Research in Training and Teaching Practices: Contributions of the Historical-Cultural Theory and the Subjectivity Theory

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The paper proposes to defend the value of research in teaching practices and training. Research comprehended through the interventive-investigative activity in school, in the classroom, of the pedagogical practice and of the student in his learning processes. A research project, in which pedagogy graduates, postgraduates—masters and doctorate, university teachers, which constituted research teams in Distrito Federal’s public school system, more specifically, with teachers and students at the beginning of schooling, at literacy level. The project counted with Vigotski’s Historical-Cultural Theory, in his defectology studies, as well as Gonzalez Rey’s Subjectivity Theory. The adopted methodology, inspired by the Qualitative Epistemology, also proposed by González Rey, was structured upon the confluence of the events and upon the inquiries that constituted this investigation’s focus, had a procedural, constructive-interpretative character. The vast learning resultant of the process were reported, described, conducted and constituted itself as produced knowledge brought to the discussion bearing in mind to identify its contributions. This allowed for us to develop innovative theoretical and practical establishing research as the pillar for teaching practice and training.

Keywords: teaching practice and training, learning, interventive-investigative research

Introduction

In the scope of the educational process, there is a great preoccupation that students receive quality assistance in school, aiming to strengthen themselves and become more active and autonomous in their learning processes.

Presently, it no longer makes sense to merely grant access to school, where it has the function of transmitting knowledge produced by humanity. School education cannot be reduced to the objective of curricularly organized knowledge to be assimilated by students. More is demanded. It is demanded that it organizes itself in order to open spaces in which students can create, produce, and develop knowledge. To do so, it must shift from the space where the already produced knowledge is found, to establish a place of innovation, where the invention and reinvention of knowledge can be achieved through constant questioning.

A thinking school is required, in which it thinks about the changing state of reality, many times problematic and demanding innovative solutions to problems that unfold into many others. Or even, to think about other ways of living or making life more fulfilling regarding human endeavors.

To point out this necessity is an idealization, for what is challenging is its effective accomplishment. To bring to school another demand, another formulation of goals, implies in offering other work tools that put it in

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movement, surpassing what is already laid, in order to organize itself as a producer, an investigator of reality, comprehending what are its strengths and how it should position itself in face of society’s many demands, which are dynamic and rooted in the complex relations between life’s diverse dimensions.

The Interventive-Investigative Research

To comprehend the reality, to identify its demands, to leverage explanations that result in propositions, is to assume an investigative attitude. In this way, a new learning work tool must be supported, as some researchers have already appointed, by research. It is through research that an analysis of what there is can be attained, so as to project towards what one wishes to attain. Therefore, already produced knowledge will be the starting point for investigation so that there may be clarity regarding how. What will guide learning is the newly produced, and not reproduction of that which no longer make sense in itself.

By research we comprehended not the search for a determined subject in a pool of knowledge, for example, the internet from where what has been produced is withdrawn. We aim to distinguish research in its investigative process, in the sense of a search for new relations between processes or a new approach towards a problem by means of an enquiry made or by the search for an explanation that deems itself necessary. Through the investigative process a shift from the ready towards the navigation of the unpredictable takes place. However, this navigation follows a north, a goal. Movement is installed, for it is steered by the emergency of what may be, by hypothetical possibilities of the issues raised. There is no way one can remain idle in this situation. Thinking is triggered, the subject must act, for a goal to be achieved exists, becoming the origin and reason of action. Uneasiness arrives by what is proposed by the investigator or by the challenges reality imposes.

Based on this argument we sustain the proposal of this paper. We want to indicate that learning has to be wanted, has to be desired and constituted by someone that involves themselves emotionally and intellectually with this process. It must be sustained by the production of subjective senses, as proposed by González Rey (2012). It is regarding the learning process, that should sustain teaching practices, that our indicating research as a field for questioning and proposition lies, so that pedagogical actions could be identified and projected according to the reality investigated. That is, a practice that investigates issues pertaining and extracted from the reality lived and according to the circumstances of those with whom one coexists. We initially invest in a proposal sustained by some queries: Who is the subject that learns, what is his story, his motives and needs? Questions that lead to others: How should the subject that teaches position him/herself, what tools will he/she use? Answers that may develop a promising articulation from another theoretical standpoint, important for an educational formation that aims to be qualified as effective by students.

Therefore, this paper supports itself upon a research project that aimed to create a discussion space regarding the learning situation of students that were in a school discrepancy situation, having a history of grade repetition and having been identified as presenting learning disabilities. The project was composed by a group of researchers that included university teachers, university students studying pedagogy and post graduate students, including masters and doctoral degrees, which worked weekly in the selected public schools in classes at literacy level.

The initial moment of the investigative process was marked by discussions regarding the theories upon which the Project was grounded—studies in historical-cultural psychology—in which the expression “learning disabilities” began to be questioned. The concept of development in Vigotksi’s (1997) theoretical approach is based upon the proposition that the laws of development are not the same for every human being with a fisical
or intellectual condition. In his defectology studies, Vigotski (1997) draws attention to the fact that development is a “qualitative transformation of one form into another” (p. 13). From this premise comes the idea that this transformation is a complex processes that meets a result that is not of a “homogeneous nature, nor monolithic, undifferentiated” (p. 141). On the contrary, it presents itself in a diversity of dimensions and functions, composing a dynamic unity that is carried out in distinguished and diverse ways. Development has an original and creative character that takes place on the conjuncture of the social and cultural planes. The social environment reveals itself as a condition and force for the development: “upon the innate base infinite diversity can be created” (p. 171).

Development must project itself towards that which constitutes its force in terms of the students capacity and personality and, therefore, the focus of pedagogical action will lie upon the possibilities inherent to each one, which will constitute itself as basis upon which work can be structured considering the peculiarities and needs that emerge.

This approach has made us assume that the social situation is the foremost circumstance that must be observed or investigated when developing pedagogical actions. It is impossible to think of a group of students without considering their heterogeneous social reality, comprehended by different capacities and abilities. Therefore, it is not surprising if the results are uneven, different, divergent, that is, consistent with the personal and social dynamics of humans. In this argumentation, it seems that we must identify children with learning disabilities as those that should be investigated considering their needs, their motives, their interests making their learning possibilities emerge, instead of their difficulties (Alarcão, 2001; Tacca, 2009).

However, the most usual in schools still is the projection of a performance standard that does not consider student’s many learning and development possibilities. Conceptions of standardised capacities, as well as performances marked by biological and organically constituted aptitudes still reign. This mark is profound and sustains itself based upon a positivist science. If we want to advance in direction of learning possibilities, we must seek another source of support, identifying other theoretical basis for learning.

Along with the arguments presented, we defend the transformative movement that would be installed by the research in Vigotski’s historical cultural standpoint (1997), advancing towards taking into account those involved by using González Rey’s Subjectivity Theory (1997; 2001; 2003; 2012).

This theoretical standpoint differentiates itself by the need to establish trust bonds through which the children should be strengthened in their capacity to learn. At the same time, they should be comprehended in their resistances, in the emergence of their emotionality, their life story and other subjective processes and psychological functions that may be at the base of their performance and attitudes in the learning process.

The Project, in this theoretical perspective, is characterized as a unique opportunity for aligning theory and practice. The experience in the class room promoted reflections that assist in the formation/training of future teachers, locating these graduate students in pedagogy, and even the post graduate students, in the everyday school routine with its specificities and challenges (Pimenta, 2005). Opportunities were offered for them to be in the public school experiencing the aspects that permeate the teaching-learning process, which includes: learning to deal with children, planning and conducting interventions, developing the attitude of having a sharp eye regarding the pedagogical needs of each student, as well as trying to identify the subjective senses that emerge from social relations. By participating in the Project, as well as the researchers and collaborators, they were called to write, construct information, debate and elaborate material to investigate student’s means of learning throughout the research process.
With this, academicals abilities were developed when invited to participate in the drafting of articles regarding the issues worked on as well as when presenting in scientific events, which optimizes training through research.

In the schools where the research was conducted, teachers who were our collaborators had the opportunity to discuss student cases, receive pedagogical assistance and have theoretical discussions, reflecting upon their choices and reconsidering their conceptions, beliefs and values. This moment brought theoretical reflection points that allowed to put in movement positions and attitudes, that is, it was aimed to create conditions to put in movement the production of subjective senses of the learning processes by students, teachers and researchers. Due to this we are able to say that everyone was in a continual formation process which took place in the classroom with the students and researching students, in formal meetings with the pedagogical coordination, in programmed lectures or meetings proposed by the researchers creating, in this manner, rich moments of discussions, findings and propositions.

The methodological proposal of work in schools was always directed towards the conduction of activities coordinated with the teacher’s and student’s interests, including pedagogical interventions with them, which should be the triggering focus of investigation regarding their motives and needs and that, later, sustained many discussions—specially about the learning possibilities of each one.

To research, intervene and register the procedures and results became a practice so experienced in the groups that many were the knowledge productions constituted, which allowed this investigative experience to transform itself in learning.

Conclusion

The results reached in the four years of research were so diverse that we cannot say they aligned themselves with a continues, growing and evolving perspective. Without a doubt each experience supported the next action, but there was always openness towards the awakening of new processes or seeking new paths that the research followed—always connected with the student’s, teacher’s and researcher’s interests and involvement with the school. Due to that, it was also important to accept the resistances, administrating them, changing strategies, abandoning ideas, following the path created daily, moving forward. This did not mean that the process was unorganized or unproductive for there was lots of planning in various conclusive circumstances, and reprogramming was done in order to tend to the different situations or conflicts that emerged. This meant that we were operating in a qualitative epistemological perspective (González, 1997) founded upon the dynamic social context and tied to the group’s social subjectivity as well as the individual subjectivity of those who participated in the study. The research, therefore, had a procedural character, structuring itself upon the confluence of the groups that were the investigation’s focus.

The vast learning resultant from this processes was reported, described, conduced, constituting itself in produced knowledge that we brought to this discussion bearing in mind to identify its contributions. This research allowed for us to have innovative theoretical and practical propositions providing support for teaching practices and training.

References


