

Education in Vygotsky: practice and way to freedom

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ABSTRACT – Education in Vygotsky: practice and way to freedom. The article analyzes formulations by L. S. Vygotski (1896-1934) in the field of education, in an articulated and historically situated way with the set of the author's work, aiming to highlight the notion of education for freedom present in his theorization and to outline possible implications of this conception for contemporary school education. The first section discusses the social genesis of personality in Vygotsky's view, as a way to freedom. In the second section, the author's concept of education is presented, such as human education and instruction. In the third section, the relationship between instruction and the development of the conscious personality is discussed and some possibilities for the realization of education as a practice and way to freedom in the contemporary school are presented. It is concluded that the concept of education as a practice and a way to freedom, formulated by Vygotski and not always made explicit by scholars of the author's work, can contribute to the realization of a critical and emancipatory education.

Keywords: Historical-Cultural Theory. Education in Vygotsky. Schooling.

RESUMO – A Educação em Vigotski: prática e caminho para a liberdade. O artigo analisa formulações de L. S. Vygotski (1896-1934) no campo da educação, de modo articulado e situado historicamente com o conjunto da obra do autor, visando evidenciar a noção de educação para a liberdade presente em sua teorização e esboçar possíveis implicações dessa concepção para a educação escolar contemporânea. Na primeira seção, discute-se a gênese social da personalidade na visão de Vygotski, como um caminho para a liberdade. Na segunda seção, é apresentada a concepção de educação do autor, como formação humana e instrução. Na terceira seção é discutida a relação entre instrução e desenvolvimento da personalidade consciente e apresentadas algumas possibilidades de efetivação da educação como prática e caminho para a liberdade na escola contemporânea. Conclui-se que a concepção de educação como prática e caminho para a liberdade, formulada por Vygotski e nem sempre explicitada por estudiosos da obra do autor, pode contribuir para a efetivação de uma educação crítica e emancipatória. **Palavras-chave: Teoria Histórico-Cultural. Educação em Vygotski. Escolarização.**

Introduction

This article analyzes and discusses the concept of education present in the thought of L. S. Vygotski (1896-1934), based on specific texts by the author on the topic, in an articulated and historically situated way with the set of his theory, aiming to highlight the notion of education for freedom present in his work and outline possible implications of this conception for contemporary school education.

It is a challenge, both because it is a broad topic, which can be examined from different angles, issues and approaches, as already carried out by Vygotski scholars in a dense and profound way (Ex. Daniels, 2003; Davidov, 1995; 1997; Duarte, 1996; 2000; Mello, 2004; Moll, 1990; Pino, 1990; 2000; Stetsenko, 2017), as well as for the possibility of putting, once again, in relief, what the author considered “the largest problem in the world” (Vygotski, 2003, p. 302), having been the object of concern and study throughout his short scientific life.

This text assumes that Vygotsky endeavored to create a psychological theory of dialectical materialist basis — *the dialectic of psychology*, which would enable the explanation of the human psyche as a synthesis of multiple determinations — *the dialectic of the human* (Vygotski, 1991a, p. 290), and although he did not live to complete his science project, he left behind a broad theoretical-conceptual system, formed by critical concepts, of which education is an integral and fundamental part. In this way, Vygotski’s formulations on education will be presented and analyzed in an articulated way with the set of the author’s scientific production understood in three peculiar and inseparable ways. 1. As a theoretical-conceptual system with a materialist-dialectic basis; 2. As a historical production and 3. As a psychological science project committed to human emancipation, in which education plays a central role.

Vygotski’s Theory as a Theoretical-Conceptual System with a Materialist-Dialectic Basis - the dialectic of psychology and the dialectic of the human as its object

Vygotsky emphasized the primacy of conceptual systems over specific concepts taken into account loosely or alone. In the author’s perspective, “[...] we can only become aware and voluntarily use a concept when it is within a system” (Vygotski, 2007, p. 317). This thought accompanied the author throughout the construction of his theory. Vygotsky (1991a) stated several times that he did not want to build a theory about the human psyche using loose and isolated concepts, but in the form of a general theoretical-conceptual system formed critical concepts, organized and based on the Marxist materialist dialectic.

In the text *The historical meaning of the crisis in psychology. A methodological investigation*, Vygotski made a statement, which according to Delari Júnior (2017), condenses the author’s psychological science proposal. Said Vygotski: “Just as the dialectic of natural science is, at the same time, the dialectic of nature, the dialectic of psychology is, in turn,

the dialectic of the human as an object of psychology” (Vygotski, 1991a, p. 290, our translation). The psychology project elaborated by Vygotski therefore contains a proposal for psychology as a unified science, based on the principle of dialectics – the *dialectic of psychology*, which has the human being as its object of study, understanding it not as an immutable, metaphysical essence, but as a contradictory synthesis of multiple social determinations – the *dialectic of the human*.

Delari Júnior (2017; 2020a; 2020b), in a constant effort to systematize Vygotski’s theoretical formulations in the form of a theoretical-conceptual system, points out four general principles that need to be maintained whenever we take it as a reference, they are: (1) the contradictory becoming of *conscious personality* as an object of study in psychology; (2) the multiple determinations of social existence as an explanatory principle for this object of study; (3) the significant word in its development as a unit of analysis that materially performs the mediation between the first two; and (4) the causal-genetic method as a privileged way of carrying out the analysis.

It is also worth mentioning the place that Vygotsky reserved for education in his theoretical-conceptual system.

The new system will not need to strive to extract pedagogical derivations from its laws or adapt its theses to practical application in school, because the solution to the pedagogical problem is contained in its own theoretical core, and education is the first word that [a new psychology] mentions (Vygotski, 1991b, p. 144).

Vygotsky’s Theory as a Historical Production, a Theoretical System in Motion

There is a common misunderstanding that we have a single, homogeneous and linear Vygotsky. However, scholars of his work (eg. Delari Júnior, 2013a; 2015; 2020a; 2020b; González Rey, 2013; Kozulin, 1990; Minick, 1987; Van der Veer; Valsiner, 1996; Veresov, 1999) have shown that the author’s scientific production in psychology, like any other human production, was marked by the constant re-creation of his theoretical-cultural system, in an attempt to build an increasingly dialectical theory, which explained the human as a concrete being, in his contradictory and multidetermined becoming. Thus, as González Rey (2013) emphasizes, unlike a harmonic whole, Vygotski’s legacy needs to be understood as a system in movement, contradictory and alive, with advances, ruptures and overcoming.

The cited authors agree that Vygotsky always took consciousness as an object of study and sought to examine it in the light of materialist dialectics, however, the way to understand consciousness, to study it scientifically and, consequently, the ideas, propositions and concepts derived from their studies changed significantly during the years in which he produced his theory, allowing the identification of different periods.

To study consciousness, Vygotsky emphasized the study of higher psychic functions (Delari Júnior, 2013a; 2015; González Rey, 2013; Kozulin, 1990; Veresov, 1999; Zavershneva, 2014), however, different from the old psychology, which conceived such functions abstractly and dissociated from the person for whom they *perform a function* (Delari Júnior, 2020a, p. 55), the author, from the beginning of his scientific production, chose personality as the unit capable of dialectically integrating all the functions of human consciousness (Bozhovich, 2009; Delari Júnior, 2020a; González Rey, 2013). In his latest productions, in an effort to theoretically unite the two processes that characterize the typically human psyche, Vygotsky began to use the term *conscious personality*.

[...] today we will focus on the general laws of the child's psychological development or on the general laws of the child's conscious personality development (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 93).

These neoformations, which characterize, in the first place, the restructuring of the child's conscious personality, are not a prerequisite, but a result or product of age development (Vygotski, 1996, p. 264, our translation).

If the existence of periods in Vygotski's scientific production is practically a consensus, the criteria for carrying out periodization differ between the different authors.

In coherence with the proposition of systematization of Vygotsky's scientific project elaborated by Delari Júnior (2017; 2020a; 2020b), and in order to explain the different ways of understanding the process of determining the conscious personality by social existence, presented by Vygotsky throughout of his scientific work, the proposition of periodization presented by Delari Júnior (2020a; 2020b) is also assumed in this work.

According to Delari Júnior (2020a; 2020b), Vygotsky, from the beginning of his work in psychology, in line with the materialist dialectic that guided his work, was clear that the conscious personality is determined by social existence, which has changed over the years. of his scientific career were the ways in which he conceived the process by which this determination takes place. Such changes allow the identification of three distinct periods. In a first period, which goes from 1924 to 1927, which we can call reflexological, Vygotsky understood that the determination of the conscious personality was given by the formation of systems of conditional reflexes. In a second period, from 1928 to 1931, called by several authors (eg González Rey, 2013; Van der Veer; Valsiner, 1996; Veresov, 1999) as cultural-historical, he understood that the determination of conscious personality took place by the complex use of sign systems, which functioned as stimuli-means or psychological instruments. Finally, in the third period, which runs from 1932 to 1934 and which we can call semantic and systemic, there was an advance in Vygotsky's theorization. The author comes to understand that the determination of the conscious personality is no longer only or mainly

through the use of stimuli-environment, but through the act of social production of processes of meaning for the generalization of reality, with no signs being any more to effect such a process, but the complex verbal systems – the word – arbitrary sign, endowed with meaning and socially agreed upon.

It is important to point out, as stressed earlier, that despite the existence of these periods, Vygotsky's work cannot be understood as something linear. It is essential that, when using the author's ideas, one takes into account the issue of progress in his process of understanding the social genesis of the conscious personality through social existence, because when considering what the author himself said, in line with the idea of Marx that "The anatomy of man is the key to the anatomy of the ape" (Vygotsky, 1991a, p. 261), we must always start with the most developed. This care is essential to avoid making the mistake of taking as a reference or defending a certain idea or concept that the author himself reformulated later. On the other hand, dialectically, there are works from the first periods of his production, as is the case of *Educational psychology*, his main work in the field of education, written for didactic purposes and published in 1926, therefore, in his *reflexological time*, which despite retaining reflexological or behaviorists, contains critical ideas and concepts relevant to pedagogical practice, such as, for example, the role to be played by the organization of educational practices in the class struggle.

Vygotsky's Theory as a Psychological Science Project committed to Human Emancipation, in which Education plays a Central Role

The scientific project sketched by Vygotski for general psychology – the dialectics of psychology, which has human dialectics as its object of study – is closely related to the historical context experienced by the author, after the Russian revolution of 1917 and his commitment to the construction of "a psychology for a new man and a new society" (Vygotski, 1991, p. 406), which would consolidate with socialism. Vygotsky had on his horizon, therefore, the construction of a new, more just and solidary society, and he attributed to education an essential role in this process. In this sense, the theory he formulated and the concept of education present in it need to be constituted in praxis by those who take them as the foundation of their work. It is not enough to study and know the theory, it is necessary to live it, which implies a commitment to human emancipation. Vygotsky challenges us every day with this statement:

Along with the liberation of many millions of human beings [from oppression], there will come the liberation of the human personality from the fetters that restrict its development. This is the first source [of transformation] – the liberation of man (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 181).

It is necessary to take this challenge as a task, appropriating the author's theoretical-conceptual system and making it advance, collectively, towards social practices, in a special way, towards educational practice, towards human emancipation.

Once these initial considerations are made, the analysis of the conception of education present in Vygotski's theoretical-conceptual system and the discussion of possible implications of this conception for school education will be carried out here in three sections. In the first section, the concept of personality in Vygotsky is explained as a way to freedom, which implies, dialectically, in the understanding of the development of each human being towards the greatest possible freedom of his actions as a person and in the development as a collective process towards the liberation of all humanity. In the second section, the concept of education present in the author's work, as *vospitanie* and *obutchenie*, will be presented, highlighting critical ideas and concepts that converge towards the understanding of education as a practice and a way to freedom. In the third section, the relationship between instruction and the development of the conscious personality is discussed and some possibilities of making education effective as a practice and way to freedom in the contemporary school are presented. Finally, the final considerations will be presented.

Personality Development in Vygotsky's Perspective: a way to freedom

The great picture of development of the personality: a way to freedom. [...] The central problem of all psychology is freedom (Vygotsky, 2010, p. 66).

As we have seen, based in Delari Júnior (2017, 2020a, 2020b), for Vygotski the psychology is the science which studies the social genesis of the *conscious personality*, term used by Vygotski in his most advanced and deep period of theorizing, for conceiving personality as the dialectical unit, the *higher synthesis* of the higher psychic functions, (Robbins, 2004, p. 3), in which the set has unique properties and specific laws regarding the functioning of the isolated parts, as we can see in one of his pedagogical texts, written during the third period of his scientific work.

As research shows and as experience teaches us, what is most essential in the development of the child and his consciousness is not only that the individual functions of the child's consciousness grow and develop in the transition from one age to another, but the essential thing is the child's personality grows and develops, and the consciousness as a whole grows and develops (Vygotski, 2020, p. 146).

According to Delari Júnior (2020a, p. 56), different from the idealist view, which conceives personality as a psychic instance, as something someone *has* and makes them act in a certain way, from Vygots-

ki's perspective, therefore, under a materialist ontology, personality is a particular way for human beings to act in the course of their social relations with the world, with others and with themselves. "Personality is the human being personally involved in his/her social relations with reality [...] it is the process (dynamic-structural) by which the human being has personal *relationships* with the world, with others and with himself".

Vygotski, in several of his works, stated that "[...] personality is the social in us" (2000a, p. 337), it is "the set of social relations, embodied in the individual" (Vygotski, 2000b, p. 33) and he endeavored to understand its social genesis. An important conclusion of Vygotski in this regard, which is of particular interest to education, is that the personality changes in terms of dynamics and structure throughout the ontogenetic development. In 1929, the author had already stated that "[...] personality dynamics is drama" (p. 35). From 1932, in his pedagogical texts, he deepened the study of the dynamics and structure of the personality, showing how "[...] both the driving forces in struggle within its 'dynamics', as well as the complex inter-functional relations that constitute its 'structure'" (Delari Júnior, 2020a, p. 59), change during our ontogenetic development process.

It was also from that moment in his creative life, more precisely, from 1932, that Vygotsky began to conceive the development of personality as a way to freedom. "A great image of personality development: [it is] a way to freedom" (Vygotsky, 2010, p. 66). As Delari Júnior (2013b, p. 9) points out, "If it is a 'way to', we have no way out. If it is for 'freedom' it is not an individualistic but a communal view". In this perspective, for Vygotsky, freedom "[...] it is not a presupposition of human action, but collective achievement to be achieved. Nor will it be the absence of rules, but the possibility of using them as a resource to overcome our limits, in cooperation with other people" (Delari Júnior, 2013, p. 4)

There are, therefore, two aspects to be highlighted in the concept of freedom in Vygotsky: (a) it is an achievement and not a presupposition; (b) it is an achievement that is obtained by cooperating with someone and not alone (Delari Júnior, 2009, p. 6)

In this sense, as stated by Delari Júnior (2013c), humanism and, consequently, the concept of freedom postulated by Vygotski are neither guided by naive humanism, which considers man as *essentially good*, nor in the liberal that focuses on *achievement individual* (p. 48), but in a critical humanism with a Marxist root, which has as its ethical goal, the leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. Such a goal becomes at least three human actions to be produced through social practice: overcoming, cooperation and emancipation (p. 49).

From the analysis of the concept of personality in Vygotski, as a way to freedom, drawing on the author's own writings and on scholars of his work, it is possible to elaborate as a synthesis, that in his perspective, the development of the psyche is the development of the human being as a totality, as a contradictory synthesis of multiple social determinations – as a conscious personality.

The development of personality in Vygotsky's perspective as a way to freedom involves two inseparable moments of the same historical process – the development of each human being towards the greatest possible freedom of his actions as a person and the development as a collective process towards liberation of all humanity.

Education in Vygotsky's Perspective – practice and way to freedom

Education emerges as the biggest problem in the world, that is, the problem of life as a creation (Vigotski, 2003, p. 302).

Vygotsky basically used two Russian terms to refer to education – *vospitanie* and *obutchenie* (Daniels, 2003; Davidov, 1995; 1997; Delari Júnior, 2013b). *Vospitanie*, which means the formation of man, in the sense of general human formation, ethical, moral, aesthetic, political formation, comprising, therefore, a broader field than school and instruction and *obutchenie*, which means instruction and is more related to schooling.

The word *obutchiene* deserves to be commented briefly, due to the difficulty of translating this Russian term into other languages and the misunderstandings arising from this issue. According to Valsiner (1988), such difficulty is due to the fact that this word used by Vygotski, dialectically brings together teaching and learning, the one who teaches and the one who learns, and the action or situation combined to be carried out collectively. In Vygotsky's first translations into English, some of which were later translated into Portuguese, this term was sometimes translated as *teaching*, sometimes as *learning*, contributing to the dissemination in Brazil of a very frequent misconception and recurrent, which is the idea that Vigotski would have argued that learning promotes development, when in fact, in the author's proposition it is the *obutchenie* that can promote the development of the person as a conscious personality. Currently, after intense debates, there is practically a consensus that the English word that comes closest to the Russian term *obutchenie*, is *instruction* (Rieber; Carton, 1987, p. 388) and in the Portuguese language, *instrução* (Prestes, 2012).

As Pino (2000) states, “[...] for Vigotski, human development and education are two aspects of the same thing” (p. 57). In this work, in agreement with Pino and in a coherent way with the more advanced period of Vigotski's work, it is stated that the development of the conscious personality and education form a dialectical unit. Vygotsky was clear that without *vospitanie* – education in its broad sense and without *obutchenie* – education in its narrow sense, a specific task of the school, there is no formation of the conscious human personality, since the development of the human being as a personality conscious, a synthesis of multiple social determinations, is realized through education. It was for this reason that Vygotsky considered education the most vast prob-

lem in the world, the problem of life as creation, and it was also for this reason that the author made the statement cited in the introduction to this study, in the terms that the psychology he formulated it would not need additional efforts to be applied to education, as the solution to the educational problem lies in its theoretical core and education is the first word it mentions (Vygotski, 1991b, p. 144).

How can Vygotsky's formulation be interpreted in the light of what has already been stated in this text? The aforementioned quote makes it clear that if education is the process of man's formation, the priority, the most important for education is what is contained in the core of the theory. And what is contained in the core of Vygotsky's theoretical-conceptual system? The social genesis of personality and conscience – the formation of human being as a conscious personality, as a function of his social relations, mediated by processes of signification. Without considering the social development of the psyche as a whole, the contribution of Vygotsky's psychology to education is empty, and might be reduced to the rhetoric of the importance of *social interaction* at school, of the *mediator teacher*, of the promotion of *cognitive development*, or other psychologisms so alive in the pedagogical ideology.

Therefore, assuming the conception of education present in Vygotski's theoretical-conceptual system means, first of all, understanding that the social for the author is not reduced to the interaction between people, nor to the context of social development of conscious personality. People's social existence and their social relationships constitute the source of that development. The human being is educated – *forms him/herself* as a conscious personality in and as social relationships.

As mentioned in the introduction, the theme of education was part of Vygotski's concerns, thoughts, theorizations and actions throughout the period in which the author constructed his theory, but the ideas that converge on education as a practice and a way to freedom they are presented mainly in three works by the author. Two of them were elaborated at the beginning of his scientific production. They are: the book *Educational Psychology*, published in 1926, and the text *Prologue to the Russian Version of Thorndike's Book: teaching principles based on psychology* (Vygotski, 1991b), which as the name says, it consisted of the preface written by Vygotski, in 1926, for the book *Principles of Teaching Based on Psychology*, by the American psychologist Edward L. Thorndike, when it was translated into Russian, that year. These two works undoubtedly bring together Vygotsky's main specific contributions to education. There is, however, a third work that adds to these and strengthens the idea of education as a practice and a way to freedom. This is the text *The Socialist Alteration of Man* (Vygotsky, 1994), written in 1930.

In these three works, it is possible to perceive the idea of education for freedom in Vygotsky, with a clear understanding of freedom as the human capacity to make deliberate, conscious choices, as in these passages in which the author addresses the issue of moral education:

“The The only moral conduct is that which is linked to the free choice of social forms of conduct [...] Self-management at school and the organization of the children themselves are the best means of moral education in the classroom” (Vygotski, 2003, p. 214). For the author (2003), any pedagogy based on the lack of freedom and that, instead of the necessary freedom of choice, is structured on the authoritarian principle, “[...] and prone to obedience, submissive and cowardly” (p. 218).

Vygotsky, dialectically, does not dissociate personal freedom from collective freedom. In the author’s perspective, different from the liberal conception, the freedom of a human being does not end where that of the other begins, on the contrary, it opens up, expands in the other, as stated in one of his texts on special education, when resuming Feuerbach : “[...] what is absolutely impossible for one is possible for two. We add: what is impossible at the level of individual development becomes possible at the level of social development” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 246-247).

In the text *The Socialist Alteration of Man* (1994), in which Vygotsky discusses the relationship between personality development and the development of society and the construction of the new socialist man, the role played by education in the process of building a free society is evident, emancipated from all forms of human expropriation.

It is education which should play the central role in the transformation of man – this road of conscious social formation of new generations, the basic form to alter the historical human type. *New generations and new forms of their education represent the main route which history will follow whilst creating the new type of man* (Vygotski, 1994, p. 181, italics of the author).

Many ideas and concepts presented in these two works, if understood in an articulated way with the author’s theoretical-conceptual system, can contribute to the understanding of education as a practice and a way to freedom. Among others, the concepts of educational process, social educational environment and teacher stand out.

Vygotsky wrote the book *Educational Psychology*, his only complete work in the field of education that we know of until now, before 1924, in the period that marks the end of the tsarist empire and the Russian Revolution of 1917. The limits given by the objective of this text do not allow to relate this work in a broad and complex way with the set of ideas of Vygotski and with the historical moment that he elaborated it, however, it is important to emphasize that it contains a communist proposal of education, which was not implemented in the Soviet Union and not anywhere else in the world. There is, therefore, in this book the dream of an education for a society that never really came into being.

In this work, Vygotsky (2003, p. 220) stated that “to educating means organizing life” and that it is necessary to organize life at school, through the planning and implementation of educational social practices that make the school a place of democratic experiences. Social educational practices are understood to be the intentional organiza-

tion of social relationships experienced at school, so that everyone who participates in it can live practices that allow them to have the freedom to think, understand and act in the world in an active, critical and creative way, towards emancipation. human. According to Vygotsky (2003, p. 220), “[...] in a correct life, children are raised correctly” and “We do not agree with leaving the educational process in the hands of the spontaneous forces of life” (p. 77). In the author’s conception, therefore, life cannot proceed spontaneously, without organizing it, without appropriating critical weapons to deal with social contradictions.

As mentioned before, there is in this work a great concern of the author with the learning of moral and ethical values. He rejected the notes, the call, the subservience to prizes and punishments, educational practices that are very present in the tsarist school and that unfortunately remain inviolable in the contemporary school.

According to Davidov (1995), from Vygotski’s work, it is possible to extract five indicators that make it possible to relate education to personality development. They are: 1. Education, which includes instruction and human formation, aims, above all, to develop the personality. 2. The human personality is linked to its creative potentials; 3. The instruction and the process of human formation assume the personal activity on the part of the students. The student is subject in the education process; 4. The teacher guides the instruction of the students, which occurs through collaboration between the participants; and 5. The most valuable methods for the instruction and training of people are those that correspond to individual peculiarities and, therefore, the methods cannot be uniform.

Davidov (1995; 1997) highlights, in his systematization, the student’s active role in his education process, defended by Vygotski – training and instruction, as someone who acts independently and has the ability to choose. He, Davidov, highlight too that these statements by Vygotski have already led to the mistaken conclusions that the author would defend a *permissive education*, scholarly viewer, which is not true. It happens that Vygotski, who understands the development of personality as a way to freedom and education as the realization of this process, could never defend the submission of a person in the process of education, nor an authoritarian education, centered on the figure of the educator, whether a father, a mother or a teacher. In contrast to this, the author advocates an education, in which all participants are active in deciding, regulating each other and acting freely within collectively agreed limits.

As education is an inalienable process in the life of the human being, free education does not mean to reject the restriction, but to transfer it to the spontaneous force of the situation in which the child lives. If the human being renounces education, then he will begin to be educated through the street, furniture and things (Vygotski, 2003, p. 222).

It is noticed that Vygotski's propositions regarding education were closely linked to a realistic and critical criterion. The author was clear about the contradictions and limits inherent in the struggle for freedom, both individual and collective.

The problems of education will only be definitively solved when the problems of the social system are definitively solved (Vygotski, 2003, p. 220).

Owning the truth about the person and the person itself is impossible as long as humanity does not own the truth about society itself. On the contrary, in the new society, our science will be at the center of life. 'The leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom' [the rise of communism] will inevitably pose the question of the domain of our own being, of subordinating it to ourselves (Vygotski, 1997, p. 406, our translation).

Relationship between Instruction and Development of Conscious Personality

Vygotsky (1935) emphasized the value of instruction – *obutchenie* –, understood as the intentional, conscious and planned process aimed at teaching and learning, in which those who instruct have the responsibility to organize the educational social environment, in order to deliberately contribute to the development process of those who learn.

In the last years of his life, the author highlighted this concept through the production of some texts on the subject, which, after his death, were collected and published in the book *Study on the development of scientific concepts in childhood* (Vygotsky, 1935). Among these texts, we highlight *The problem of instruction and mental development in school age*, *The dynamics of mental development of the student and instruction* and *On the Pedological Analysis of the Pedagogical Process*. In all these texts, the author shows the role of instruction as an element that can promote the advancement of development.

In the cited work (1935), in *Thought and Language* (2001; 2007) and in the texts on pedology, Vygotsky introduced another concept, which, despite not being at the center of his theoretical core and, therefore, not constituting one of the pillars of his theory, is probably one of the author's best known and most widespread concepts. This is the concept of a zone of proximal or imminent development (Prestes, 2012).

I agree with Tudge (1999) that the problems arising from the reception of Vygotsky's work both in the former Soviet Union, where the six volumes of the author's *Chosen Works* were only published in the 1980s, and in the West, where in the early 1990s there were only the first volume of the collection was published, allowed the concept of *zone of proximal development*, presented in the translation of a reduced version of the book *Pensamento e Linguagem*, published in 1962, in the United States and in the collection of texts by Vygotsky entitled *Mind in society*, originally published, also in that country, in 1978, would gain a larger

dimension than it actually has in Vygotsky's theoretical-conceptual system. This concept became one of the author's best known, especially in educational circles, having been used to justify and create the metaphor of scaffolding, ways in which teachers, other adults or more experienced children provide assistance to less advanced children in their development processes. intellectual.

When we currently analyze this concept in an articulated and historically situated way with the set of Vygotsky's production that we have available, we realize that it was introduced as part of the author's efforts to produce a dialectical materialist conception (Vygotsky, 1996, p.255). of human ontogenesis, resulting in an understanding of the development of the conscious personality as a complex dialectical process marked by advances and setbacks, with stable moments and critical moments, quantitative increases and quality leaps, overlapping between internal and external processes and the emphasis on overcoming processes of limits. The concept of zone of proximal development was introduced, in this context, by Vygotsky with the purpose of "[...] highlighting an important place and moment in the process of child development" (Claiklin, 2003, p. 45-46, our translation) and refers

[...] to roles in the process of maturation that are relevant for the next age period and that provide the means to act in collaborative situations that could not be achieved independently. Such roles are not created in the interaction; instead, the interaction provides conditions for identifying their existence and the extent to which they developed (Claiklin, 2003, p. 58, our translation).

The limits of this text do not allow us to expand this debate. However, when analyzing Vygotsky's conception of education, we cannot avoid addressing the problems arising from limited and/or distorted interpretations of this concept, which is undoubtedly Vygotsky's best known in educational circles, and draw attention to the need to understand and use the term zone of proximal development to refer to the phenomenon Vygotsky was discussing, namely, child development, the social genesis of conscious personality "[...] and find other terms (e.g. assisted instruction, scaffolding) to refer to practices such as teaching a specific subject concept, skill, and so on" (Claiklin, 2003, p. 59, our translation, author's emphasis).

Consistent with Vygotsky's more advanced formulations about the dialectic of the human, it is correct to say that it is the role of instruction to promote the student's development as an omnilateral human being, a conscious human personality and not only his intellectual development. Likewise, when Vygotsky uses the concept of zone of proximal development, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the letter D of the acronym zone of proximal development means the development of the human being as a conscious personality.

I also emphasize that despite the attention given by Vygotsky to the concept of instruction in the last period of his scientific production,

the richness of the concept of education present in the author's theorization cannot be reduced to the concept of instruction, often even understood unilaterally, sometimes as teaching, sometimes as learning, nor the concept of development reduced to the acquisition of a certain amount of school contents by the student, forgetting that, for Vygotsky, the development in question is the complex process of social genesis of the conscious personality.

Different from the classical conceptions of the educational process, which tend to privilege one of its poles, by focusing sometimes on the teacher, sometimes on the student, Vygotski conceives the educational process as a totality, a dialectical synthesis formed by three united elements: the teacher, the student and the educational social environment, in which everyone is active. "The educational process, therefore, is trilaterally active: the student is active, the teacher and the environment between them are active" (Vygotski, 2003, p. 79).

Another theoretical proposition that can enhance the concept of education as a practice and a way to freedom is the concept of teacher. If for Vygotski, educating is organizing life, the teacher "[...] is the organizer of the educational social environment, the regulator and controller of his interactions with the student" (Vygotski, 2003, p. 76). In the text *Prologue to the Russian version of Thorndike's book: teaching principles based on psychology*, Vygotski points out that the teacher is not the engine of the educational process, he is the driver. He is the intellectual who organizes and leads the process in dialogue and sharing with his students. Using the metaphor of the Japanese conductor and the tram driver, he asserts that the teacher does not need to be the horse that pulls the carriage, but the coachman that drives it. It's up to him to create the possibilities for the instruction to take place, but he doesn't need to do it alone, efforts are shared, responsibilities too.

The idea that Vygotsky conceived the teacher as a mediator is very common in Brazil. There is no doubt that one of the roles of the school is the transmission of knowledge, in the sense of socializing it and thus allowing students access to the wealth of culture accumulated by humanity. In this case, the teacher also fulfills the role of mediator between the student and the systematized knowledge, but as we have seen, this was not the role that Vygotsky reserved for the teacher. Consistent with his conception of education as a practice and a way to freedom, the author reserved a role of greater importance and responsibility for the teacher - he is the organizer of the social relationships experienced by students at school -, the relationship with knowledge being just one of those relationships. We can conclude, then, that in view of Vygotsky's conception of education, the concept of the teacher as a mediator is limited, reduced, because it focuses almost exclusively on the content of knowledge, including the idea that the teacher is the holder, the possessor of the knowledge accumulated by humanity and who acts as a *tool* for accessing knowledge for students.

The concept of educational social environment is another critical construct by Vygotski about school education. In general, the the-

ories of education understand that the educational process is formed by two elements: the teacher and the student. Vigotski, in his attempt to contribute to education as a practice and a way to freedom, adds a third element in the formula of the educational process, the *social educational environment*, understood as the conscious organization by the teacher, in combined action with the students, of the social relations experienced at school, so that it can interfere deliberately in the social processes of development as conscious personalities.

From our perspective, the concept of instruction elaborated by Vygotsky, and commented on earlier, allows dialectically uniting the three elements of the educational process – the teacher, the student and the educational social environment, emphasizing the teacher's role as the organizer of the educational social environment and highlight the role of pedagogical intentionality.

Other concepts of Vigotski, such as *imitation* and *ideal form*, the latter little discussed among the author's scholars, may also enhance the relationship between instruction and the development of the conscious personality.

The *ideal form* concept was presented and developed by Vigotski at a pedology conference, known as the fourth conference or class (Vigotski, 2017), uttered in the last years of his life. In the author's perspective, people, who still are in the beginning of the formation process of their conscious personality, coexist with other people who are already in more advanced stages. This social relationship provides to the person at the beginning of development an *ideal form*, a model one, which somehow represents where this person can go, but he hasn't yet.

All of these concepts elaborated by Vigotski, emphasizing the historical, social, active and relational character of the educational act contribute to the realization of an education as a practice and a way to freedom. It is up to the teacher to organize the social educational environment so that he becomes powerful in training and transformation for students and teachers as human beings in training and instruction processes.

I also highlight the wealth of ideas and concepts about the active, creative and collaborative character of the educational act, present in the seminal work of Stetsenko (2017). I believe that the critical propositions and concepts presented by the author can enhance the concept of education in Vigotski as a practice and a way to freedom, insofar as they provide a living school, in constant movement, with the active involvement of students and teachers with reality and the commitment to social transformation. After all, as Vigotski (2003, p. 303) stated, “[...] the pedagogical process is active social life, it is the exchange of combative experiences”.

Final Considerations

The article aimed to analyze and discuss the concept of education present in Vygotski's work, seeking to articulate the author's formulations about the theme with his psychological science project, understanding it, as a theoretical-conceptual system with a dialectical materialist basis, designed to explain the development process of the human psyche. It was based on the assumption that the author, throughout his short scientific life, dedicated himself to building a psychological theory with a dialectical materialistic basis, which would allow the explanation of the human as a concrete being as a synthesis of multiple determinations. This project culminated in the construction of a broad system of critical concepts which the author used to compose his most radical and advanced conception of the human psyche, understood as the social process of development of the omnilateral human being, called by him in his last writings of *conscious personality*.

When elaborating his theoretical-conceptual system, Vygotsky reserved a special place for education. In the author's words (1991b), it is the first word to be mentioned. He also stated that the system he developed would not need to make an effort to extract pedagogical derivations from its laws, nor adapt its theses to practical application at school, since the solution to the pedagogical problem is contained in its theoretical core. As we have seen, in our perspective, in making such a statement Vygotsky makes it clear that the greatest contribution of his theory to education is not the specific constructs he created directly for school education, but his general explanation for the social genesis of conscious personality. as a result of multiple determinations, since that is its differential, its advance in the understanding of the human psyche.

In a more advanced period of his scientific work, Vygotsky affirmed that the development of personality constitutes a way to freedom, in a clear mention that the most developed human being is not the one who has internalized more knowledge, who has had access to classical culture or that has more memory or more intelligence. The most developed human being is the one who, throughout his life, becomes increasingly free. He also evidenced in his writings that he was not referring to the liberal vision of freedom, but to a concept rooted in the Marxist tradition and formulated ethical principles, such as those pointed out by Delari Júnior (2013c), which we can take as criteria for the organization of social practices, with a view to education for freedom.

Vygotsky understands that the process of personality development and education, understood in terms of *vospitanie* (formation) and *obuchenie* (instruction), form a dialectical unit. There is no development of the conscious human personality without education. On the other hand, to educate means to intervene in the human being's development, by organizing life at school and in the society in a way to build the act and thought freedom.

Therefore, in the perspective of education present in Vigotski's work, what explains the formation of the conscious personality is the set of social relations. In this sense, the organized and semantically mediated social relationship between students and teachers is only one of the relationships through which the students' training process (*vospi-tanie*) takes place. However, despite being only one among the set of social relationships, it gains power due to the fact that it is organized and planned in a conscious way (*obutchenie*), aiming to contribute intentionally in the process of training everyone who participates in it. For Vygotsky, the teacher is the organizer of the educational social environment, which requires a solid theoretical formation, intentionality and directivity.

Vygotsky's ideas about the relationship between instruction and development, as a deliberate process, carried out by people actively and in constant collaboration in search of desired goals, allow us to understand not only school education, but the complex process of social formation, of the conscious personality. For Vygotsky, the development that needs to be enhanced through the social activity of school education is the social development of the conscious personality. Therefore, a school education that intends to contribute to and for this development cannot focus the educational process on the individual activity of the student, on competition, or on obtaining rankings, but on collective activity, since it is in the cooperation of consciences that everyone advances.

A proposal for school education based on Vygotski's theoretical-conceptual system is not a new school, *interactionist* or *interactionist partner*, as it is often called. On the other hand, it is also not banking, centered on the transmission of knowledge, in which the student is a pure spectator and not an active and participative subject. It is dialectical and dialogical and aims at the emancipation of all students and teachers, since both are formed in and through social relations.

It is concluded that Vygotski's theory contains a deeply dialectical conception of the social educational act, understanding it as a practice and a way to freedom. The general theoretical categories that make up the author's theoretical-conceptual system, as well as the specific theoretical categories created to explain the educational act, signal ways of organizing life at school in order to move in that direction. This horizon, however, is still a long way from being reached, since we still live in the *realm of necessity*, as stated by Vygotski (1994, p. 182) when he cited Engels. Building a *realm of freedom* is, therefore, a huge challenge imposed on education, teachers around the world and the working class in general. For this, in addition to our pedagogical work, we need to engage in the struggle of our professional and social class. Thus, dialectically, we will contribute now, to the transformation we want.

As Freitas (2013, p. 79) says, "[...] under capitalism education is subsumed in instruction [...] and training has as its central objective the integration of the student into the current social system, free from

the analysis of its contradictions”, without evidencing and formulating the criticism of the capitalist model of production. Added to this is the observation by Mészáros (2008, p. 35), that the school not only provides knowledge and specialized labor for capital, but also generates and transmits a framework of values that “[...] legitimizes the dominant interests”, as if there could be no other way of managing society, other than the exploitation of man by man. In this sense, as Freitas (2013) observes, when examining the contributions of the pioneers of Soviet education and which I consider pertinent to pay attention to when we examine the contributions of the concept of education present in Vygotsky’s work,

It is therefore necessary to radically separate the places we speak of. It is one thing to think about the spaces of struggle in schools, with their centrality under the capitalist system to which the child is expected to integrate ‘naturally’; another, completely different, is to think about training, education and instruction under the communist system, through the socialist transition – a path to be created, which needs not only fighters, but also builders of this new society. One cannot think of one with their feet on the other (Freitas, 2013, p. 79-80, author’s emphasis).

We know the limits of the contribution of a theory in this process of building the new society we want, more just, egalitarian and inclusive, but as Mészáros (2009, p. 277) stated, a “[...] revolutionary practice is inconceivable without the contribution of a revolutionary theory”. From this perspective, Vygotsky’s conception of education, still little studied and much less practiced, can become a component of the emancipatory struggle, which, of course, requires political commitment from everyone who adopts it, with the project of forming a new man for a new society, as well as an active stance in the struggle for a public, free, secular and inclusive school and for public education policies that enable the materialization of education as a practice of freedom.

In the year in which Brazil celebrates the 100th anniversary of the birth of Paulo Freire, an eminent Brazilian educator, who conceived of education as the practice of freedom, this article that analyzed and discussed the concept of education present in Vygotsky’s work, ends with the recognition of Freire to the critical power of the formulations on education of Lev Semionovitch Vygotski.

It is necessary that the progressive, democratic, cheerful, capable school rethinks this whole question of the relationship between the *conscious body* and the *world*. To review the question of understanding the world, while producing itself historically in the world itself and also being produced by *conscious bodies* in their interactions with it. I believe that this understanding will result in a new way of understanding what it is to teach, what it is to learn, what it is to know, that Vygotsky cannot be absent (Freire, 1994, p. 73, italics of the author).

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