

Psychoeducational Approach of Vygotsky and its Relationship with the Symbolic Interactionism: Application to the Juvenile Criminal Responsibility and Educational Processes

Enfoque psicoeducativo de Vygotsky y su relación con el interaccionismo simbólico: Aplicación a los procesos educativos y de responsabilidad penal juvenil¹

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¡Nota

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Summary

The psychoeducational intellectual work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1943) provides a theoretical and sociohistorical meaning that allows you to see from a contextualized perspective the higher forms of self-regulation, conscious control and forms of self-governance. This contribution to the theory of the psychology of education is clearly consistent with the conclusions of the interaction approaches that have been developed by the sociology of the Chicago School (George Mead, 1863-1931), proposing the concept of “Symbolic Interactionism” (Herbert Blumer, 1900-1987), to explain the essentially social nature of the person and his actions, which were consolidated in the field of criminology. From the recognition of the pedagogical-educational purpose that is assigned to the process and juvenile criminal sanction, the present essay aims to use the socio-historical theoretical (Vygotsky) and interactionist (Mead-Blumer) reasoning, to think about the importance and influence they have in the setting of goals of the juvenile criminal system and how the criminal and educational processes have a high impact on the formation of subjectivities. In this way, it will state that the process of educational formation is an essential instrument of socialization and humanization of the subject.

Keywords: Psychoeducational, socio-historical theory, symbolic interactionism, juvenile criminal sanction, socialization.

Resumen

La labor intelectual psicoeducativa de Lev Vigotsky (1896-1943), aporta un significado teórico socio-histórico que permite ver desde una visión contextualizada las formas superiores, de autorregulación, control consciente y formas de auto gobernación. Este aporte a la teoría de la psicología de la educación, encuentra conclusiones claramente coincidentes con los enfoques de la interacción que han sido elaboradas por la sociología de la Escuela de Chicago (George Mead, 1863-1931), proponiendo el concepto de “Interaccionismo simbólico” (Herbert Blumer, 1900-1987), para explicar el carácter esencialmente social de la persona y sus acciones, los que se consolidaron en el ámbito de la criminología. Desde el reconocimiento de la finalidad pedagógica-educativa que se le asigna al proceso y sanción penal juvenil, el presente ensayo tiene por objetivo utilizar los razonamientos teóricos socio-histórico (Vigotsky) e interaccionistas (Mead-Blumer), para pensar la importancia e influencia que tienen los mismos en la determinación de los objetivos del sistema penal adolescente y cómo los procesos educativos y penales tienen un alto impacto en la formación de subjetividades. De esta manera, se afirmará que el proceso de formación educativo resulta un instrumento esencial de socialización y humanización del sujeto.

Palabras clave: Teoría psicoeducativa socio-histórica; Interaccionismo simbólico; Sanción penal juvenil; Socialización.

Introduction

“...the internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human activity, the basis of the qualitative leap from animal to human psychology...”

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1943)

The psychoeducational intellectual work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1943) is undoubtedly a tool that provides a theoretical, sociohistorical and methodological meaning since it represented the reorganization of a key social system and associated modes of discourse with potential consequences for the development of new forms of thinking.

The modern character of the Vygotsky's psychological program is reaffirmed from the particular perspective of the weight given to educational processes, analyzing their impact on the subjective development. This development allows seeing from a contextualized vision, among others, higher forms, forms of self-regulation, conscious control, and forms of self-government.

This contribution to the education psychology theory yields conclusions that clearly coincide with the interaction approaches elaborated by the sociology of the Chicago School (George Mead, 1863-1931), proposing the concept of “Symbolic Interactionism” (Herbert Blumer, 1900-1987) to explain the essentially social character of the person and his actions, which impacted and were incorporated in the field of criminology.

From the recognition of the pedagogical-educational purpose given to the juvenile criminal process and sanction, this article aims to use the theoretical sociohistorical (Vygotsky) and interactionist (Mead-Blumer) reasoning to think about their significance and influence in setting the objectives of the juvenile criminal system, and how the educational and criminal processes have a high impact on the formation of subjectivities.

To this end, special attention will be paid to the most significant basic theoretical guidelines proposed by the authors in order to consider the educational training process as an essential instrument of socialization and humanization of the subject.

Argument

Lev Vygotsky's Sociohistorical Theory. Approaches to Concepts of Higher Psychological Processes (HPP), Internalization, and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Vygotsky has provided the most important contributions with respect to the role of culture and social organization in the development of higher psychological processes, fundamentally focusing his studies on the social determinants of development.

He maintains that the individual is inseparable from the society where he lives, which transmits him forms of conduct and of organization of the knowledge that the subject has to internalize; thus, the development of the individual takes place in the society where he lives (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 59).

It is a fact that the subject is not made from the inside out; it is not a passive reflection of the environment. On the contrary, it is a result of the subject's relationship with others.

Learning is not focused on an internal problem of the individual, but it has two differential aspects: one initial and biological, based on repetition and memory; and the other one referred to the higher functions of sociocultural thought, based on creative and symbolic thinking. While the biological aspect lays the foundation for general development (natural line), only the cultural and social context (cultural line of development) enables higher learning development (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 59; Lucci, 2006, p. 8).

It is thus stated the sociogenetic approach of this theory because the subject that knows always does it within the framework of the social relationships the subject establishes with other people in a context, in a specific case the school (classmates, teachers, etc.), integrating the genetic (biological) aspect with sociocultural interaction into the development of the construction of knowledge (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 60).

The prevalence of the environment in the development of the subject's learning makes language the main instrument both in the social sphere as a means of communication (extrapsychological), and in the internal sphere as a means of reflection (intrapsychological) (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 61; Lucci, 2006, p. 9).

These social processes whereby people access the cultural world through diverse communication channels are known as cultural mediation (in the educational sphere by means of classmates and teachers), and carry out the set of actions by which subjects achieve certain potential abilities, allowing them to perform activities that they could not previously do on their own. Thus, external influence and incidence allow the person to appropriate cultural instruments and then proceed to an internal reconstruction (Chaves Salas, 2001, p. 62; Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, pp. 61-62).

In this line of sociogenetic reasoning, the concept of *psychological processes* (PP) is introduced. It can be *elementary* (EPP) that is the habitual psychological capacity, follows the natural line, is not specific to man and is shared with superior animals; or *higher* (HPP) that is the human-specific psychological capacity and is the result of social life, follows a cultural line of development, is based on the sociocultural nature of the human being, and requires a long and complex process of cultural internalization. The higher psychological process entails a sociocultural construction. It is not given by the genetic, but given by the interaction with the sociocultural environment, following the learning development process (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 62; Lucci, 2006, p. 8).

The development of higher psychological processes (PPS) shows how human beings have been building useful signs and signals in problem-solving.

Education has an essential role in the formation of higher psychological processes because through education a person becomes educated and civilized. For these reasons, the psychological approach proposed by Vygotsky seeks to find the foundations of the human culture, assigning an important role to symbols and cultural practices. This is due to the fact that what is characteristic of the school is the drive, development, and complexity of higher psychological processes (Ruiz Carrillo & Estrevel Rivera, 2010, p. 136).

Another significant concept in this article of Vygotsky's sociohistorical theory is *internalization* or *interiorization*. It points out that in psychic development every function appears first on the social plane and subsequently, on the psychological plane, i.e. it takes place first on the interpsychic plane among the others and subsequently, in the subject's interior on an intrapsychic plane. The process itself turns into this outside in transition, and its structure and functions change. In this internalization process, the social principle prevails over the natural-biological principle, therefore the sources of a person's psychic development are not in the subject itself, but in the system of his social relationships, in the system of his communication with the others, in his collective and joint activity with them (Chaves Salas, 2001, p. 60).

This process that is evidenced in the development of the human being is where the individual acquires the capacity to internally reconstruct an external operation, demonstrative of the cultural forms of thinking transformed by a social phenomenon that becomes part of the individual's own mental functioning. This means that: a) this process implies the construction rather than the copy of a function; b) it depends on the domain of the adequate cultural system of symbolic representation; and c) it is performed by social interaction (Ruiz Carrillo & Estrevel Rivera, 2010, p. 137).

Thus, internalization is not a transfer from the external to the internal plane, but rather a process of construction and reconstruction of the internal plane, which implies internalizing experiences lived externally (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 63).

Finally, one of the concepts largely used in the educational field is *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), which refers to the space where, thanks to the interaction and help of others, a person can work and solve in a way and with a certain level that he would not be able to achieve individually; unlike the zone of real development that refers to the space that delimits what a person can solve alone (Ferreyra & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 63).

The educator must take into account the development of the learner at both levels: the real and the potential, to promote levels of progress and self-regulation through collaborative activities. What is essential is not the transfer of skills from those who know more to those who know less, but rather the collaborative use of forms of mediation to create, obtain and communicate sense (Chaves Salas, 2001, p. 62; Ruiz Carrillo & Estrevel Rivera, 2010, pp. 138-139).

In introducing the concept of the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky raises the interdependence of the development process and the existing social resources that are connected to that process. Consequently, it can be said that the zone of proximal development is created when the child is involved in a collaborative activity within specific social environments. In the same sense as the other higher psychological functions, the zone of proximal development can only emerge in a person's social relationship. That is, in socially organized contact, the human being can completely create new spaces and forms of activity that, subsequently, the human being can apply and adopt in everyday situations (Ruiz Carrillo & Estrevel Rivera, 2010, p. 139).

In short, for the purposes of this article, it could be said that the zone of proximal development, through internalization, would be the mechanism

whereby the higher psychological processes will be formed and, although it is said that the support of someone with greater mastery or control of the situation leads to development, it should be noted that this can only take place in the teaching/learning process, i.e. the relationship/interaction between them (*obuchenie*)¹ (Ruiz Carrillo & Estrevel Rivera, 2010, p. 141).

The process of internalization of the higher functions is essential in the individual's development, as well as recognizing the role played by both internal and external activities in psychological processes and human behavior, enabling the subject to bond with others and then achieve an understanding and internalization of the process that will determine the action to be performed by the subject.

Symbolic Interactionism. Contributions to Education and Criminology

The conclusions of Vygotsky's sociohistorical theory show coincidences with the sociological interactionist theories because, as previously set out, for this author, the subjects' learning and development are essentially based on the social experience and on interpersonal relationships in which they are continuously involved.

Based on Mead's postulates, Blumer proposes the term "symbolic interactionism" to designate a particular vision on the nature of the social world. This theory proposes an explanatory model of an essentially social nature of the person and his actions, individual in appearance, based on the postulate of a permanent connection between exteriority and interiority in the course of the experience, simultaneously giving a decisive importance to the inseparably linked processes of symbolization and communication (Cubillas Fontana, 2014, p. 3; Lennon del Villar; 2007, pp. 30-31).

1 Term described by Vygotsky to determine the importance not only of the learner and the educator, but also of the interactional relationship between them (Ruiz Carrillo & Rivera, 2010, p. 138).

The individual is not a being that can exist without the other. The individual exists and is constituted in an intrinsically social context, in a constant relation with the other members of its community, in the continuous connection of interactions of which education forms part.

The social inscription of individuals is a determinant of future actions since the consequences derived from it direct personal actions (Lennon del Villar, 2007, p. 32).

This is so because once the eminently social conception of the human being is affirmed, a particular relevance is given to the socialization processes, about which it proposes an explanatory model based on the subject's involvement in the interaction processes, functioning the main mechanism of socialization and formation of the inner self: process whereby the subject adopts the attitude and the role of the other, simultaneously learns to perceive itself first from its own perspective and then from the perspective of the group of the members of its environment (Lennon del Villar, 2007, p. 34). 34; Parada Gamboa, 2014, p. 93; Zaffaroni, 2012, p. 154).

The formation of the subject's personality and the necessary influence of the other, which interfere in obtaining tools to solve future problems, can be assimilated to the concepts of higher psychological processes (HPS) and zone of proximal development (ZPD), introduced by Vygotsky.

Thus, formation is characteristic of symbolic interactionism since people's behaviors are formed by others. This makes necessary the intervention of the other to collaborate in the person's formation, above all through dual interaction (*obuchenie*) (Sánchez Jerez, 2008, pp. 61-62).

A clear similarity between both theories studied that is important to look more closely is the concept of analyzed interiorization.

According to this interactionist sociological theory, the human subject has to distinguish and interpret the actions of others, and indicate its own actions to others. For this reason, social interaction is not only the field where all the human being's activities are moved, but forms the human behavior

because it continuously interprets the contexts of its actions and the actions of others, develops plans and acts based on them (Sánchez Jerez, 2008, pp. 59-61).

At the same time, this social interaction is governed by a system of rules internalized or learned by individuals who have the necessary and sufficient information to adequately act and perform in each situation. Moreover, this implies that there is a previous agreement between the actors regarding its nature and significance, and that when participating in it, they do nothing but conform to such norms (Cubillas Fontana, 2014, p. 5; Lennon del Villar; 2007, p. 36).

For such reasons, human interaction is symbolic because it is the mutual process of definitions and interpretations whereby each actor interprets the significance of the actions of the other and, at the same time, defines the significance of his own actions (Lennon del Villar, 2007, p. 38).

As it can be clearly observed, there are multiple coincidences of the symbolic interactionism postulates with Vygotsky-coined concepts of higher psychological processes (HPS), interiorization and zone of proximal development (ZPD).

This sociological theory has observed the school as a subject matter of study since it is confirmed that the social microcosm of the classroom is the result of a joint construction between teachers and students that obliges the actors to define their lines of conduct and to coordinate them mutually and to undertake continuous negotiations to maintain this interactional order.

Criminologically, Goffman's contributions are significant since he established one of the most useful interactionism currents to understand the cause of criminal social acts, based on the symbolic interactionism theory, stating that deviant behaviors are closely related to the subject's cultural context (Cubillas Fontana, 2014, pp. 6-7).

This approach allows statements such as: “*Pibes chorros*² are made not born. And the process whereby they are made results from the interaction between individuals and the social conditions in which they develop...” (Míguez, 2010, p. 59).

Emphasis is placed on the nature of social norms and on the labels that are put on people who contravene such norms or the caused social reaction. The intervention of criminal systems as social control processes cause a negative image of the subject and a symbolic reorganization of the self, in which the person is seen as deviant and progressively acts as such. Thus, a person is qualified as deviant and ends up accepting this deviant path. Therefore, according to the interactionists, deviance is a result of the ideas that people and society have about the others (Gamboa Stop, 2014, p. 93; Zaffaroni, 2012, pp. 154-157).

Educational Purpose of the Juvenile Criminal System. A Social Pedagogical Approach.

After having described the contributions of Vygotsky’s educational psychology theory and the sociological symbolic interactionism theory in the educational and criminological spheres, we must also gain a deep insight into the importance of these contributions to the pedagogical objectives pursued in the juvenile criminal system.

The juvenile criminal law is characterized by the educational principle which prescribes that the legal consequences arising from the process of accountability for the committed acts must always have a socio-educational purpose, either by searching alternative solutions to the common criminal process or in the very nature of the sanction. When the criminal justice system decides to have interference in juvenile offenders, the educational principle should serve as an argument to reduce the repressive intensity and direct it towards education.

2 An Argentinean slang for young robber, hoodlum, thug or toughie.

Positive³ special prevention, which plays a key role in the system, is understood as the socialization of adolescents, adapting it to a socio-educational objective, i.e. education for life in society (Couso, 2007, p. 219).

The educational principle consists in promoting through the juvenile criminal system the adolescent's accountability capacity, incorporating mechanisms for the cognitive and emotional management of the factors that influence the adolescent's behavior and the anticipation of its consequences (Frega & Grappasonno, 2010, p. 20).

This educational purpose is related to the special stage of the subject's educational evolution where every intervention and practice tend to symbolize and mean an identification of the personality under construction. The adolescent is at a very convenient age for learning. During this stage, the adolescent acquires a large amount of knowledge, so the idea of trying to correct his deviant behavior sounds logical (Tiffer Sotomayor, 1996, p. 153).

But we should not forget that the educational relationship with adolescents begins as a result of an act that violated the rights of another person. This implies that one of the objectives of the educational action aims to be accountable for the violation, which is none other than the recognition of the other injured subject's rights, assuming that his behavior caused harm to someone. At the same time, it implies a proposal to the adolescent to take part in a social educational project that aspires to the inclusion in the dynamics of his community and to the exercise of his rights.

But this concept of community cannot be simplified as a group of people who live under certain rules or who have the same interests, but must above all be understood as a duty/obligation that connects the subjects in one community, like a debt we owe each other (Espósito, 2012, pp. 30-31).

3 Characterized by the assignment of an improvement function to the offender itself under the so-called theories of the *re* ideologies (re-socialization, re-education, reinsertion, reincorporation).

What symbolic interactionism emphasizes as important in association is to take into account and be aware of the other. By continuously taking into account each other, subjects treat each other as subjects and not as objects, seeing themselves as directors of their acts and putting themselves the place of the other. Thus, a new sensitivity in interaction is established, taking the other into account to control their own acts (Sánchez Jerez, 2008, p. 62).

In this context of education, formal education is not only of interest, but also the education of adolescents who commit criminal acts, who have attracted the attention of the government social control bodies, and who normally, in reality, have dropped out from the formal school system (Couso, 1999, p. 91).

The condition of being subject to specific liability according to age is key from the perspective of social reintegration because it is difficult for someone to become a competent citizen if he does not manage to link in some way to his acts and understand the meaning that the crimes he commits have in the community where he lives. Thus, given the failure of prevention, the entry of the adolescent to the system must become a paradoxical opportunity to ensure the adolescent understands the harmfulness of his behaviors, is aware of the fact that he is part of a community and its values, develops the sense of responsibility, and relates in a non-conflictive way with his environment in the future (Beloff, 2013, pp. 46-47).

This is just the process of internalization that Vygotsky proposes in his psychoeducational theory and the symbolic interactionism in his sociological theory, indicating that the human being when entering in contact with the culture to which the human being belongs appropriates the social signs to later internalize them. The sign is always initially a means of social linkage, a means of action on the others, and becomes a means of action on the human being itself (Chaves Salas, 2001, p. 60).

In the matter at hand, Article 40.1 of the CRC recognizes the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the

penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, and the importance of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.

In this vein, we propose social pedagogy as an educational field that seeks to give viability and pedagogical recognition (on the social, institutional and academic planes) to educational practices that are developed outside school environments or in conjunction with them, in order to provide the subjects with cultural and social resources that allow them to be in a non-segregated place and solve the challenges of the historical moment in which they live (Martinis & Redondo, 2015, p. 138).

Thus, the social pedagogical proposal, as a form of juvenile criminal intervention, reevaluates the content of the word socialization from a critical pedagogical perspective. Socialization does not end with the adherence to the norms of a given community in time, but true socialization goes far beyond a rudimentary adherence to the established order. According to this approach, an adolescent is socialized when he gives importance to each member of his community and all people, respecting them, their rights and property. The adolescent will act this way not only in compliance with a law enacted or sanctions, but based on personal ethics which considers others as equally valuable related to oneself (Gómes Da Costa, 2004, pp. 54-55).

Socialization is simply the fact that the subject appropriates the cultural manifestations that have a meaning in the collective activity. This is how the higher psychological processes are developed in the subjects through the enculturation of the social practices and education in all its forms (Chaves Salas, 2001, p.60).

For the juvenile criminal accountability system, interaction is essential because when a person acts on another, he does so with the expectation

that the latter will respond, or at least become aware of the community requirements.

Therefore, from a learning-focused paradigm, the subject is perceived in his bio-psycho-affective-social and spiritual totality, as active, protagonist, a result of multiple social interrelations. The person is conceived as the builder of knowledge within a permanent and emancipatory process to use it autonomously (Ferreya & Pedrazzi, 2007, p. 27).

This type of proposal makes it possible to exclude, as a solution of juvenile crime, repressive-punitive approaches, which promote the exclusion of the most vulnerable sectors exposed to the selectivity of the criminal system, without providing an effective response to the problem, to opt for non-penal social/educational strategies and that the community sphere promotes awareness of the consequences associated with criminal practices, as well as the integration and exercise of citizenship in its broadest sense (Müller, Hoffmann, Nuñez, Vallejos, Innamoratto, Canavessi, Palacio & Krause, 2012, p.). 132). In this way, it is possible to socialize criminal policy and not criminalize social policy (Müller et al., 2012, p. 154).

Conclusions

As previously stated, the social/cultural factor is an aspect that cannot be ignored when dealing with the educational psychology developed by Vygotsky through the sociohistorical theory of learning.

The potentiality of his contributions clearly coincides with the sociological interactionist theories and their practical application in a very sensitive topic at present, received in the juvenile criminal accountability systems.

This is due to the fact that development consists in appropriating purposes, knowledge, norms, and instruments produced by culture within socially defined joint activity contexts such as family, school, work, ensuring education has an inherent role with the development of the subject. Education not only has an impact on the individual, but also creates a certain type of

development of advanced higher processes, having a positive impact on the society as a whole.

Thus, it is through interaction that the individual's socialization greatly occurs, consisting in his broad and coherent induction into the social world.

This dual interaction that takes place in traditional social institutions (such as family, school, and work), as well as non-social institutions (social control systems) is the optimal scenario for a true formation of subjectivity because the most important experience that one has of the others is produced in a face-to-face situation, which is the prototype of social interaction because it makes social elements prevail over individual ones.

With this presence pedagogy, the subject has true subjective relationships since subjectivity symptoms occur in this relationships more than in any other kind of relationship. In a face-to-face situation, the other is completely real.

Thus, sociohistorical psychoeducational contributions ensure the creation of environments that provoke the subjects' mental and physical activity, and foster dialogue, reflection, judgment, cooperation and involvement, awareness raising and self-regulation, contributing to clarifying, producing, reorganizing and re-conceptualizing meanings that enable to interpret the world.

If the educational formation processes conceive the subject as active, protagonist, reflexive, a result of varied social interrelations that take place in a specific historical-cultural context, and rebuilder of knowledge with others, the educational learning-focused paradigm will not only find space for its materialization, but will also result in a passable path for socialization and humanization of the subject.

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