

THE SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSION: CHALLENGES TO FORMATIVE PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a discussion on the subjective configuration of the psychological professional practice, which hints at the importance of continuous education processes that mobilize new subjective resources. It also addresses the relationship between the process of continuous education and the modes of professional activity, in a perspective that considers subjectivity as an element to be approached in training spaces. In order to dialogue with the assumptions of the Theory of Subjectivity, the epistemological and methodological principles of Qualitative Epistemology were used for the production of knowledge conceived as an interpretative construction process. Concerning the research participant, this subjective, professional configuration can be recognized by means of the participant's openness to new learning experiences and the development process itself, of her movement of action as a response to the needs of students, of her involvement / commitment to Inclusive Education, of her belief in the students' potential, and of her belief in the power of teamwork and personal values when it comes to nurturing positive and healthy relationships for life.

Keywords: school psychologist; continuous education; human development.

La dimensión subjetiva de la profesión de psicólogo escolar: desafíos a los procesos formativos

RESUMEN

En este artículo se presenta una discusión sobre la configuración subjetiva de la profesión señalando la importancia de procesos de formación continuada que sean movilizados de nuevos recursos subjetivos. Aborda la relación entre el proceso de formación continuada y los modos de actuación profesional, en una perspectiva que considera la subjetividad como elemento a ser considerado en los espacios formativos. Para dialogar con los presupuestos de la Teoría de la Subjetividad, se utilizaron los principios epistemológicos y metodológicos de la Epistemología Cualitativa para la construcción de un conocimiento concebido como un proceso de construcción interpretativa. En la participante de la investigación, la configuración subjetiva de la profesión puede ser reconocida por la apertura a los nuevos aprendizajes y al propio proceso de desarrollo, por el movimiento de acción orientado por el otro, por el involucramiento/compromiso con la Educación Inclusiva, por la creencia en la potencialidad del estudiante, por la creencia en la labor colectiva y por los valores personales que posibilitan una relación positiva y sano con la vida.

Palabras clave: psicólogo escolar; educación continua, desarrollo humano.

A dimensão subjetiva da profissão de psicólogo escolar: desafios aos processos formativos

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma discussão sobre a configuração subjetiva da profissão sinalizando a importância de processos de formação continuada que sejam mobilizados de novos recursos subjetivos. Aborda a relação entre o processo de formação continuada e os modos de atuação profissional, numa perspectiva que considera a subjetividade como elemento a ser considerado nos espaços formativos. Para dialogar com os pressupostos da Teoria da Subjetividade, utilizaram-se os princípios epistemológicos e metodológicos da Epistemologia Qualitativa para a construção de um conhecimento concebido como um processo de construção interpretativa. Na participante da pesquisa, a configuração subjetiva da profissão pode ser reconhecida pela abertura às novas aprendizagens e ao próprio processo de desenvolvimento, pelo movimento de ação orientado pelo outro, pelo envolvimento/compromisso com a Educação Inclusiva, pela crença na potencialidade do estudante, pela crença no trabalho coletivo e pelos valores pessoais que possibilitam uma relação positiva e saudável com a vida.

Palavras-chave: psicólogo escolar; educação continuada; desenvolvimento humano.

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INTRODUCTION

This article presents a discussion on the subjective configuration of the school psychology profession while demonstrating its importance for the development of continuous education processes that are mobilizers of new subjective resources. Recognizing professional identity as a subjective configuration implies recognizing that this is one of the areas of a person's life, and that professional action is guided by a system which consists of numerous other configurations (family, religion, belief system etc.). In this sense, continuous education requires greater investment on what has been proposed as the constitutive content of one's profession, with processes that are effective promoters of development.

Psychologists must be socially committed to their contribution to the promotion of social justice and of transformations in institutionalized systems so that they can be spaces for the development and free expression by the individuals who participate in these spaces (Mitjás Martínez & González Rey, 2017). In this sense, we emphasize here the importance of the spaces for continuous education that enable not only the updating and development of new skills, but also the improvement of the quality and functionality of the services provided to society, which is the basis of psychology's social commitment (Bock, Ribeiro Ferreira, Gonçalves, & Furtado, 2007; Santos, 2017).

Studies indicate that continuous education not only complements what has been learned in graduation courses, but also provides opportunities for updating and for the consolidation of conceptual, theoretical, and methodological innovations in the psychologists' practice (Mendes, Abreu-Lima, & Almeida, 2015). It is understood that, by means of critical thinking, psychologists can become effective actors in the transformation of reality (Silva Neto, Oliveira, & Guzzo, 2017).

Still in this perspective of associating spaces of formation with opportunities to mobilize social structures, Matos (2019) reflects on how a process of continuous training can effectively contribute to the transformation of professional practices while raising awareness of social commitment. For Marinho-Araujo and Neves (2007), continuous education, named 'in-service training' by the authors, "is configured as a privileged space for integrated, complementary dialogue between the theoretical bases of psychological knowledge and the demands of professional performance" (p. 70). Understanding continuous formation, in this perspective, constitutes something fundamental for overcoming the instrumentalist character of education and the search for awareness on the subjective dimension involved in educational contexts, as well as the possibilities and potentialities

of professionals in a demonstration of commitment to the reconstruction of the history of the people involved.

Over ten years ago, a traditional trend was already identified in terms of the performance of psychologists. At the time, Senna and Almeida (2005) already hinted at the need to investigate whether these professionals would be committed to the paradigm shift from the point of view of their conceptions and practices in educational contexts. We consider that, for the school psychologist, it is necessary to reassess the scope of their practice in order to promote transformations that effectively promote the development of all actors involved in the educational system. Shifting the focus away from processes of illness and school failure and onto the triad of health, well-being, and success becomes an urgent necessity and demonstrates the psychologists' level of social commitment (Bock, 2007; Mitjás Martínez & González Rey, 2017).

It is notorious that what distinguishes subjectivity, as conceived by González Rey (1949-2019), from other forms of presented subjectivity is the recognition of the relationship between the social and the individual as a complex, integrative, dynamic, recursive, and non-deterministic production, where both social and individual dimensions influence each other, without undermining themselves in the process.

The challenge of presenting the psyche from a cultural vision, stripping it of the deterministic and essentialist character that accompanied the vast majority of psychological theories, leads to a representation of the psyche in a new complex, systemic, dialogical, and dialectical dimension, defined as an ontological space, which we have chosen as the concept of subjectivity. (González Rey, 2005, p. 75).

The potential of the Theory of Subjectivity to help us understand the complexity and diversity of subjective aspects of social life lies in the heuristic value of subjective senses as a person's production in the actions and daily relationships in which there is involvement and mobilization of subjective resources. The subjective meanings produced in the experiments, in different areas of human activity, feed the configurational system whose units and main forms constitute subjectivity.

Subjective configurations, besides having a predisposition to aggregate subjective senses with high convergence with each other, also have a generating character, which strengthen the new subjective senses that are produced in everyday actions and relationships. Subjective meanings are always up-to-date, unprecedented, and characterize the procedural nature of the human experience. Due to its recursive, dynamic, and complex character, subjectivity is a

configurational system that has a procedural nature (González Rey, 2005; González Rey & Mitjás Martínez, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative in nature, the research was guided by the assumptions of Qualitative Epistemology, which conceives science and professional practice as mutually constituent, socially committed, integrated practices for the development of science. Qualitative Epistemology supports the study of subjectivity by assuming a theological and epistemological awareness of phenomena and becoming different from other quantitative approaches (González Rey & Mitjás Martínez, 2017; Rossato & Mitjás Martínez, 2018). Qualitative Epistemology argues that the research process is relational while the researcher is active and takes a position beyond alleged neutrality. In this sense, the constructive-interpretative character of the production of knowledge leads to the integration of two inseparable and recursive moments of scientific research, which are often regarded as disparate, occurring in fragmented stages: theory and empirical moment.

The process of interpretative construction is based on the understanding that subjective senses and subjective configurations are not accessed exclusively by means of oral expression, nor are they consciously expressed. For González Rey and Mitjás Martínez (2017) these meanings and these configurations are legitimized by means of information that does not manifest directly in the expressions of the participants, but that, when analyzed by the researcher, based on a constructive-interpretative model, become essential for the generation of new intelligibility on the studied issue.

Characterization of Research

The research was conducted with a school psychologist who works in the “Equipes Especializadas de Apoio à Aprendizagem” (EEAA), or Specialized Teams for Learning Support at the “Secretaria de Estado de Educação do Distrito Federal” (SEEDF), or Education Bureau of the Federal District. The participant was originally a member of a group of approximately 10 school psychologists, who meet monthly to study and discuss issues related to professional performance. The participant was chosen after analysis of the information produced by instruments 1 and 2 performed with the whole group. In the case of the chosen participant, the profession was identified as a dominant subjective configuration and become extremely relevant for the research. After this choice, individual meetings were held with the participant in order to perform the other tasks of the research. The information produced in these meetings was later analyzed in connection with the

information of the initial steps of the study.

Instruments

The instruments were used as mobilizers of the participant's expression, and their importance was inscribed in the quality of the information produced.

1. Statement Completion - Written instrument created by González Rey and Mitjás Martínez in 1989. It consists of statements to be completed by means of direct and indirect short inducers. The research used a version adapted to its theme.

2. Song-based Dynamics – Instrument composed of excerpts of various songs in which the participant is supposed to choose the one that best represents their professional performance while singing along with the audio recording.

3. Conversational Dynamics – instrument based on discussion topics and used in order to understand professional trajectories, as well as current professional developments.

4. Art at Work – discussion, by means of art (music, poetry, literature, and visual arts), on how she perceived her own professional performance.

5. Field Diary – used as record for the researcher's reflections and impressions on verbal and on non-verbal reactions observed throughout the research.

In the process of interpretative construction, the theoretical basis of the researcher assumes great relevance, because it is what makes it possible to produce the intelligibility system in the face of the participant's expressions, in a singular and sometimes contradictory movement, requiring that the analysis of information occurs throughout the realization of the theoretical-empirical moment. It is understood that studying subjectivity requires the development of a theoretical model that considers articulation with multiple systems of meanings that arise in the course of research (Matos, 2019).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF INFORMATION

The analysis and discussion of the information presented below aims to outline the process of theoretical/empirical interpretative construction of the researcher on the constitutive resources, processes, and productions of the school psychology profession. Such process is not encapsulated in itself, but part of a system of dynamic subjective configurations.

Participant Clara¹

Clara, 30 years old, psychologist and specialist in psycho-pedagogy. Graduated 8 years ago, she has been working as a school psychologist at the SEEDF since 2014. She entered the institution by means of

¹ Fictitious name.

a public tender and her previous training led her to take a first interest special education. Clara reports that, at the beginning of her education in Psychology, a work developed with children and adolescents/young people with atypical development drew her attention to the area. Her first contact with special children, as a co-therapist in a clinic specialized in care for this population, was the beginning of a path that Clara would follow to the present day. Statement 24 – My journey “is just beginning” (Demonstrating openness to new learning experiences); Phrase 32 – I think a lot about “the future” (Her belief in tomorrow brings implicit reflection on what can be done differently); Statement 46 – Yesterday’s “learning” (Demonstration that learning is something very relevant); Statement 49 – “To try to do your best” every day (Belief that it is always possible to improve by means of new learning experiences); Statement 55 – When I arrive at the school “a new possibility” (Possibility here as an opportunity for new learning) (Statement Completion - SC).²

At another point, she expresses the way she sees her learning and development process. “We are always looking for more knowledge, each team working within the domain of their own areas of expertise” (Conversational Dynamics – CD). Clara’s reflections, as early as the first meetings of the research, hinted at the attention paid and importance attributed to the learning process itself and the future possibilities offered by these learnings. By analyzing the inner workings of this information, it was possible to understand that learning is always under construction. That is a clear sign of **openness to new learning** and to the development process itself, which constitutes a first indicator of how the profession was configured in its subjectivity. For González Rey (2006), becoming the subject of one’s own process of learning and development requires a process of implied, reflective, and conscious personalization of knowledge. By assuming a commitment to the process of learning and development itself opens possibilities for us to think that Clara has produced her own paths of subjectivation for her own performance, despite the expectations of other professionals that professional action is shaped by training processes.

During the meetings with the participant it was possible to perceive a passionate professional committed to her work: “I like being a psychologist at the Centro de Ensino Especial (CEE), or Center for Special Education and I cannot imagine being a psychologist anywhere else” (CD). Clara sees her position as psychologist at the CEE as a chance to do everything she believed to be

² The comments that follow the statements come from reflections by the researcher on the process of interpretive construction in dialogue with information produced at other moments of the research.

beyond the socially established limits for students with disabilities: “We can see potential that other people out there cannot. And because they cannot see such potential, they end up excluding students with special needs. That is a problem I have been able to identify with the work I develop here with these students. My greatest difficulty is being able to dialogue with other schools when it comes to inclusion” (DC).

The biggest challenge faced by Clara, in relation to her practice, was the dissemination of her belief in the students’ potential, overcoming the view that students with special needs have only limitations. Her attempt to broaden the view of school actors about the potential of students with disabilities was one of her references as a school psychologist. Phrase 2 - To be a psychologist is “to believe that the world can be different” (To be different is to be more inclusive); Statement 5 - I would like to “offer the best to students” (Her belief in the students’ potential reflects her willingness to offer what she believes students deserve); Statement 9 – I feel satisfied when “I see teachers who believe in their students’ potential” (Students have the potential for development regardless of diagnosis); Statement 10 - I am sad when they “give up on a student” (Her belief in the student’s potential does not allow her to give up on any of them); Statement 35 - My greatest pleasure is “to see the development of students” (Precisely because I believe that everyone has the potential for development) (SC).

Clara’s pleasure in being a CEE psychologist was reflected on the way she copes with disbelief in the potentialities of students with disabilities, resulting in a professional performance that evidenced her focus on the needs of students. This **action as a response to students’ needs** was recognized as a second indicator of how the profession was configured in its subjectivity. The action of the psychologist is not determinant of the development of students with disabilities, but it becomes relevant for the subjective resources that can be produced or mobilized in this interaction (González Rey, 2004).

Throughout the research meetings, Clara made reflections about her performance as a school psychologist and revealed: “At first I believed that I would not be able to do this work because of the various difficulties presented by the children. However, I soon fell in love with the work and kept on developing projects in the area of child psychology, atypical development, and early education throughout the psychology course” (CD). In the course of this dialogue, Clara reaffirmed her taste for working as a CEE psychologist while always emphasizing that she did not imagine herself as a psychologist anywhere else. Once again, Clara spoke of her belief in the potential of students with disabilities

and their discomfort with other people who do not believe in this potential. Statement 3 - I am happy “when they welcome our students with affection”; Statement 5 - I would like to “offer the best to students”; Statement 9 - I feel satisfied “when I see the teachers believing in their student’s potential”; Statement 10 - I feel sad “when they give up on a student”; Statement 21 - I take pleasure “to see inclusion happening”; Statement 44 - A dream: structural changes at the center (SC).

Clara’s reflections demonstrated her passion for the work developed at the center, as well as her satisfaction with the success of the CEE students. At various times she pointed out emotions that were related to the work performed within the CEE, which demonstrated her happiness, sense of achievement, and pleasure with inclusion. This **involvement/commitment to Inclusive Education** was a third indicator of how the profession was configured in its subjectivity. Involvement/commitment, for González Rey (2014), is the result of individual motivation – a system of desires and needs – to do something, understood as strong potential in the constitution of subjective configurations that present themselves as dominant in certain spaces/times of life. The author defines “subjective configuration as continuous engagement in action, which expresses the understanding of motivation as a system, transcending the idea of motive as just another internal psychological entity that influences action” (González Rey, 2014, p. 15. Our translation).³

The belief in the students’ potentiality, regardless of their diagnosis, permeated Clara’s statements at all times. The diagnosis of a disability, due to its social content, can constitute a dominant subjective configuration for students and, sometimes, it might do damage to their development (González Rey, 2006; Mitjans Martínez & González Rey, 2017; Rossato, 2009; Vigotski, 1997). Understanding that students are not defined by their diagnosis allows us to find new ways for action that recognize people’s generating character, in addition to their characteristics and limitations. Clara’s faith in her students’ potential allowed her to take action in her daily work disseminating her ideas among the other actors of the school. The **belief in the students’** potentiality represented, then, a fourth indicator of how the profession was subjectively configured in Clara’s case.

Throughout the meetings with Clara, it was possible to identify further evidence of the value that she conferred to students: “I would change schools only

from one CEE to another and if I could, I would take my partner, the pedagogue. I love being part of this team. We can get our ideas together, we do everything together. There’s nothing we do without each other, we think along the same lines, we fight for the same things. If I were in another team my previous answers would be different, I think I would have given up by now. In the other schools, I did not even want to go to work” (CD).

Clara’s reflections also enable us to understand how much she appreciates healthy relationships, and a sense of affiliation. At all times she emphasized the importance she attributed to teamwork and how much she needed professional partnerships for the proper development of her work, and in order to feel motivated to do things. In this sense, **the belief in teamwork, in contrast with individual work, can** be considered a fifth indicator of the subjective constitution, with regard to professional performance. The tension of social processes and products, expressed by Clara in her belief in teamwork, evidences a differentiated subjective production in order to cope with the social subjectivity of the school, a space where individualized actions still predominate. Clara’s position evidences a character that generates subjectivity, guided by her individual values and beliefs (González Rey, 2003).

It was also possible to perceive the presence of certain life-orienting values that were expressed in their professional performance. During the song-based dynamic, reflecting on the song she picked to represent her performance as a school psychologist, Clara revealed that she really liked the lyrics of that song and that it reminded her of some memorable moments in her life. For Clara, the reality of a Special Education Center was completely different from the reality for any other team, because the work did not happen with one, two or three students, but with all the students of the school, since they all had their difficulties.⁴

It was observed that, when she realized that there was a lack of motivation and disbelief in the potential of the students with disabilities, Clara established a different professional approach, assuming a posture that demonstrated she was really responsive to the students’ needs and potentialities as part of her own professional identity. This orientation mobilized her personal values: Statement 15 - What I want most is “respect” (She invests in actions that promote respect within the school); Statement 23 - The most important thing is “love” (Another expression of her values); Statement 41 – Gratitude is priceless (Sign of lightheartedness);

³This definition characterizes the concept of subjective configuration as continuous engagement in action, which expresses the comprehension of motivation as a system, transcending the idea of motive as just another psychological entity that influences the action from inside.

⁴ “Live, and do not be ashamed to be happy. Sing, and sing, and sing the beauty of being an eternal apprentice. I know life should be much better and it will be. But that doesn’t stop me from repeating, it’s beautiful, it’s beautiful, and it’s beautiful” – Gonzaguinha (Excerpt from Song-based Dynamics).

Statement 50 - Most of the time “I try to be a better person” (Again, she expresses her openness to the new); Statement 61 - I like “doing good” (personal values); Statement 65 - Ethics “at work and in life” (The obvious presence of personal values) (SC).

In this sense, it was possible to record another important piece of information provided by the participant, by means of an activity in which she was invited to represent her performance as a school psychologist by means of some artistic expression: Researcher: “Why did you depict a sun?”. Clara: “Because I think the work of the school psychologist enlightens the teacher, the student, and the school as a whole. Because we stop and say, ‘wait a minute, I’ll take a look at you, wait so I’ll be there for you as long as I can. I see it as that.’ Our mission is to provide students with light and support”. Researcher: “Did you choose the sun as a reference of this light and support?” Clara: “Yes. You know, it’s like when you’re cold and you look for the sun. I think that’s what we’re there for.” (Art at Work - AT).

By presenting herself as a person in love with life, who kept values for herself and those around her, demonstrating lightheartedness, always seeking to do her best, caring for others, being grateful, and caring for what she does, Clara revealed that her personal values were directly reflected on her professional performance and made it possible for her to maintain a **positive and healthy relationship with life**, which represented a sixth indicator of how the profession was subjectively configured. Here we highlight the complexity of the system of subjective configurations because what Clara expresses in her performance at work is not exclusive to her professional matters (Mitjás, Martínez & González Rey, 2017). The positivity and the healthy way that drives her life go beyond the demands of the profile of professional performance. These are constitutive characteristics of the basis of her actions and professional relationships.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Subjective configuration, as a unit of analysis, represents a production of intelligibility on the nature of the subjective senses that constitute it. These subjective meanings are subjective productions generated in real-life experiences, but which are also permeated by what is already subjectively constituted in each person. Subjective meanings are always unprecedented, as a new production, but do not present the same novelty when analyzed in their procedural nature, since they are permeated by the configurational system already constituted (González Rey & Mitjás Martínez, 2017).

In the participant’s case, the passion for the work she does has been constituted throughout her performance

as a school psychologist. In the context of this action, the subjective meanings that were being produced outline the continuity of the nature of this production, enabling the passion for the profession to be maintained. Profession as a subjective configuration, dominant or not, presupposes a professional who is emotionally and symbolically involved with it. It is the quality of this involvement that sets the tone of the life of these professionals because profession, as a dominant subjective configuration in its subjective constitution, permeates all other subjective configurations.

Concerning the research participant, the subjective configuration of her profession can be recognized by her openness to new learning experiences and to the development process itself, by her movement of action as a response to others, by her involvement/commitment to Inclusive Education, by her faith in the student’s potentiality, by her belief in teamwork rather than individual efforts, and by her own personal values that enable her to have a positive and healthy relationship with life. For other professionals, the subjective configuration of the profession will present itself with its own contents and, although we can argue that this singularity should be recognized from the point of view of professional training, it should also be mobilized without aiming for a standard, but as a path of professional development.

One aspect that deserves to be highlighted in this discussion is the dynamics between objective working conditions and subjective production on such conditions. We do not disregard the importance of objective, instrumental, and operational matters of school daily life. However, we emphasize that that all these subjective questions present different constitutions for every person. More than that, mobilization for professional performance is part of the subjective resources that govern actions and relationships in daily school life. Understanding how something is subjectively configured, like the profession of a school psychologist, represents generating intelligibility about the value of the symbolic and the emotional formations that are entangled in the actions and relationships of professional performance.

It is also up to us to discuss the value of mobilizing new subjective resources when we have to deal with a framework of subjective processes and formations that produce professionals who are not mobilized. The main challenge presented to this discussion is to think of formative actions for professionals who do not have the profession as a subjective configuration constituted in a way that allows them to be mobilized, engaged, and motivated with their profession. We have seen, in this case, some indicators of a personal order that inevitably permeate the profession, but that can

be handled by means of formative experiences that mobilize the production of new subjective resources while generating a stronger basis for the performance of school psychologists.

In this sense, it is necessary to mobilize the production of resources, experiences, and practices that can be reflective and involve professionals emotionally and symbolically while providing these professionals with the opportunity to reconstruct their subjective resources for professional practice. We believe that people who do not have their profession as a more dominant subjective configuration in their subjective system, are little involved with the work they perform. Therefore, thinking about formation processes that enable a subjective reconfiguration implies the challenge of creating an emotional involvement that enables individuals to symbolically reconstruct the terms of their own profession.

It is necessary to produce experiences that enable professionals to produce ruptures in their subjective systems and, thus, to develop resources of another nature as the basis of new subjective productions. They can change all objective, instrumental and operational conditions of daily work, however, if these changes do not occur in line with the construction of new beliefs, values, and motivations, professional performances can continue to be outlined by a subjective system that prevents actions and relationships from taking on another quality in their daily interaction.

Thinking about formation only by means of instrumentalization does not lead to the occurrence of changes in terms of subjective production because, from the point of view of the singularity of educational phenomena, a tool is not capable of reproduction and becomes merely an empty tool. In the meantime, the subjective resources present in the subjective constitution of individuals lead to the production of new subjective meanings concerning professional matters, provided that they are qualitatively different. Otherwise, in terms of professional performance, no change will occur. Thinking about the spaces of formation, from a perspective that assumes subjectivity as a central element in the dynamics of knowledge construction, allows training professionals break away from exclusionary and crystallized practices in a movement that presupposes social commitment.

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