultural attribute, or even a set of interrelated cultural attributes, that prevails over other sources of meaning". This statement seems correct to us, but it forgets that meanings are not solely an individual construction. On the contrary, as we have already pointed out, individuals are always compelled to appropriate a certain system of meanings, and only from this appropriation can it be said that it is possible to create new meanings. As Leontiev (2004) points out

The same system of verbal meanings is therefore capable of expressing different and even contradictory contents. Therefore, there is no need for different languages, different systems of meaning to express the radical differences in representation and thought that inevitably arise in class society. Of course, the slave and the slave-owner, the peasant and the landlord, the worker and the capitalist have different and even contradictory ways of representing the world, but these differences in no way require the same difference in their language, in the verbal meanings they possess, and are not reduced to them. (LEONTIEV, 2004, p.137)

Identity does not create meanings; these are present in the "cultural attributes" of a given social formation. It attempts to give a "unique meaning" to the actions of individuals by coating them with a new and very particular content. The pleasure of effort for the bourgeoisie and the middle classes has an entirely unique content from the same pleasure for the working class. A bourgeois can try to expand his business and take pleasure in it, just as a middle-class individual can make an effort to graduate from school, just as a worker tries and takes pleasure in being able to feed his family. In both cases, pleasure and effort appear as elements of action and have the same meaning that guides the subjects' actions, although the contents of pleasure and effort are different for different social classes. To illustrate what we're trying to show, let's take an example from literature. In the historical novel by Howard Fast (1960), the hero Spartacus discovers this difference in the content of bodies designed for death and those designed only to produce death, and from this, he derives a personal meaning for his hatred of the Romans.

The hot water was an endless wonder to him. Never had the dry death of Nubia washed him completely clean, and he could never enter the bathhouse without thinking of the care given to the bodies of those who were created to die and trained only to produce death. When he had produced the things of life-wheat, barley, gold-his body had been a useless, dirty thing, a thing of trash and shame, to be beaten, kicked, whipped, starved-but now he had become a creature of death, his body as precious as the yellow metal he had dug up in Africa. And, strangely, it was only now that the hate began to flow. There had been no place for it before; hatred is a luxury that needs to be fed and nourished, and even given time for a certain amount of reflection. (FAST, 1960, p. 83, our translation, emphasis added)

In the plot created by Fast (1960), Spartacus' identity as a peasant, Thracian, slave, and gladiator helps him to become aware of his real situation of oppression by the Roman Empire. In a way, this reorients his actions and gives them new meaning. Of course, we cannot exaggerate the example, but it is not identity itself that transforms Spartacus' actions, but rather the extension of his

class-consciousness, the product of "a certain reflection" that he was able to make during his training period for the fights in the arena. Ultimately, identity does not create meaning, but it does guide the meaning of action and can help develop an individual's class-consciousness.

### **2.3 Identity that shapes meaning**

Connecting the dots between activity, motive, and personal identity, we can say that identity functions as a meaning-making element. In other words, it establishes relationships between subjects' activities and motives, which can be authentic and lead them to a process of awareness, or they can be inauthentic and deepen the processes of alienation. In the first case, memory plays a fundamental role. Without memory, it is not possible to record the personal experiences that shape the structure of each individual's personality. To the same extent, memory constitutes the social consciousness through which individuals are linked in their relationships. The personality of each individual contains, in general terms, aspects that are rooted in their family, fraternal, professional, etc. relationships. The more they are surrounded by social institutions, the more varied and extensive are their activities and motivations. The social institutions to which individuals belong inevitably produce, by imposition or free association, a myriad of memories that persist even before the individual is born and often continue after death. In the average family, for example, photographs, the "stories" told by grandparents, and everyday objects are part of the family's social memory, which the individuals who are its must appropriate, transforming them into their personal memories and continuing them, producing new memories through their activity in the social world. In the family, this production of memory takes place almost "spontaneously,"<sup>5</sup> thanks to the ties of consanguinity that tend to unite individuals in the same circle of meaning, even under conditions of extreme deprivation.

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<sup>5</sup> When we say "spontaneous", it doesn't mean that this is somehow a natural relationship; on the contrary, the spontaneous carries in its dynamics all of humanity's historical-social development.

However, when it comes to professional categories such as professors, this memory has to be consciously produced. First, because the bonds of biological determinations do not exist in a professional category. It is only the social determinations historically imposed by the social division of labor that direct the specific development process of a professional category. Secondly, the class struggle in the professional field is more direct and fierce, determining the appearance, disappearance, valorization, and devaluation of entire categories in accordance with the mode of production of society. In this sense, the production of the memory of the professional field is much more complex than that of the family. This is because the economic aspects that determine the discontinuity and the rupture in the generational development of the professional layers as a whole come into play with greater expression.

We can say that professors belong to a professional category that has achieved and consolidated a certain prestige and has therefore managed to produce a positive social memory that reflects, to a certain extent, its importance in society as a whole. However, a discourse on the obsolescence of the teaching profession has emerged, supported by academic circles and the media. This discourse, based on the present report, seeks to dissociate the identity of the teacher from teaching and to emphasize the role of communication and information technologies in student learning. The influence of technology on people's learning is undeniable, but it has its limits and at the same time requires a set of intellectual skills that are acquired through schooling in the strict sense of teaching. In fact, this discourse is used to delegitimize the work of teaching and, more generally, to justify the adjustments and dismantling of careers that have been carried out to the satisfaction of neoliberal policies in recent decades. In particular, this deconstruction of teaching goes hand in hand with the suppression of its social and collective memory. The technical, scientific, and political achievements of the category have been replaced by a propaganda of process innovation in which teachers must identify themselves as professional actors. In particular, the labor achievements of teachers, the construction of their class entities, and the consolidation of their technical and political specificities have been systematically disqualified in the present.

The manipulation of the social and collective memory of the teaching profession leads to serious problems in the constitution of individual memory and, consequently, in the constitution of teacher identity. Individual memory, as described by Luria (1991, p. 39), is constituted by the record of experience, "[...] a record that gives man the possibility of accumulating information and operating with the traces of previous experience after the disappearance of the phenomena that provoked those traces". It is not our intention here to discuss the development of mnemonic activity, but it is important to report on the relationship between memory and other aspects of the individual's personality and even his (in) ability to generate meaning for the world<sup>6</sup>. When the elements that constitute the marks of experience of a professional category are continuously eroded, their connections with individual experience lose their meaning and are guided by inauthentic motives. In the teaching profession, the reality of restructured capital has subjected its activity to external evaluation parameters that impose on it the achievement of indices and objectives. In this way, we understand that the core of the loss of teaching identity lies not in the modification of the teaching-learning processes, but in the change of the motives of teaching activity imposed by capitalist restructuring. Teaching is no longer a teaching activity but a market activity. The measurement of student scores, teacher performance, and school rankings is mirrored in the market evaluation model, in which speculators abstractly decide which company, brand, or market niche to invest in. The meritocratic logic is exponentially distanced from school life, and this has had a direct impact on the teaching profession, which has lost the meaning of its action and, consequently, its identity.

If we consider the loss of identity as the disjunction between the motive and the goal of the activity, in other words, the breakdown of its personal meaning for the individual, we can say that the identity of the teacher has been deconstructed and labeled by neoliberal policies that have tried to give it a new meaning. This new meaning is distant from the primary function of

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<sup>6</sup> Luria (2006, p.3) presents the clinical study of "[...] a man whose extraordinary memory" and in which the author dedicated himself to "[...] not only exploring the main patterns and mechanisms of this man's memory (which in practical terms was inexhaustible), but also describing personality traits that this extraordinary person revealed" (LURIA, 2006, p.3).

teaching and resembles the logic of the market, whose regulation of teaching, teaching careers, and investment in education is being transferred from the state to the market. In the state, although the rules of the political game are constructed in such a way as to be unfavorable to the interests of the working class, occasionally, due to the advance of class political organization, it has become possible to achieve some conquests, mainly in the field of human and labor rights. In the market, the only acceptable logic is to increase profitability. This has only been possible at the expense of the intensification and precarization of wage labor. Accepting the regulation of teaching by the market means entering a field that is aggressive and inhospitable to work, where the realization of capital reigns, regardless of the circumstances. In this way, a new meaning for teaching activity essentially requires the identification of elements that make its activity conscious. At this point, a process of fetishization of educational activity to the extreme comes into play, immediately linking it to the economic growth of countries. At the same time, the need to modernize teaching is argued, placing the burden of backwardness and anachronism on the shoulders of professors.

At the same time, it is necessary to create a different identity for professors, relating them as professionals who frequently evaluate themselves and act searching for constant improvement, adapting to the circumstances. The rigorous support of these false ideas in education in some way justifies and explains the deconstruction of the identity of the teacher and the attack on the class-consciousness of the category. The need for this ideological construction hides the imposition of a new level of exploitation, under which a certain consciousness must be based, integrating the individual into the new order of capitalism in crisis.

## **2.4 Teacher Identity and Class Consciousness**

Leontiev (2004) insists that consciousness is a necessary condition of life, which means that human relationships in general only make sense to individuals if they have some awareness of them. Consciousness does not always

truly reflect the relationships by which humanity is organized. In class societies, the exploitation of labor is sustained by a "false consciousness" of reality that is capable of keeping exploiters and exploited integrated, however precariously. It is true that violence plays an important role in maintaining this integration, but even its use must be justified in some way by some kind of consciousness. Capitalism is undoubtedly the most developed class society, which seeks to maximize its productive forces, and for this, it needs the consensus of its superiority as a form of production. The workers know deep down that they are exploited by their bosses, but due to a dull awareness of the totality of social relations, they consent to domination as if it were the result of a common goal between capital and labor. But the first step in becoming aware of something is to identify it. Identity is in itself a form of consciousness for individuals who, by identifying with their jobs and occupations, become aware of what they have to do. It is the immediate form of consciousness and therefore the most susceptible to false considerations about reality. For this reason, each professional identity represents the functionality of capital in the subjectivity of the individual. A positive representation of this functionality, which inevitably produces its opposite, is expressed in the subordination of all professional activity to the alien desiderata of capitalism.

Of course, a meaningful discussion of professors' identities cannot fail to address issues related to professors' class-consciousness. Of course, these issues are obscured when the professional identity of professors is presented as an alternative to the identity crisis. From this perspective, class problems become personal procedural vices that can be corrected through processes of reflection on practice and "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 2000). But, one might ask, class is not an economic category, so what can its consciousness change about the professor's activity? If we understand class-consciousness only as an epiphenomenon of economic relations, there certainly won't be much to add to teaching practice. However, class-consciousness goes beyond economic determinations and constitutes the very being of the subjects of practice. Lukács (2003) believes this:

[The class-consciousness of the proletariat, the truth of the process as a "subject," is far from being stable or progressing according to mechanical laws. It is the consciousness of the dialectical process itself; it is also a dialectical concept. The practical and active aspect of class-consciousness, its true essence, can only become visible in its authentic form when the historical process imperiously demands its entry into force, when an acute crisis in the economy drives it into action. Otherwise, corresponding to the permanent and latent crisis, it remains theoretical and latent: it confronts the individual questions and conflicts of today with its demands as a 'mere' consciousness, as an 'ideal sum', in the words of Rosa Luxemburg". (LUKÁCS, 2003, p.127)

When Marx states that the working class cannot liberate itself without liberating all classes, and that its goal would be the elimination of all class society, he is affirming the purpose of class-consciousness. In other words, the project of working-class society. In the slave world, the struggle of the slaves against the domination of their masters was in no way aimed at organizing a different social system. The class-consciousness of the workers, on the other hand, has as its task the constitution of a "class for itself" capable of dissolving political power and the political form that gives rise to the struggle between antagonistic classes. Because the identity of the professors, their identification with the elements of the complex social structure inherent in the capitalist social division of labor, brings them into conformity with the contradictions of the system. It is obvious that overcoming this situation of destruction of the formality of work and the subordination of working individuals to the imperatives of employability cannot come from the realization of a professorial identity, nor from a professional identity that is anodyne to the misrepresentation of teaching work. It will have to come from the political struggle waged between the poles of labor and capital.

### 3. Conclusion

Social beings are ontologically diverse, and this diversity in turn determines the identity of subjects. The contrast between identity and

difference leads to a misunderstanding, since the identity of each person is made up of innumerable differences that form a unity in the consciousness of the individual. These identity relations are formed because of the material production of life. Our individuality is always a singularity, unique and unrepeatable, but what unites us is the universal human-generic production. The "other," the different, is nothing more than a participant in what we produce and need is. This leads us to say that individuals are essentially interdependent and that there is no identity separate from the mode of production of material life.

In class society, the social division of labor has become an obstacle to the full realization of individuality. If in primitive, societies' identity was born in the relationship between the individual and the community in the sense of the community ethos, the division of social classes transforms this identification into a fragmented and conflicting relationship. With the spread of capitalist forms of production, the contradiction is intensified, making individual life even more dependent on social relations, while at the same time a process of distancing and isolation of the individual takes place as activities become increasingly meaningless. From the subjective standpoint, the split between the motives and ends of activity "[...] endows consciousness with certain psychological characteristics" (LEONTIEV, 2004, p. 130), which result in the alienation of their activity and their life.

Understanding identity thus begins with the concrete relations with which professors establish their activity. Teaching as a profession for capital is subject to the legality of commodity labor, as Marx (2014, p. 586) expresses it.

[...] The schoolmaster is a productive worker if he works not only to develop the minds of the children, but also to enrich the owner of the school. The fact that he invests in a teaching factory instead of a sausage factory does not change the situation.

Just as sausage factories had to be restructured to accommodate outsourced and automated production in the second half of the 20th century,

professors also had to go through a process of restructuring their educational activity, considering the new way of being of flexible production and neoliberal state policy. The decline of the welfare state and the precariousness of formal jobs have resulted in a process of de-characterization and devaluation of professors, which reflects the general state of anomie among professors. However, theories that defend professors' professional identity present as an alternative to the senselessness of the capitalist crisis—not resistance to its causative elements, but integration into the predatory processes of capital's political and economic restructuring.

In conclusion, identity expresses in a superficial way the practical consciousness of individuals in society. It unifies the meaning of actions in a given social relation. However, this generation of meaning produced by an identity may not reveal the totality of the relationships that determine it and may be guided by inauthentic motivations. The professional identity of professors brings together a set of actions that seek to motivate teaching activity in a way that integrates it with the new production processes. This motivation comes from an apparent valorization through the introduction of professional competencies and self-evaluation practices. By focusing on the behavioral aspects of individual teaching activities, the structures that produce anomie remain intact.

We believe that teacher identity is not the product of individual will, but of the relationships in which professors are defined. It is an expression of the technical, academic, and political motivations of the profession. Therefore, teacher identity cannot be separated from class struggle. For Marxism, teacher identity must discuss issues of class-consciousness, seeking to overcome simplistic and fetishizing conceptions of teaching practice.

## Para una comprensión de la identidad docente desde la Psicología Histórico-Cultural

### RESUMEN:

Este artículo aborda el tema de la identidad docente a partir de las categorías de análisis del Materialismo Histórico Dialéctico. Con base en los presupuestos de la Psicología Histórico-Cultural, analiza los vínculos entre la actividad motivadora y el progreso de la conciencia individual. Observando la relación dialéctica entre actividad-motivo e identidad-conciencia, estructura los rasgos constitutivos responsables de la formación de la identidad docente, presentando el fenómeno de la identidad en sus aspectos psicológico y social. Para el Materialismo Histórico Dialéctico, las formas de existencia de los seres humanos definen sus identidades sociales. Estos se presentan en una relación necesaria que une actividad y motivo, originando el significado personal de la acción. De esta forma, se comprende la constitución de la identidad del docente desde las condiciones históricas y materiales en las que se desarrolla la actividad docente, abarcando las intersecciones entre la identidad como formadora de sentido y su posición de clase.

**Palabras clave:** Identidad Profesional del Profesor. Formación del Maestros. Actividad y Motivo. Psicología Histórico-Cultural.

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