

Sociocultural theory: potentialities to motivate the Cuban History class in universities

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on an analysis of the essential contents of L. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the most influential learning theory in the process of motivation in the teaching-learning of history. Its authors, from a punctual epistemological study, reveal its varied possibilities with respect to other learning theories, to awaken the interest of university students for the full knowledge of history. From this perspective, they stated as a fundamental objective the determination of the theoretical-methodological potentialities of the Sociocultural Theory to motivate the Cuban History class in Higher Education.

Keywords: Cuban History; Sociocultural theory; Teaching-learning motivation process.

Introduction

The teaching-learning of Cuban History has become a topic that has aroused the most varied debates in Cuban universities. Discussions have stated the need to support,

develop and apply procedures, methods and strategies to improve the teaching of this discipline. It has also been theorized about the introduction of novel didactic and pedagogical actions that dynamize its learning, to achieve that young university students know in depth the National History.

The priority that the scientific-methodological work of universities gives to the improvement of Cuban History learning, justifies the interest of raising the motivation of students for the complete knowledge of the homeland's history. In this article, its authors have stated as an objective to determine the fundamental theoretical-methodological potentialities of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to motivate the Cuban History class in Higher Education and to apply it creatively in the pedagogical practice.

The study undertaken provides a result, developed from the empirical method of consultation of specialized sources, to generalize an answer to the problem of how to determine the theoretical-methodological potentialities of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to motivate the Cuban History class in universities and to apply it creatively in the learning of that discipline. The research developed provided valuable information, whose data were generalized by means of the logical procedures of scientific knowledge, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction the authors selected the work materials, in correspondence with the demands of the scientific research developed.

The school is the institution that methodizes learning in order to direct the formation of individuals. In this process, the thinking of the subject becomes through the action of a complex network of interconnected intellectual operations, whose physiological basis is based on the sensory activity that directs the brain.

At school, most of the knowledge acquired by students is mediated by teaching actions directed by the teacher or professor. The learning that is achieved in this way is nuanced by the motivation that the teacher must project in order to attract the students' attention and concretize the apprehension of the planned knowledge.

The authors of the literature consulted coincide in affirming the existence of a large number of learning theories, all of them with their advantages and disadvantages. Of this wide variety of theories, among the most influential in the studies on learning motivation in Cuban history, the sociocultural theory stands out, whose essential methodological theoretical foundations are provided by the research of the Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovitch Vygotsky (1836-1934).

His theory explains the social origin of higher psychological processes, thus justifying the changes produced in human mental processes as a consequence of the appearance of transformations in the social and cultural organization of society. The studies carried out in this field focus on determining the purpose for which an individual learns, in the learning scenario provided by the school.

From the sociocultural theory, various social conceptions of learning have emerged that modify some of its postulates, while maintaining the essence of its theoretical contributions. Other conceptions pretend to present its results as a variant of the constructivist theory of learning. The sociological and psychological vision of learning offered by constructivism includes the psychogenetic theory of Jean William Fritz Piaget (1896-1980), the significant learning of David Paul Ausubel (1918-2008) and the information processing theory of Robert Mills Gagné (1916-2002). Thus, some authors have considered Vygotsky as the precursor of social constructivism. However, the epistemic bases that support their sociological and philosophical foundations differ from each other, because while constructivism is based on the principle that individuals construct their own conception of reality and the world in which they live, sociocultural theory places in the foreground the analysis of the predominant role that social interaction plays in cognitive development.

The constructivist theory, based on psychological and philosophical foundations opposed to Vygotsky's dialectical materialist positions, affirms that individuals form or construct a large part of what they learn and understand. Thus, learning is conceived in the manner of a construction of the subject as he or she organizes the information that comes from the environment with which he or she interacts. Therefore, from conceptions close to the subjective idealism of Emmanuel Kant (1725-1804), he considers that learning originates in the action conducted on the basis of a previous mental organization, which is constituted by structures and the structures by properly related schemas.

The referred mental organization is presented as the cognitive base that determines the mental capacity of the learner. For Piaget, mental structures or schemas constitute the basis of the intellectual organization that guides the individual's behavior. Thus, he explains that all schemas arise from the reciprocal assimilation of structures and their adjustment or accommodation to external reality. For Piaget, all structures are not always present at all levels of intellectual development of the subject, but are built progressively, in correspondence with the interactions of the learners, who actively

participate in their learning process, while the teacher develops teaching actions to favor the cognitive apprehension of the student.

In the same way that constructivists flirt with Kant's subjective idealism, to explain how individuals learn, the representatives of the Cognitive Theory, to explain the genesis and development of knowledge, follow Kant's postulates, who argued that all human knowledge "[...] begins with experience, not for that reason all of it originates in experience" (1973, p. 33). For the German philosopher, all human experience corresponds to representations and not to things by themselves. Cognitivism followed in the footsteps of Kant, for whom representations, as manifestations of the activity of pure reason and not as expressions of sensible activity, for this reason he stated: "I call pure (in the transcendental sense) all representations in which nothing belonging to sensation is found" (1973, p. 52).

However, like the followers of constructivism and cognitivism, they do not delve into the epistemological foundations, which explain learning from the conception of knowledge as a faithful reflection of reality in human consciousness, but of knowledge as a process of individual and subjective construction, the basis of cognitive development, which determines the subject's perception of the world. For this reason, they fail to put forward a convincing conception of the genesis, unfolding and enrichment of human knowledge, conceived as the epistemic essence of learning as a process of gradual apprehension of the object by the cognizing subject.

Development

The sociocultural theory also differs from the arguments offered by behaviorism about the genesis and development of learning, although it is based on an empiricist conception of knowledge, supported by studies of learning through conditioning, whose basic sequence is the thesis about knowledge as a result of stimulus-response action. Among the most renowned followers are: Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), John Watson (1878-1958), Edwin Guthrie (1886-1959), Edward Thorndike (1871-1949), Skinner (1904-1994) and Neal Miller (1909). These personalities coincide in the rational thesis, according to which research requires the rigorous application of the scientific method, and only admits the study of observable and objectively measurable learning.

The representatives of behaviorism, in general terms, do not understand human knowledge as a complex process of reflection of reality in the consciousness, but as a passive and automatic response to external stimuli from the environment. For them, the study of higher mental processes is fundamental for the understanding of human behavior, because they consider learning as the result of permanent changes in behavior, which in activity, practice and interaction with the environment are sustained by the subjects.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory takes the best of the learning theories of his time and on that basis develops a new conception of social learning, which is based on the idea that an individual learns, by observation, behaviors of his peers; that is, the individual captures and makes his own the behavioral patterns that the society to which he belongs provides him with. Depending on the stimulus received, the learned behaviors are reinforced or discarded.

The new vision of learning elaborated by Vygotsky is directed by the treatment of four conceptual nodes, whose treatment crosses transversally his theorization about learning: mediation, internalization, mental functions and the zone of proximal development. In dealing with the issue of mediations, he starts by affirming that the activity of the learning subject (student) involves a mediated social practice, which imposes the use of tools and signs for learning. In this process, the student through his activity transforms the cultural environment and at the same time internalizes or internalizes it; that is to say, he makes it his own, incorporating it into the individual, intrapsychological plane. Through internalization, the student achieves the capacity to act on his own and to assume responsibility for his actions. It is about the student "[...] adopting an active and critical position in the teaching-learning process; this implies inserting himself in the search, elaboration and transformation of information, which leads to the production of new knowledge or the remodeling of existing knowledge." (Mauri et al, 2019, p. 6)

According to Ortiz (2021), the treatment of the epistemological foundations of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is an essential requirement, because it is a condition for its holistic understanding, both for students to know it in its entirety, and to promote active debate in the classroom or other academic scenarios on the deficiencies that are manifested by their ignorance or underestimation. In these contexts, Vygotsky's conception should be analyzed, according to which, in organized sociocultural contexts, cultural mediation takes part through the intervention of the context and sociocultural

means, and the higher psychological processes originate and are shaped: intelligence, language and moral convictions as a conscious ethical resource for regulating activity.

With the concept zone of proximal development (ZPD) Vygotsky refers to the ideal space that mediates between the actual level of development that a student manifests in his or her formative environment and the level of potential development that he or she can reach under the guidance of the teacher or tutor. The learning potential (potential intelligence) is present in students who, with the help of their teachers and the use of procedures, methods and other external means, such as new technologies, create conditions conducive to the development, in the intellect, of the capacities necessary for learning. The zone of proximal development is enriched and enhances learning to the extent that it facilitates interactions among students and the use of the knowledge and experience of others who are more advanced by those who are lagging behind. Therefore, the zone of proximal development is socially determined and learning takes place in the realm of social interaction or ZPD.

The sociocultural theory grants a relevant role to culture and to the teaching-learning-development relationship, whose interaction makes human activity transcend the social environment. Vygotsky's vision of learning as a social activity overcomes the approaches offered until then by other theories that reduced it to a process of particular realization, which manifests itself as an elementary activity of production and reproduction of knowledge, which allows the child the individualized assimilation of social modes of action and interaction.

With Vygotsky, the principle of the active character of the subject loses the subjective foundation that Immanuel Kant had imbued it with and reaches an objective and truly human dimension, because he presents it as the quality that allows the subject to project himself towards the conscious transformation of the social environment that surrounds him. In this regard Patiño (2007) states:

Only the complete formation of actions and internal operations can lead the student to the authentic mastery of knowledge, skills, modes of action of a professional know-how, based on the deontological requirements. This allows perceiving him as a subject in the process of formation within the framework of the potentialities of teaching, that is to say, as an individual who assumes an active character with regard to his orientation and his relationship with a given historical context, from where he gradually consolidates the development of his cognitive independence, which translates into an authentic mastery of the professional skills explicit in the curriculum (p. 57).

The Russian researcher considers that the development of human culture takes place through activity, as a process that mediates the relationship between man and his objective reality. That is to say, for the notable intellectual, activity becomes the essential nucleus of social and human development, therefore, the generating force of socializing learning, which starts from the methodized treatment of the content of a curriculum adjusted to the formative needs of the students. The cultural contribution that Cuban history makes to the education of students in universities, "[...] assumes that teaching provides the required conditions, not only for the formation of the student's cognitive activity, for the development of his thinking, abilities and skills, but also for the different aspects of his personality". (Solis and Lopez, 2020, p. 14)

Thus, in this theory, the social and cognitive factors go hand in hand and both are presented as components of a supreme factor: culture, which is presented as the result of human creation. From this perspective, the subject is conceived as a transforming entity that produces and processes information and exchanges critically with its model to follow. In this process, the subject models the path to follow in order to enrich his knowledge, while perfecting his behaviors, skills and modes of action, in correspondence with the development of the social environment in which he acts.

The teaching-learning process is mediated by various factors that stimulate or limit its results. In this sense, motivation intervenes as one of the most important forces that activate and guide behavior. In Cuban universities, student motivation towards learning activities in Cuban history is one of the fundamental issues to be taken into account when planning the teaching of this pedagogical discipline and student learning. Motivation, understood as the activated motive, by its human nature is essentially sensitive and emotional. From that perspective, it is the guide that orients the student to obtain a meaningful learning of historical contents.

In the "[...] teaching-learning process (TLP) developed in engineering careers, it is necessary to deal with the History of Cuba, to enhance the patriotic and revolutionary culture of students, from the perspective of their future performance as professionals [...]" (Navarro et al, 2021, p. 206). In this process, motivation participates as a psycho-pedagogical resource of proven effectiveness, to awaken the interest of students in learning the history of the homeland.

Other pedagogical and didactic factors that influence the effectiveness of this process intervene in the motivation for learning the History of Cuba. In the first place, the teacher must creatively apply the principles and laws of Didactics in his teaching, to

facilitate the deployment, by his students, of all the attention to achieve an autonomous and effective learning of the contents: knowledge, skills, values and ways of acting. Secondly, the teacher must transmit to the students all the orientations that will allow them to know how to face the challenge of fully apprehending the contents taught. Thirdly, the teacher will guarantee an integral organization of the school activities related to the teaching of Cuban History and the forms of concretion and evaluation of their learning. Fourth, the teacher will apply the motivational strategy that best promotes learning. Fifth, the teacher models in the students the behavior, values, skills and modes of action that stimulate interest in learning.

The sociocultural theory of learning recognizes the importance of joint activity and encourages the transformation of students, from their active role in the acquisition of historical content. From that perspective, it promotes the cooperative relationship among students, and between them and the teacher, who fulfills the function of orienting and guiding the teaching-learning process of Cuban History to increase "[...] their possibilities; to turn into reality the potentialities of their zone of proximal development; from what students can do with the help of the teacher until achieving the internalization of the steps for the execution of operations on their own."(García et al, 2014, pp. 467-468)

The pedagogical and didactic factors analyzed, constitute starting points for the creative application of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the Sociocultural Theory, as supports for the motivation of learning Cuban History. In this sense, it is essential to have a socio-pedagogical and psychological knowledge of the factors that favor or limit students' learning, in order to accurately determine the real potential (zdp) for the realization of learning. "This contribution of Vygotsky's cultural historical approach is doubly important in that it must be taken into account in order to carry out a successful intervention diagnosis." (Garcia et al, 2014, p. 460)

For Vygotsky, human motivation appears twice, first at the interpsychological level and then at the intrapsychological level. The manifestation of human motivation is linked to the development of the different brain structures involved in the motivational process. Morphologically, these structures have a hierarchical structure. Thus, recent structures (limbic or temporal frontal cortex) favor the realization of certain social practices or may condition the development of new functional connections, which explain why certain individuals like the study of historical sciences. For this reason, motivation

follows two paths: that of satisfying needs and that of controlling access to the source of satisfaction of these needs.

In his social behavior, the environment imposes on the individual, that the development of his vital activity, adjusts to very determined patterns of hemostatic regulation. But the development of the personality leads him to use more open processes to concentrate his interest in certain purposes, such as incentives. It is at this stage that the educator must play a fundamental educational role in order to prevent external reward from prevailing over intrinsic motivation. Therefore, in the learning of Cuban History this mechanism can be applied, but once the student's engagement has been achieved, it is necessary to lead him gradually towards intrinsic motivation. "But it cannot be forgotten that motives give the subject's activity its direction, orientation and meaning." (Silis and Lopez, 2020, p. 14)

The Vygostkian vision of learning as a social activity, which has its fundamental scenario in the school, although it has other social scenarios such as the family and the community, contains a formative potential of great value to understand the dynamics of the students' personality development. In the school (University) various strategies are developed to motivate the learning of Cuban History, such as permanently updating the curriculum, to link the discipline to the history of the profession and bring it closer to the interests of the students' professional training.

In the classroom, the Cuban History teacher, in order to motivate the learning of his students, must take advantage of the social environment generated by teaching, to stimulate the self-esteem of the students who present better results, while encouraging the less outstanding ones to place themselves at the same level of the most advanced ones. However, this activity requires the need to foster self-regulation systems that consolidate motivational patterns based on types of goals to promote learning from the unity of the group and fair recognition of the best results. Likewise, regulation should encourage joint and cooperative preparation among students and recognize the manifestation of attitudes and modes of action that accredit the fulfillment of the formative objectives set forth in the curriculum.

Affective, emotional and sentimental processes are involved in the learning of the discipline studied. They also mediate the cognitive processes of senso-perception, reasoning and memory. The motivation of students towards study and learning is linked to the development of will, emotions and character. For the teacher of this discipline, student motivation requires mastering the art of attracting, of stimulating the desire to

know, of creating interest in research, and of awakening curiosity for new knowledge. The Cuban history teacher must be prepared to apply the most effective teaching methodology to achieve motivated and autonomous learning in their students. They must also attract the attention of their students by the fulfillment of the formative objectives, which from discipline direct the learning of historical contents. Researchers Morera and Morera (2020) consider that teachers must be clear about what they motivate their students for. In this sense, they affirm that, in order to project themselves into the future, students turn to history in search of knowing the past as a condition for understanding the present of the world and the society in which they live.

Likewise, history allows them to develop a critical sense, with which it is possible to analyze the root of problems and reach conclusions. They can also study other cultures and social realities, which enable them to obtain a general culture. In the same way, they are able to strengthen their sense of national and cultural identity. History provides the tools to work on the ethical dimension of social life. Through history, students develop skills in the methodology of scientific research, valid for analyzing the evolution of social phenomena and contextualizing them. "History is the fundamental resource available to the educator to teach students to think and defend their ideas with arguments, to appropriate values, and to know their roots." (p. 10)

According to Vygotsky, both in production and in cognitive activity, there is a permanent appropriation of knowledge generated in the historical process. In this process of cultural appropriation, language manifests itself as the mediating and formative axis of consciousness. This action is revealed as the concentrated expression of the link between thought and word, as fundamental spiritual and material substrates of the communicational discourse, through which Cuban history teachers transmit to their students the knowledge, skills, values and modes of action that concretize the formative role of that discipline.

- a) As a conclusion of the analysis, it is recommended that the Cuban History teacher in universities review the evaluation strategy applied in this discipline, because the excessive priority given to written exams can lead students to believe that they are studying to obtain knowledge immediately, without taking into account the value of the knowledge that lasts as meaningful learning. In this sense, teachers should vary their respective evaluation systems, and in correspondence with the diagnosis of their students, proceed to seek a balance between written and oral evaluations,

between frequent and partial evaluations, using all the possibilities offered by the different forms of teaching to apply the evaluative exercises most conducive to stimulating learning. In this way, among other evaluative actions, he/she can guide the implementation of independent study activities that favor the exchange, reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation of the answers provided by other students in the group. Likewise, he/she should "[...] demand the substantiation of ways and procedures used in the exercises and value their solution; in addition, he/she should encourage that within his/her classes there are always spaces for reflection and that the debate is enriched by the criteria of all." (Solís and López, 2020, p. 14).

Conclusions

In the field of education, the sociocultural theory of learning explains the processes that allow students to interpret, understand and access knowledge. The object of this theory revolves around what skills, abilities, competencies and experiences individuals develop in order to learn. It studies the processes of acquiring the skills necessary to apply knowledge in daily activities, explains how to promote changes in personality and explains what methodological resources are needed by subjects to transform, from the knowledge learned, the social and natural reality. It also examines the theoretical foundations and experiences necessary for the formulation of effective learning methods.

In the same way, it allows the design of processes to access new knowledge, from an approach that places in the foreground of critical analysis the behavior or the ability to conduct a subject. It also studies emotions and learning as an intellectual process. On the other hand, it provides proposals for solutions to theoretical and practical problems that limit the cognitive exchange between subjects and their respective objects of knowledge, and promotes an immediate solution to problems that hinder learning or draw attention to the study of other variables that allow solving the situation stated.

The sociocultural theory of learning is characterized by offering Cuban history teachers a complex theoretical framework, valid to be applied in the foundation of the research processes that are necessary to undertake. Its dynamics of theoretical development strives to reflect the state that the conceptualization of learning is gradually reaching.

The theory of sociocultural learning has solid philosophical, psychological, pedagogical or sociological foundations, whose generalization provides a rich variety of approaches to the learning process of Cuban history and its links with motivational strategies, which are directed towards the enrichment of knowledge in the country's universities. At the same time, these supports constitute research fields that are in constant informative interaction, because their foundations explain many of the phenomena that characterize the motivated learning of this discipline.