
Abstract

TRINDADE, C. *School Failure? The personal meaning of Higher Education for students who experience academic difficulties*. 2021. 333 f. Thesis (Doctorate in Psychology), State University of Maringá, Maringá – PR^{1,2}.

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For Historical-Cultural Psychology, human constitution and development are not separate expressions of the conditions of possibility placed on human existence, on the contrary they are processes that take shape and content in reality. Especially with regard to consciousness, Leontiev (2021/1975) highlights its intimate relation and, therefore, institution in human activity. According to the author, “individual consciousness as a specifically human form of subjective reflection of objective reality can be understood only as a product of relations and mediations that arise in the course of the formation and development of society” (Leontiev, 2021/1975, p. 151).

Thus, among other elements, in the thesis developed by Trindade (2021), the basis was the analysis of the educational context of Brazilian Higher education and its consequences in the constitution of students who experience academic difficulties. In other words, the starting point for understanding the form and content that make up the meanings and conduct of academics was the current educational context marked by important rates of university dropout and

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repetition. That is, we started from reality to understand the subjects, together with the movement of understanding how the subjects mean and act in reality.

Thus, being constructed from the contributions of Critical School Psychology, Historical-Cultural Psychology and the historical-dialectical materialist method, Trindade's (2021) investigation had as its general objective to understand the personal meaning of Higher Education for students who experience processes of academic difficulties and their relations with the formation of educational failure. To this end, a theoretical and empirical study was developed with four students from a Brazilian public university, through a review of scientific literature in the area, semi-structured interviews and application of the Colored Agenda Technique with the subjects (Trindade, 2021).

The respective thesis was structured into eight chapters, plus an introduction and final considerations. In the first four chapters, the author follows a path of theoretical discussions, ranging from the articulation between work and education, the question of activity and its relations with the process of human meaning, the production of social meaning and personal meaning and, finally, develops a discussion questioning the issue of so-called academic failure in Higher Education. Next, in the fifth chapter, Trindade (2021), presents the methodological path that involved the construction of his study, mentioning both its theoretical aspects and the investigative path used.

Furthermore, throughout chapters six, seven and eight, Trindade (2021) discusses the reality and constitution of research participants in correlation with the theory presented in the previous chapters. To this end, their experiences in the formal educational process, from Basic Education to higher education, the question of dominant activity, that is, the dialectical unity of professional study activity and productive activity and, finally, there are taken as axes of analysis and discussion, the social meaning and personal meaning of Higher Education for academics who experience academic difficulties.

Throughout the study, Trindade (2021) argued the need to understand the issue of so-called academic failure in Higher Education from a historical and social perspective. Based on Patto (2022), the author revisits already questioned

and refuted conceptions about the failure in basic education, debating how much and how often we can be reproducing these conceptions to explain some contradictions that we currently observe in Brazilian higher education. In other words, concepts that explain repetition and/or dropout from individual, biological, if not racist, perspectives are still present, this time in Higher Education.

Critical School Psychology contributed, and still contributes, significantly to overcoming these understandings. It is now time to start from this so as not to reiterate in Higher education notions and practices have already refuted in the scope of Basic Education (Trindade, 2021). Along this path, the contributions of Historical-Cultural Psychology and the historical-dialectical materialist method are especially necessary, given that this perspective makes it possible to understand the processes of reality and the constitution of subjects in their historical, social, cultural determinations, that is, as a movement that it is a synthesis of multiple determinations.

So much so that, according to Vygotski (2000/1931), the immediate expression of processes and/or subjects must be overcome if we want to reveal their constituent roots. This path also requires going beyond the mere description of reality towards the construction of its explanatory analysis. In the context of the study developed by Trindade (2021), this means that university failure and dropout should not be conceived in themselves, that is, there is a need to overcome their mere description. For example, overcoming analyzes that will exclusively point to the understanding of failure in a certain discipline or as a process originating from a certain academic, that is, processes in themselves.

Therefore, overcoming this movement requires us to also look at the educational process itself, especially in its particular and universal aspects. In this sense, Trindade (2021) considers how much Brazilian Higher Education is currently permeated by capitalist logic, that is, for example, by competitiveness and meritocracy. It is worth remembering that “success and failure” become much more expressions of the capitalist educational process itself than singular issues.

Faced with these questions, the author even reflects about the very notion of failure, questioning both its meanings today and who this process actually

serves. In her words, in fact “we have the production of a true educational failure — of the full constitution of students and of the higher educational process — and, therefore, the success of capital society” (Trindade, 2021, p. 24).

Identifying these contradictions that currently constitute the educational process in higher education does not imply denying the importance of the educational process. Given that, according to Martins (2013), school education is an important mediation for human development, especially with regard to the development of higher psychological functions.

From this perspective, according to Trindade (2021), it is understood that the unique constitution of academics, therefore also the difficulties they experience, is not an expression of their organic bodies, but of the set of objective life that makes up their existence. Therefore, according to the author, if we want to understand these subjects, especially the difficulties they experience, we need to analyze the concreteness of their existence.

Thus, in the construction of the respective study, it was observed that the content that makes up the memory of academics in relation to their experiences in Basic education is also constituted by the meanings of their current experiences of academic difficulties (Trindade, 2021). For example, when important actions that concern their schooling processes, such as learning to read and write and even completing basic training, are remembered in an undervalued way (Trindade, 2021).

Regarding this aspect, it is important to highlight that the memory process, according to Martins (2013, p. 158), is related to the movement of the “individual understanding that the retention of certain content is necessary for their practical or theoretical activity”. Thus, it is clear how much and how the memory production process is also linked to human activity and, in the case of students, to their experiences produced in and from academic activities.

Regarding to the issue of activity, as previously mentioned, in addition to being a fundamental process for the constitution and human development, within academics, according to Trindade (2021), it constitutes a process that will boost the constitution of the young person in the dialectic unit, professional study

activity and productive activity. Thus, it consists of a key category for understanding the processes involved in the thesis in question.

For Leontiev (2021/1975), activity is an important process that articulates and is articulated by certain components, namely motives, actions, operations and personal meanings. Thus, according to the author, “we always deal with specific activities, each of which responds to a specific need of the subject, is directed to the object of that need, is extinguished as a result of its satisfaction and is produced again, perhaps under other, changed conditions” (Leontiev, 2021/1975, p. 123).

In the case of the aforementioned thesis, the author verified some particularities that the dominant activity of academics assumes. More precisely, it was observed that male students dedicate themselves exclusively to developing professional study activities, while female academic students also need to dedicate themselves to productive activities (Trindade, 2021). Despite these particularities, the author found that all students end up developing much more individualized study actions, that is, which motives and purposes are not necessarily related in the professional study activity.

The construction of this scenario ends up being expressed in the fragmented constitution of academics' professional study activity, therefore in the very unity between professional study activity and productive activity (Trindade, 2021). In view of this, from the study, we have the possibility of understanding that the students' academic difficulties are also an expression of this very contradiction established in their activities, which, in turn, is formed in a capitalist educational context that mostly does not aim at the full human development of the subjects.

In this sense, Leontiev (2004/1975, p. 127) considers that it is precisely this capitalist context, that is, this historical stage, that “resulted in an opposition between inner mental activity and practical activity, after a relation of rupture between them”. Therefore, it is the material conditions of existence that promote the formation and consolidation of the contradictions and splits that we experience in our activities and, therefore, constitutions,

and not singular and/or biological determinants. According to Trindade (2021), this understanding is especially relevant for understanding the issue of so-called academic failure in Higher Education.

Furthermore, when looking at the fabric of human meaning, Trindade (2021) identified that students who experience academic difficulties constitute a social meaning about Higher Education as a mediation that will enable their social ascension, while the personal meaning of Higher Education places it in opposition to this meaning. In this context, according to the author, students' retention in Higher Education is guided by reasons that are not necessarily related to the educational process, but to, for example, the “change” of life.

Therefore, identifying and revealing the dominant activity of academics, social meaning and personal meaning are essential movements to understand the issue of so-called academic failure in Higher Education beyond singular limits. Leontiev (2004) is emphatic in pointing out the determination of culture to human formation and development, even if under capitalist molds. In the same way, Vygotski (2000/1931) draws attention to the need to overcome the understanding of everyday processes in and by themselves. It was the construction of this path that Trindade (2021) considered necessary to understand and overcome the issue of so-called academic failure in Higher Education. Finally, from this perspective, the author defends the thesis that:

[...] when the work-education relation is structured according to the logic of capital society, in conjunction with the construction of a social meaning of Higher Education as a process that would enable the social ascension of subjects and personal meanings that are often separated from the learning process, the higher education of academics becomes fundamentally promoted by individualized study actions that do not fully constitute a professional study activity. In this dynamic, students internalize, as content of their consciousness, conceptions that denote the so-called academic difficulties as contradictions related to their singularities, that is, to their lack of effort, dedication and/or personal organization, and not as structural issues inherent to the current particularity. (Trindade, 2021, p. 24).

¿Fracaso escolar? El significado personal de la educación superior para estudiantes que experimentan dificultades académicas

Para la Psicología Histórico-Cultural, la constitución y el desarrollo humanos no son expresiones separadas de las condiciones de posibilidad impuestas a la existencia humana; al contrario, son procesos que toman forma y contenido en la realidad. Especialmente en lo que respecta a la conciencia, Leontiev (2021/1975) destaca su íntima relación y, por tanto, institución en la actividad humana. Según el autor, “la conciencia individual como forma específicamente humana de reflejo subjetivo de la realidad objetiva sólo puede entenderse como producto de relaciones y mediaciones que surgen en el curso de la formación y desarrollo de la sociedad” (Leontiev, 2021/1975, pág.151). Así, entre otros elementos, en la tesis desarrollada por Trindade (2021), la base fue el análisis del contexto educativo de la educación superior brasileña y sus consecuencias en la constitución de estudiantes que experimentan dificultades académicas. En otras palabras, el punto de partida para comprender la forma y el contenido que configuran los significados y la conducta de los académicos fue el contexto educativo actual marcado por importantes índices de deserción y repetición universitaria. Es decir, partimos de la realidad para comprender a los sujetos, junto con el movimiento de comprensión de cómo los sujetos significan y actúan en la realidad.

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