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DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF DEVELOPMENTAL TRAINING AT A TRANSITIONAL AGE

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Abstract. The present article aims to share the results obtained by the investigation of how the Developmental Didactics can help the organization of the teaching of Sociology aiming at promoting the full development of students in transition phase. It was carried out through a Didactic-Formative Intervention, in a Brazilian public school in the city of Uberlândia-MG, in high school classes and constituted by adolescent students. From this investigative effort, didactic principles emerged that aim to guide the organization of a teaching that aims at the simultaneous development of the teacher and the students in the relationships they establish in the classroom through pedagogical practices. More than mere prescriptive propositions, these principles represent the result of a theoretical elaboration on the teaching-learning-development processes validated by practice in a particular concrete reality.

Keywords: developmental teaching; transition phase; didactic principles.

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ДИДАКТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРИНЦИПЫ И МЕТОДЫ РАЗВИВАЮЩЕГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ В ПЕРЕХОДНОМ ВОЗРАСТЕ

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Аннотация. В статье представлены результаты, полученные в ходе исследования влияния применения принципов развивающего обучения на организацию преподавания социологии, способствующую созданию условий для всестороннего развития учащихся на переходном этапе. Исследование проводилось в рамках дидактико-формирующего внедрения в бразильской государственной школе города Уберландия, штат Минас Жерайс, в школьных классах учащихся подросткового возраста. На основе этого исследования были разработаны дидактические принципы, направленные на организацию процесса образования, включающего одновременное развитие учителя и учеников во взаимоотношениях, установленных в классе в условиях педагогического процесса. Эти принципы не просто предписывающие положения, они представляют собой результат теоретических разработок процессов обучения-учения-развития, подтвержденных практикой в определенной конкретной действительности.
Several researches in the educational context of Brazil have already pointed out that teachers in the country look forward to teaching methodologies and practices that are capable enough of sustaining them through the challenges in the classroom [1; 2; 3; 7; 8; 9]. This article shares the results of a number of researches of Didactic-Formative Intervention [10] that were outlined in accordance with the Cultural Historical Theory and the Developmental Education. The context was Brazilian High School and its adolescents, i.e. transitional age youths.

The systematic study sought to identify which developmental processes are most likely and adequate for the transitional stage. Subsequently, as a possible synthesis, propositions of teaching organization were established and materialized in the form of principles and didactic actions that serve as guidelines for the teaching practice.

1 Didactic principles that guide the Developmental Education

Although an extensive number of authors [4; 5; 6] have already schematized didactic principles from the perspective of the Cultural Historical Theory, it is worth mentioning that, in the context of this article, the propositions consist in the formulation of feasible principles for High School in Brazilian public schools. Thus, they are situated both historically and socially. According to the literature, there are four principles that guide the didactic action in the allotted conjuncture: 1. the class seen as a process of forming concepts; 2. teaching as an activity that promotes crisis; 3. the teaching practice and its capability of forming new interests; 4. teaching in order to develop the intellectual abilities of an awareness of itself.

1.1 The class seen as a process of forming concepts

The formation of concepts and the conceptual thinking must be established as primary goals of teaching practices and the professor’s teaching activities. The transitional period offers unique conditions for the development of thought during adolescence. The formation of concepts is central to the revolutionary transformations that occur to an adolescent’s superior psychic abilities. Besides finding in adolescence a favorable stage for development, they are capable of transforming the psychic structure and of subordinating the psychological functions that are elementary to the intellect [15]. Being the first principle and teaching goal, the formation of concepts crosses all other principles and systematized didactic guiding actions. In addition, all other principles are connected to this one and find in it its feasibility.

The formation of concepts and the subsequent development of theoretical thinking stand for the establishment of superior abilities of perceiving reality. Those new abilities transform the psychic structure. Furthermore, they are responsible for enabling the student to assign sense for the reality he/she observes and in which he/she is inserted, by appropriation of the concept’s meanings.

The ability that must be developed in order to motivate teaching practice, in what concerns theoretical thinking, relies on the formation of concepts. A similar process occurs in the child when the verbal thinking finds in the formation of the word meaning a fundamental condition [15; 16; 17]. In other words, the ability to analyze, understand and intervene in reality holds scientific concepts as its instruments, and this is why the occurrence of one is closely linked to another. Such ability is contingent on the theoretical thought.

As theoretical instruments that represent the results of human work, concepts are essentially social. They are the outcome of a long historical process that has enabled the formation of its most diverse types in each historical moment [14]. Their appropriation enriches the social experience of subjects, especially students, and this movement amplifies the meanings that attribute sense to their reality.

In investigating children’s development, Vygotsky [16, p. 236] expressed that concepts are not formed by copying the characteristics and elements of the external reality to the interior of the subject’s mind. On the contrary, they are the result...
of a “long and complex process in the evolution of children’s thought”, being essentially social.

According to these findings, every set of principles and didactic actions systematized herein, aims to establish the class principle as a formative process of the concepts. Every environment and didactic actions are organized with this goal.

1.2 Teaching as an activity that promotes crisis

Every period of human development is marked by some process of crisis. The adolescence stands out for its collection of relevant crises and the intensity of the development processes that are in action in this period [15; 16]. The threshold experience of crisis is also the experience of recognition that a subject has concerning the limits to his/hers ability in providing solution to problems and challenges. Furthermore, the crisis is a development factor because it represents a problem with a solution located in a superior level in relation to the knowledge already acquired and the abilities previously developed by the subject. Thus, to solve a crisis implies to reach a set of new knowledge and abilities, namely, to transform potential knowledge and abilities into real ones.

Crisis is a distinct element that enables development and promotes the necessary reasons and interests for confrontation. Solving a crisis by means of appropriation of new cognitive-social content and also by elaboration/transformation of mechanisms of conduct is a sign of development [15; 16].

1.3 The teaching practice and its capability of forming new interests

The fundamental fuel for every development process lies in the subject’s inherent reasons and interests. This means that there can be no ongoing development process without having, in its basis, the outbreak of new interests and/or the reorganization of old ones [15]. In order to reach a potential learning and develop, one relies deeply on the existence of some kind of interest [15]. Therefore, a phenomenon that marks the transitional period is the internalization of new interests. This is based upon the need of confrontation with a new pattern of social relationship the adolescent experiments in this stage.

In other words, it is fitting that the teacher considers setting up an environment that offers the means for expanding and developing students’ interests. The increased participation in social situations is dialectically related to the development of conceptual thinking, resulting in the expansion of the adolescent’s interest for something beyond his/her immediate experience. This condition is positively transformed in an environment that supports good learning processes and that enables the development of new abilities and interests.

The use of problematization stands out as a remarkable didactic instrument. In this third proposition, problematization holds its importance as long as it can be used as a motivational tool. Problem situations are created and organized by the teacher, and they offer the student an external method of internalizing and developing interest for the study and the appropriation of school knowledge. Problematizations must be organized in a way so as to make sure that students are capable of providing an adequate solution to challenges, by applying scientific and school knowledge.

1.4 Teaching in order to develop the intellectual abilities of an awareness of itself

The development of consciousness as a superior psychological function has a social origin, linked to the development of perception, the formation of concepts and the conceptual thinking [15; 16; 17].

Vygotsky [9; 10] demonstrates that socialized language has a fundamental participation in the organization and formation of thought [15]. By socializing their internal language, children simultaneously take conscience of their own thought and start to form verbal thinking. Afterwards, in the transitional stage, verbalized thinking plays a decisive role in developing logical thinking, by converting concrete reality to an object of knowledge. It must be noted that in both moments the process of consciousness development is intimately connected to the elaboration of thought in language.

Every didactic strategy designed to require from the student the appropriation of knowledge from the verbal application of meanings and senses elaborated in the classroom enables the realization of thought. The development of intellectual abilities of an awareness of itself can only occur if the student recognizes the cultural heritage
of his/her society and participates in its expres-
sion, by appropriation. The verbal elaboration of
these meanings and senses is a safe way for ap-
propriation.

2 Didactic actions serving as guidelines for
the Developmental Education

The systematization of didactic principles has
also permitted the systematization of five didactic
actions that integrate them: 1. diagnosis as start-
ing point and process of teaching-learning-devel-
opment, 2. problematization as a generator of con-
tradiction: propelling crisis and the emergence of
interests, and being the driving force for the for-
mation of concepts, 3. collective activity, 4. the
patent consciousness in the intentional use of con-
ceptual meanings and 5. generalization as an ob-
jectification of the concept for itself.

2.1 Diagnosis as starting point and process
of teaching-learning-development

As long as the teacher recognizes the set of
real and potential abilities of his/her students, it
becomes possible the intentional planning of
teaching activities that will offer the best condi-
tions for the learning to occur, enabling develop-
ment. The abilities that comprise the Zone of
Proximal and Real Development are not immedi-
ately evident and are continuously moving and
transforming. From the initial diagnosis the
teacher is able to recognize the knowledge and
abilities already mastered by the students, and
then plan the teaching activities. Then, with con-
tinuous diagnosis, the teacher can enhance the
possibilities of potential abilities and knowledge
becoming real ones.

Problematization is a strategy that enables
continuous diagnosis both in the form of adequate
questions (idem) and problem situations [11]. It is
the teacher’s duty to permanently evaluate
changes in interests and patterns in students, since
these alterations are a sign of developmental pro-
cesses in action [15].

2.2 Problematization as a generator of con-
tradiction: propelling crisis and the emergence of
interests, and being the driving force for the for-
mation of concepts

Vygotsky [16] elucidates how adolescence is
a period of “crisis and thought maturation”. A typ-
ical feature of the transitional period is the estab-
ishment of new patterns of social relationships
and needs, when old abilities developed during
childhood prove no longer to be enough, and to
fulfill the demands of this new context. This tense
contradiction raises crisis, which for its turn gen-
ernates great possibilities for the occurrence of de-
velopmental processes.

The recognition of the crisis’ potential for de-
velopment plays a key role for the conception of
teaching practices. These are understood as pro-
cesses intentionally planned to provoke critical
situations. Teaching issues, a feature of the prob-
lematization strategy [11; 12], are devised in order
to demand a command of knowledge and abilities
more sophisticated than the one the student carries
in a given moment. This generates motivation in
learning a new content and favors the develop-
ment of the theoretical thinking. Problematiza-
tions act in the abilities circumscribed in the stu-
dents’ Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD),
highlighting the importance for continuous diag-
nosis, strategy previously described in this article.

2.3 Collective activity

The strategy of collective activity is a trans-
formative element in the transitional age, and
there are especially two reasons for this. First, be-
cause it takes advantage of the interests that are
already present in students, i.e. to be in close con-
tact with its peers, by bringing them closer to the
aims of education and the teaching practice. This
enables the teacher to bring up students’ interests
while instigating them to participate in activities,
habits and knowledge acquisition [15]. The sec-
ond reason makes reference to the relevance of collec-
tive activities in formation processes of
feelings, qualities and values [12].

Collective activities comprise opportunities
of being in action and relation to the historical and
-cultural elements that must be internalized. This
appropriation allows the formation of the concep-
tual thinking and, by doing so, transforms the psy-
chic structure of the subject, while modifying old
interests and establishing new standards of con-
duct [15; 16; 18; 19]. When mingled to the whole
of the teaching practice, collective activities rep-
resent a strategy that act as a driving force for pro-
cesses of appropriation and development.

2.4 The patent consciousness in the inten-
tional use of conceptual meanings
Consciousness refers to the intentional use of appropriate conceptual meanings; namely, to make a transference “from the course of action to the language system, recreating it in the imagination in a way that is possible to express it in words” [16, p. 275]. Consciousness results from the dialectical relation between the activity elaborated in the concrete reality, the internalized elements and the establishment of personal senses. This process enables the capacity of intentional use of appropriate conceptual meanings.

Vygotsky [15] demonstrates that, in what concerns the process of internalization, the possibility of understanding meanings walks hand in hand with language, either in its social use as a means of communication or in its individual application as a mode of thinking. Thus, the socialization of thought by language becomes “the decisive factor for the development of logical thinking in the transitional age” [15, p. 101]. Furthermore, the development of formation of concepts and of the conceptual thought becomes possible through the intentional use of the personal senses elaborated by study and the internalization of scientific and school knowledge.

2.5 Generalization as an objectification of the concept for itself

The concept modifies the complete thinking system of an adolescent by equipping him/her with tools of in-depth knowledge and reality comprehension, as well as tools for self-comprehension. This is achieved by showing the student the logical structures in action [15]. The concept can be characterized as a phenomenon of thought, particularly because it has a generalized meaning.

The student can develop the ability of intentional use by understanding his/her reality – that is, its generalization –, through the critical experience of recognition of his/her own limits, through facing problem situations and also through the awareness of concepts’ meanings. The concept has already an existence by itself, independently of student’s appropriation, but once it attains the superior ability of generalizing its meaning, it becomes an instrument of the student’s thinking, achieving an existence for itself. By being able to generalize, the student extrapolates the limits of reproduction of a memorized meaning, becoming able to understand his/her reality and also the phenomenon he observes, mediated by scientific concepts.

In general, these principles and didactic actions, although presented separately, constitute a set of practices that are deeply guided by the Cultural Historical Theory. They allow the successful establishment of a teacher’s practice-theory unit with the aim of promoting students’ learning and development.

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