

**Socioenvironmental Consciousness for Cultural-Historical Psychology and
Critical Environmental Education**

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SUMMARY

The understanding of the society-nature relationship posed by Environmental Education due to the ecological crisis already denounced since the 1950s is accentuated with the current global health crisis. The understanding of the consciousness in the relationship of humans with their natural and cultural environment contributes to reflections on the subject and is essential for changing the established status quo. In this light, it is convenient to take ideas of Historical-Cultural Psychology represented by Lev Semiyonovich Vygotsky and the assumptions of Critical Environmental Education, with several representatives influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire. Assuming that both currents find similarities between them in different scenarios, we focus on the articulation of these references by their importance and relevance for the formation of consciousness. The work does not intend to overlap ideas and currents over the others, nor does it end the subject proposed in this theme, but as the very result of this work, to establish articulations and reflections on the relationship between man and nature, addressing issues such as socio-environmental consciousness, the social role and the subject in these two theoretical fields.

KEYWORDS: Formation of Consciousness. Vygotsky's Psychology. Society-nature relationship.

1 INTRODUCTION

The article corresponds to a part of the Master's dissertation in progress that seeks to analyze the promotion of socio-environmental consciousness of teachers participating in a project to develop Environmental Education in public schools in two cities in the country town of São Paulo, through their verbal expressions in training meetings and workshops. The theoretical foundation of this article starts from the perspective of Cultural-Historical Psychology (PHC) related to the foundations of Critical Environmental Education (EAC). Such articulation is possible because both are explicitly committed to the debate on consciousness.

The understanding of the society-nature relationship that guides the different currents that conduct Environmental Education is the result of the ways and how we appropriate the experiences and knowledge that involve this relationship. Spazziani (2006) highlights that

As últimas quatro décadas revelaram, por meio das crises ambientais e sociais, os descompassos do modelo civilizatório da modernidade. Muitos estudos vêm propondo como primeiro passo para a superação dos problemas atuais é revisitar as nossas concepções de mundo, de natureza, de homem, entre outras, como forma de buscar novos valores humanos e resgatar àqueles desenvolvidos por culturas tradicionais antigas e contemporâneas, que respondam às necessidades de sobrevivência e transcendência do ser humano e do planeta (p.49).

In this same line of thought, Castro, Spazziani and Pedrosa (2010) clarify that the environmental experience that we have been living in the last two centuries is marked by Cartesian ideas unfocused on their social and cultural dimensions, prioritizing the domain over the natural environment and between humans. A domain that considers placing nature and all its complexity at the service of the interests of certain groups that hold power (economic and political) at the service of a hegemonic project of conquest and power at any cost. Extrapolating this same reasoning to the control and submission of other human groups.

It seems to us then that we are in a historical moment of fundamental importance for the taking of a different conscience about human relations with the natural and social

environment in the search to revisit to transform the current conceptions and uses from those of the everyday universe to those that make up the power superstructures.

Initiatives within the scope of EA arise with the purpose of contributing to revert to the current situation of socio-environmental consequences resulting from environmental degradation (CASTRO; SPAZZIANI; SANTOS, 2010), in the face of development and production processes, both intrinsic to the current capitalist system and which Leff (2003, p.15-16) characterized as:

A crise ecológica é a crise do nosso tempo. O risco ecológico questiona o conhecimento do mundo. Esta crise se apresenta a nós como um limite no real que re-significa e re-orienta o curso da história: limite do crescimento econômico e populacional; limite dos desequilíbrios ecológicos e das capacidades de sustentação da vida; limite da pobreza e da desigualdade social. Mas também crise do pensamento ocidental: da “determinação metafísica” que, ao pensar o ser como ente, abriu a via da racionalidade científica e instrumental que produziu a modernidade como uma ordem coisificada e fragmentada, como formas de domínio e controle sobre o mundo.

It is important to emphasize that these relationships impact the current socio-environmental crisis characterized by environmental degradation resulting from the fragility of values and paradigms that guide the relationship between human beings and nature. Intensified from the Industrial Revolution, they cause an increase in misery, consumerism and social and economic exclusion, which notoriously shows the permanent deterioration (MORALES, 2007).

Based on the above assumptions, it is in the intermediate phase that there is potential to stimulate the conception of concepts and conditions for the active development of consciousness. Bearing in mind that EA, like education, proposes to promote and rescue the relationship between human beings and nature, in the sense of transforming the current consciousness promoted by the progression of the capitalist system, it is intended to reflect on the assumptions of the PHC on the category conscience and its articulation for the taking of the socio-environmental conscience and the costs to the EAC.

2 OBJECTIVES

Thus, the objective of this article is to present reflections from studies based on historical-cultural psychology to form conscience and Critical Environmental Education, when it postulates the emergence of socio-environmental consciousness.

3 ANALYSIS METHOD

To meet this purpose, we compared some texts by Vygotsky, Luria, and PHC scholars that deal with aspects of the formation of conscience and the probable articulations and directions for the promotion of a socio-environmental conscience as presented by the EAC branch of authors who dialogue with Paulo Freire's ideas.

4 RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS BY PHC

The consciousness of man, a superior psychic characteristic, requires necessary conditions admittedly by the PHC. Such constraints are linked to the emergence and development of work, thought and language, intertwined and dialectically constructed throughout human historicity (LEONTIEV, 1978). Likewise, Toassa (2006) states that the meaning of consciousness from the psychological perspective

(...) é, portanto, uma estrutura composta de outras estruturas. Desenvolve-se com modificações da estrutura geral e de vínculo entre seus elementos, os quais mantém uma relação dialética de parte-todo, criada pela inserção dos sujeitos nas atividades sociais (p.78).

Thinking that consciousness is a structure constituted by elements that influence and are also influenced, the relationship established between the existing variables is transpired in the conscious and objectified reflection of the subject's reality. According to Leontiev (1978),

(...) o elo directo que existe entre a palavra e a linguagem, de um lado, e a atividade de trabalho dos homens, do outro, é a condição primordial sob a influência da qual eles se desenvolveram enquanto portadores do reflexo consciente e objectivado da realidade (p. 87).

The conscious and objectified reflection of man's reality refers to highlighting the influence of the social environment, since it also influences the individual's activity and also conditions the conscious reflection of reality, stimulating or not its meanings and senses. As a result, conscience for Aguiar (2000)

(...) é como um processo, abriga o aspecto psicológico, ou seja, a realidade social transformada em psicológica. Esse processo, sempre em elaboração, redundando em formas de pensar, sentir e agir, que estão, também, sempre em construção (p.131).

This process of continuous and permanent construction of man is also linked to signs when internalizing some aspects of the structure of the activity, it actually internalizes not only an activity, but an activity with meaning (AGUIAR, 2000). Therefore, the same author endorses that the taking of

(...) consciência não somente surgirá pela apropriação e internalização dos signos, sobretudo, a tomada de consciência virá pela significação deles, processo que traduz as condições de funcionamento da sociedade, suas estruturas de relação e suas práticas sociais. (AGUIAR, 2000, p. 133).

The meaning of these signs is tied to the concept of the subject's praxis, as Ivo Tonet (2013, p.73) states “praxis is exactly the concept that translates the way in which subjectivity and objectivity are articulated, under the regency of the latter, in all human activities”.

5 CONCEPTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In Historical-Cultural Psychology (PHC) postulated by Vygotsky, one of the central ideas brings the elucidation of the origin of mental processes promoted by learning. To this end, the higher psychic functions are constituted through social insertion for appropriation and individuation:

(...) lei básica do desenvolvimento das funções psíquicas superiores: toda função psíquica superior no desenvolvimento da criança vem à cena duas vezes: **a primeira como atividade coletiva, social, ou seja, como função intersíquica**; a segunda, como atividade individual, como modo interior de pensamento da criança, como função intrapsíquica. (VYGOTSKY, 1996 p. 483. Grifo nosso).

The formation of thought in the child individually, first, begins through collective activity. Thus, the social environment has a strong relationship with the development of higher psychic functions (memory, attention, imagination, thought). In this way, when the child identifies the meaning that the collective has for the object, established here as nature, it will probably influence the individual meaning/reality that it will also have for it.

In the progression of critical environmental education, based on Paulo Freire's ideas, the problematizing educator is the one who signifies/resignifies the world view through the dialogic method. And, to reinforce this method, he knows that in practice, “no one educates anyone, nor, no one educates himself: men are educated in communion, mediated by the world” (FREIRE, 1970, p. 253). Thus, perceiving points of convergence between Freire and PHC as the direct and fundamental implication of social relations for the constitution of thought in the individual and the consequences for the formulation of a new vision of the world.

Such learning carried out in collaboration and interaction with the collective is instrumentalized by historical/dialectical/culturally constructed signs by human societies. The concept of signs and their use is significant to the point of being one of the fundamental characteristics that distinguish humans from animals (VYGOTSKY, 2000). In this process of hominization, language symbolizes a profound and significant change between men and animals. While in humanization, language plays an important role in human development and the transformation of society, as Vygotsky (apud Martins 2016, p.57) states, “language is the system of signs able to operate both in communication between men and women. in the construction of knowledge about the real”. Therefore, language is an instrument used by humans that makes it possible to identify/internalize knowledge about reality.

When this real, like what has been pointed out here, portrays inert individuals in an automated praxis and belonging to a society, in general, with the same impoverished characteristic of reflections, they contribute to the construction of uncritical people guided by the river current as didactically well explained by Guimarães (2004).

In the same thought, Karel Kosic (1976) reinforces:

A atitude primordial e imediata do homem, em face da realidade, não é a de um abstrato sujeito cognoscente, de uma mente pensante que examina a realidade especulativamente, porém, a de um ser que age objetiva e

praticamente, de um indivíduo histórico que exerce a sua atividade prática no trato com a natureza e com os outros homens, tendo em vista a consecução dos próprios fins e interesses, dentro de um determinado conjunto de relações sociais (p.13).

Practically and objectively, in the reality revealed so far, determined by the individual over the collective, the utilitarian model prevails and the “thinking” subjects belonging to society increasingly dwindle while their relationships with each other and the world remain unchanged. In this case, when the analysis is carried out from the perspective of the unknowing subject related to nature, the scenario becomes increasingly alarming and urgent for changes, as it establishes a clearly unbalanced picture between human beings and nature.

To change the established scenario, significant and profound changes in man-nature relationships must be thought of. One of the reasons why environmental education is consolidated as a key piece to break the shackles of inertia of this thought. According to Carvalho (2004, p. 18), “environmental education adds a specificity: understanding society-nature relations and intervening on environmental problems and conflicts.” As the chains of the non-thinking subject in the human-nature relationship break, more reflections and discussions are developed, more signs are created, meanings of the world constructed and realities are revealed. As Guimarães (2004, p. 25) asserts, “there is a need to re-signify environmental education as “critical” because it is an action capable of contributing to the transformation of a reality, which historically places itself in a serious socio-environmental crisis”.

One of the limiting realities to reach a new one (homeostasis of the man-nature relationship) is the presence of the reductionism of ecological consciousness. Such reductionism, understood here, is characterized in the reflection of thinking individually to achieve the collective objective, just in the thought that the sum of the parts is equal to the whole. These mistakes’ premises can be answered by the theory of pseudo-concentricity, that is, the theory of totality proposed by Marx, an influencer of Vygotsky when implementing dialectical historical materialism in his research as a method. Thus, understanding that in the same way that Marx understood that there were relationships witch not apparent in the social context, Vygotsky also shares the idea that consciousness should be thought of in a dialectical and cultural way and not only supplied by reflection, due to theoretical insufficiency and biological reductionism (SILVA, 2012).

In a critical environmental aspect, according to Lima (1998, p.111), “ecological consciousness has its central characteristic of uniting realities, articulating and relating complementary dimensions that constitute a greater whole”.

Kosic (1976) makes explicit in his work about the dialectic of the concrete and in this cognitive effort he was very happy to reflect on the phenomenal aspects and discusses “the essence of the thing”, “the thing in itself” and “the structure of the thing”. The fact of establishing an immediate reality (socio-environmental crisis) through perception, the text says that a *détour* must be made and consider this apparent reality to, in fact, understand the essence of the thing (perpetuation of hegemony and domination of capital), the structure of the thing (maintenance of the social class relationship). However, this reality/example presented here may be flawed in terms of its understanding, since the realized perception remains in the

field of phenomena and does not capture the “thing itself”, nor its essence. Paulo Freire endorses the thought:

(...) absorvido pelo meio natural, o homem responde a estímulos pelo meio natural; e o coito de suas respostas mede-se por sua maior ou menor adaptação: naturalize-se. Despegado de seu meio vital, por virtude da consciência, enfrente as coisas objetivando-as, e enfrenta-se com elas, que deixam de ser simples estímulos, para se tornarem desafios. **O meio envolvente não o fecha, limita-o – o que supõe a consciência do além-limite.** (Freire, 1970, p. 35. Grifo nosso).

Going beyond the limit, overcoming apparent stimuli through reflective exercise is an essential figure in this process. According to Kosic (1976), philosophy is an indispensable human activity. And to philosophize is to problematize. To inquire. Daydream. And social participation in this type of exercise is indispensable.

Ivo Tonet (2013, p.76) follows the same line of thought and reinforces the inseparability of philosophy and science,

(...) uma ontologia do ser social (filosofia) é, pois, condição prévia para a resolução das questões relativas ao conhecimento. Além disso, essa ontologia também é condição imprescindível para, em interação com a ciência, produzir um conhecimento adequado da realidade social. Na perspectiva ontológica marxiana, filosofia e ciência não são dois momentos separados ou apenas superficialmente relacionados. São dois momentos intrinsecamente articulados, que, sem perder a sua especificidade, constituem uma unidade indissolúvel no processo de produção do conhecimento científico.” (TONET, 2013, p.76)

Despite the philosophy and the exercise of critical reflection on ecological consciousness is not a recent issue, society is still in its infancy when the theme permeates issues regarding socio-environmental consciousness. Alluding to Vygotsky's famous theory about learning zones in children, when considering society as one, the proximal learning zone (man-nature relationship currently established) is seen as learned, that is, appropriated and internalized. The potential learning zone is the homeostatic relationship between man and nature that is tangible and objectification process. And finally, to reach this stage, the desired learning, society will appropriate learning in a spiral way. Therefore, the concepts (learning) about critical environmental education must be revisited frequently. And with each contact, new reflections are carried out and new problematizations are revealed in a forcefully. Such an exercise of problematizing brings to light needs, challenges and paths for a society to go through. “The problematization, that is, exercising a critical analysis of the problem reality” (FREIRE, 1970, p.624) enables qualitative leaps to reach the potential learning zone of society.

Now, if we consider that there is an imbalance in the man-nature relationship, and through social interaction, this scenario is consolidated. Walking in the same social scenario, but now, with the bias of balance, thinking about the multiple dimensions and reality that surround the problem, can be a feasible path for a new man-nature relationship. Thus, ecological consciousness will be under the spotlight and internalized in the subject.

But which guy? What features does it carry? The subject here is understood to be the one constructed in a historical-dialectical-cultural way over the years and times that have passed. In a process of building the world and building itself. Therefore, considering human historicity and its multiple adaptations over time. Loaded with Marxist assumptions and against the utilitarian condition rooted in society.

Carvalho (2012, position 11) defines the “ecological subject as an individual with an ecological ideal, a personal and social utopia that guide the decisions and lifestyles of those who adopt an ecological orientation in life.” And, “With the most comprehensive and multisectoral thinking, this subject is conditioned to break society's paradigms and unify different realities” (CARVALHO, 2001, p.185).

Edgar Morin (2000, p.12) also reinforces the line of thought by saying:

Penso que tudo deve estar integrado, para permitir uma mudança de pensamento que concebe tudo de uma maneira fragmentada e dividida e impede de ver a realidade. Essa visão fragmentada faz com que os problemas permaneçam invisíveis para muitos.

Once the subject is delimited, assuming the multiplicity of existing realities and understanding that they are integrated and not disjoint, the paradigms of a society cannot resist such pressure of understanding endorsed in/by the collective aspect. The way that allows a new disruptive scenario, totally different from the utilitarian and unbalanced relationship between man and nature. Such a desired context - indisputably - is nourished by the social and for the social. In a more objective and watertight way, society proposes itself on the path of change due to the social, so that itself is a determining figure to open the curtains of problems in the man-nature relationship installed in a society.

While the unveiling takes place through the “reciprocity of consciences” (FREIRE, 1970, p.25), individual and collective consciousness takes shape, realities are challenged, values are reevaluated and transformations are inevitable.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Considering the construction of consciousness as a dynamic, permanent and historical process, the turning point starts from the principle of the collective and the problematization of the theme. Furthermore, the importance of environmental educators to appropriate the processes of conscience formation for the realization of the EAC is highlighted. In this way, they suggest significant contributions to effective critical thinking regarding the relationship of current societies with the natural and built nature that surround us. Therefore, the breadth and depth of interpretations of the realities articulated with the thought-action of society engender promising paths of equalization of the society-nature relationship. Paths that oppose the courses of automatism to the detriment of reflective thinking.

Therefore, this work sought to show some points that bring the ideas of Historical-Cultural Psychology closer to the foundations of Critical Environmental Education. Above all, to stimulate reflections, problematizations and points of convergence between the society-nature relationship in these two perspectives of references. Well, it is known that the problematizations

and propositions around the theme are not exhausted here and, new contributions will emerge. Discussions regarding which elements within the training spaces can contribute to the consciousness/formation of the two references used? What are the elements that can hinder this path effectively pursued by the EAC? These among other questions can serve as fuel for new works.

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