The Teaching View on Children: Implications in Affective Relationships and the Self-evaluation Process

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze how teachers see children and the affective relations with them in the classroom, through their own expressions. Moreover, aims to analyze how teachers understand the role of conflict for the child's education in Kindergarten and Elementary School and how they provide information for the review of their assessment practices. The methodological approach was based on semi-structured interviews, which had as main theoretical framework — to support the categories of analysis, reflections and conclusions — the psychogenic theory of Henri Wallon. The guiding hypothesis is that in Elementary School affective relationships are increasingly avoided by the educators, in an effort to promote the cognitive development of children, while in Kindergarten, because of the strong presence of caring, affection manifests mode apparent. This assumption has not been confirmed. With regard to evaluation, the work is guided by the Regulatory Guideline nº 1/2014 — Evaluation in Early Childhood Education, the Department of the city of São Paulo Education.

Key words: childhood, affective relationships, self-assessment

1. Introduction

This work stems from some of the concerns raised in Henri Wallon's group of studies on psychogenetics, composed of students and teachers from different institutions of higher education (public and private). From the theoretical point of view, the author's works focused on the complexity of human formation, grounded in social relations and the environment in which the person is immersed on the importance of the school; on the role of the educator and, finally, on the culture in this formation. From a practical point of view, there are the events experienced by the students in their curricular stages.

It is our intention to present the conclusions of this research, from 2014, because of the understanding of how founding is the availability of materials that allow teachers to evaluate their own work, as well as reflect on how they understand their students and, consecutively, their role in their training, since their vision also composes the evaluation process about their students. After all, it is known that "... the teaching judgment is based in fact on a set of fuzzy criteria, never explicit, standardized or systematized ..." (Bourdieu, Saint-Martin, 2007, p. 192).

This view, although it lacks foundation in the theory and conceptions of educational evaluation, including the evaluation of learning, is very often present in the school environment. However, if appraisal of learning consists of collecting relevant data using strategies that demonstrate it, then requiring analysis of what has actually been

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achieved and based on what one wanted to achieve, in order to provide for possible and necessary interventions, there is no way to explain the lack of clear and guiding criteria for school evaluation practice (Luckesi, 2011). On the other hand, Article 3, item I, of the aforementioned "Normative Guideline" states that early childhood education will have "[...] evaluation through monitoring and registration of children's development, without the objective of promotion, even for access to Elementary School" (SME/DOT, 2014, p.10).

In this sense, this work has the objective of understanding, through the teachers' report, how they perceive children and how they understand the affective relationships they maintain with them in the classroom. In addition, it proposes to analyze how these same teachers perceive the role of conflicts in the formation of the child that is found in the last level of education of Infant (kindergarten) and in the first level of Primary Education (Elementary School).

As a methodological procedure for data collection, the semi-structured interview was characterized by "[...] a series of open questions, made verbally in a planned order, but in which the interviewer can add clarifying questions" (LaVille & Dionne, 1999, p.187). Such a choice was more appropriate because it was a small number of subjects, because it is possible "... a more intimate contact between the interviewer and the interviewee, thus favoring an in-depth exploration of their knowledge, as well as their representations, their beliefs and values" (LaVille & Dionne, 1999, p. 189). It should be noted that the subjects of this research were two teachers: one from the last stage of Kindergarten and the other from the first year of Elementary School.

Based on the reports, records and discussions brought by the students who participate in our study group and who experienced the obligatory curricular traineeship in these respective segments of teaching, a hypothesis emerged: in Elementary Education, affective relationships are increasingly avoided by teachers, in an attempt to promote the cognitive development of children, whereas, in Kindergarten, due to the strong presence of caring, affectivity tends to be more manifest.

The main theoretical reference, both to support the categories and the analyses and conclusions, was the psychogenetic theory of Henri Wallon, through which a series of questions broke out in the study group.

From the raw material of interviews and support of Wallon's concepts, the analysis' categories were organized so that it was possible to identify in the speech of the teachers interviewed: how they perceive the child; how their affective relations in class occurred; what was their view of the conflicts between children.

2. Results and Discussions

On the way children were perceived, the last-year educator of Kinderdarten, here called "I" (in reference to the stage of Early Childhood Education - Infancy), seemed to constantly invest in attempts to make them more "adult", "fewer children" and more "students".

In her speech she said that some aspects of the child's personality and intelligence are innate and there was nothing she could do to change them. This strongly reflected her relationships with the little ones.

In her speech, she appeared to be a teacher who took distance from affective manifestations, even saying that they should not occur in school spaces. From her point of view, children should be prepared well before, around the age of four, to "face" the difficulties that were to come in Elementary School. She hoped that the ones that had difficulties would become aware of this confrontation and, from that, they would mature, so that they could reach Elementary School.

The Elementary School teacher, who will be named "E" (in allusion to the elementary level), seemed to

understand the children in a more integrated way, realizing that cognitive and emotional aspects are interdependent.

In her speech, it was possible to perceive her attempts to adapt the activities to achieve a better development on the part of the children, always presenting stimuli, not charges, trying to understand the point of view and the needs of the children. The relationship she believed to be in the classroom is reflected in her position on child development, since she understands the need for children to receive attention, to express themselves and to be stimulated, so she tries to consider those needs. An example of this is the "conversation circle", which the educator considered essential because it is one of the spaces in which children's needs are verbally exposed, as well as their feelings.

The teacher "E" believes that the transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School should be a time of acceptance in which the pressure, often from the part of parents and some teachers, is not beneficial to learning, as they expect children to have a maturity that they have not yet acquired, bringing insecurity to them.

It is quite interesting to note that teacher "E" promotes conversations with children on various subjects and those that are of their interest. They are themes of experiences that have had a positive or negative impact on their lives and that they do not understand them alone, but the teacher plays then a mediating role, helping verbalize such experiences. This role is emphasized if we think that the construction of our subjectivity and the objectification of the world occurs at the same time; in this direction, the teacher promotes activities that help to see the world with greater objectivity and, therefore, with less subjectivity and syncretism. Wallon (1986, p. 50) gives examples that demonstrate:

> (…) the state of dispersal that precedes the time when the child will be able to identify at the same time his personality and that of others, removing them from the particular situations in which they are continually confused. As long as the child is not able to reduce to something permanent the different aspects of its personality and that of others, aspects that arise from circumstances and overcome them, the situations in which life disperses will keep the child itself dispersed or divided. The child does not know how to perceive consistency in situations, nor, therefore, in its own conduct or in its knowledge of people. In similar situations or circumstances, the child is tempted to confuse different subjects and, conversely, to disassociate the same subject into as many characters as the child has had the opportunity to witness under different conditions. The child itself is not always sure of its own identity, or at least does not even give the child precedence over the changes in its relationships with the people in her environment.

On the other hand, the educator "E", understanding the children as beings of innate and immutable behaviors, demonstrates to believe that the school has little to offer them, thus emptying the teacher's role and its relevance in human formation. We cannot overlook the fact that some human characteristics are indeed innate and immutable.

The human organism has an organized biological logic, as an evolution prescribed by the human body follows an organized biologic logic, like the evolution defined in the genes and related to a maturation calendar that predicts natural functions that appear each one in its own time, controlled by neurological and hormonal processes. However, there are functions open to the influences of the environment.

This is not a limitless opening, as many mistakenly understand, but it is definitely that opening that sets us apart from other animals; is what allows our humanization; allows placing the human being in a time and in a social context; is the openness to the functions of social adaptation, which need material to become effective. This material embraces society and everything it produces; in other words, is the culture: "[...] our knowledge, progressing and transforming, are, in each epoch, the witness of the laws and structures that our techniques allow us to discover and put into play in nature" (Wallon, 1979, p. 124).

The child speaks the language used around them. You cannot do it until you're biologically prepared. On the other hand, the child's speech and thinking only evolve in contact with the people in the environment in which the child lives. Deprived of this contact, the speech function is frustrated. It is through social relationships that the child receives material for the language and thoughts to evolve.

Regarding the affective relationships that they had with the children in the school environment, the answers of the professionals "I" and "E" were again divergent. For "I", it seemed more difficult to outline the kind of relationship she had in class with her students, as if the affective relationship was not relevant enough to be questioned. When asked if there were students in the room who showed more emotional demand and what was her attitude in these cases, she answered that in some situations, she asked a child to talk to that colleague who was crying to try to help him/her, justifying that it would not be possible kiss or hug everyone in a room with thirty children. At other times, she would talk to the child, but if she noticed an unmotivated cry, she did nothing.

This teacher seemed not to feel very comfortable in maintaining an affectionate relationship with the children, especially with physical demonstrations of affection, but she also touches on an important point: the high number of children per room. A problem undoubtedly prevents a closer and individualized effort by a single teacher in the classroom.

Teacher "E", on the other hand, has shown she feels comfortable answering questions about her relationship with children, giving examples and looking happy about the bonds they had created during the year. In addition to the physical aspects, such as kissing and hugging, this educator also gave examples of how their relationship occurs when a child needs to be warned, using this opportunity to discuss with the group through a good conversation.

This action can be very important and positive in children's development since, in order to achieve the movement to leave an affective syncretism and move towards a differentiation of this field, language can be a powerful resource, allowing the naming of emotions to better understand them. In this direction, the work that the teacher performs — to talk and thus objectify this subject — becomes something very significant for the affective control and the strengthening of the self. The fact that the teacher recognizes the importance of raising themes related to affectivity is very positive.

Children are strongly attracted to adults, especially the teacher, and as such, they have the possibility to strengthen this affectionate relationship in such a way that mediation between educator, child and knowledge is increasingly facilitated.

Henri Wallon understands emotions as part of a larger field, which is affectivity. Of an organic and therefore bodily nature, emotion is a physiological fact, but it is also a social behavior, as its meaning is only perceived in relation to others. In this way, emotion is understood as a factor of union between organic activity and psychic activity, which makes it possible to rescue the idea of a being integrated in body and mind, and more, an organically social being, which absolutely needs to be related to continue to exist.

> [...] the first systems of reactions organized under the influence of the environment, the emotions, tend only to realize, through consonant and contagious manifestations, a fusion of sensitivities between the individual and those around him. They can undoubtedly be regarded as the origin of consciousness because, by the play of determined attitudes, they express and fix for the subject itself certain specific dispositions of his sensibility. But they are only the starting point of their personal consciousness through the group where they begin by fusing it and from which it will receive the differentiated formulas of action and the intellectual instruments without which it would be impossible to operate the distinctions and the classifications necessary to the knowledge of things and of him (Wallon, 1986, p. 145).

On the other hand, with the strengthening of cognitive activity, the motricity tends to be reduced and the movement becomes integrated with the intelligence, as if has being internalized. In the antagonism between motor act and mental act, during the long process of strengthening the latter, on the occasion of the increasing acquisition of the domain of cultural signs, motricity, in its kinetic dimension, tends to reduce, to virtualize itself in a mental act.

In this way, the ideational process, representing the world, originates in the motor action on the physical environment. In pretend play, children resort to movement to make an object present: the act of opening the tap and rubbing themselves as if they were bathing are examples of symbolic gestures that are at the origin of representation.

A teacher who values only cognitive aspects of development should be more aware of how relationships mediated by affectivity, fantasy and play potentialize the triggering of cognitive functions. Educator "I", with her vision and ways of acting, represses such manifestations, wasting valuable opportunities for the education of her students. For Wallon, the meaning of emotions must be sought over the human environment, not the physical environment.

Now we will move to discuss the role of conflict relations and the teachers' view of them.

3. The Mediation of Conflicts in the Professor-Student Relationship

In class, "E" says that conflicts exist, but they should not be seen as alarming, but rather natural. According to her the conflict, besides being part of the developmental of the child, being "typical for this age", is also intrinsic to the human being and, therefore, cannot be avoided. She believes that conflicts are a way for children to learn to deal with each other, to understand the need to respect others and the rules of living, not just in school, but outside it as well.

Teacher "I" understands conflicts in the school environment differently, linking the conflicts to the reality of students with family problems. She believes that conflicts seem to have different motivations: either the student wants to assert her/himself, or follows examples of what the students sees at home.

The educator, in the end, states that if conflicts did not exist, she would probably "advance" more with the students. She sees conflicts as something that decreases development, as if they are not part of human nature, but something that hinders the development of the child. It is worth noting that although this process is seen as negative, extrinsic and development-constraining, this teacher can observe it as a way for the child to assert itself in tumultuous relationships, a view also shared by our theorist, yet he does not see it as negativity, on the contrary.

Henri Wallon emphasizes the importance of conflicts as something that constitutes the human person, its identity, being a necessary reality for the formation of psychic life. By the age of three, for example, crises of opposition allow the child to investigate, to discover and to understand more of it, forming the contours of its identity from the preservation and affirmation of the self.

Through a phase of emotional character, the child constitutes its identity from the relations and oppositions that the child establishes with his peers, and it is in this sense that the conflict is seen as a movement necessary to the formation of the identity, and not as something negative.

From this perspective, physical aggression from children can be analyzed as something constitutive, since voluntary control of movement is not easy to achieve. Such control only occurs only around six or seven years, with the maturation of centers of inhibition and discrimination of the cerebral cortex (Wallon, 1968). Until then, it

is difficult for the child to stay in the same position for a long time and to react very bodily to external stimuli. It is here that the role of the school is emphasized for the promotion and strengthening of voluntary behaviors, so that the child can postpone immediate and spontaneous actions, planning his action (Galvão, 1995).

In Kindergarten, in turn, it is recurrent to find children who use biting as a resource in disputes for space or a toy. It is up to the teacher to help them verbalizing this action, that is, instead of the act, it can say "I did not like it", encouraging that an involuntary and emotive action becomes a voluntary and cognitive action.

It is interesting to note the different perspectives of the educators interviewed. The teacher "E" understands the child as an integral being, with emotional reactions typical of the age in which they are, recognizes their needs and has actions converging on this idea. The teacher "I", in turn, discredits the potential of the school and the teacher to promote formative actions, healthy relationships in a stimulating environment. However, school education can make a difference in the constitution of human beings living in adverse environments. And Wallon's theory has the potential to alert us to this.

4. Final Considerations

Through the data collected, it was possible to perceive that the interviewed teachers have visions that are quite divergent from each other, so that the hypothesis that guided this research was not confirmed: in Elementary Education, affective relationships are increasingly avoided by teachers, in an attempt to promote the cognitive development of children, whereas, in Early Childhood Education, due to the strong presence of caring, affectivity tends to be more manifest.

In the light of Henri Wallon's psychogenetic theory, we come to the conclusion that in primary school, affective relationships are not avoided, since the teacher is clear that such relationships constitute an important component for the development of children. On the contrary, it is in the last stage of Kindergarten that we find actions more linked to cognitive development with less presence of affective relationships on the part of the teacher. These are actions guided by the way the teacher conceives her children, that is, as beings of innate and immutable behaviors, about which the school has no transformational power.

The theoretical framework selected for this study is quite consistent, since Henri Wallon is quite easily transited by Anthropology, Medicine, Biology, Psychology and Philosophy. On the other hand, this research still does not offer generalizations, considering the number of subjects involved. The need to expand studies with more teachers, as well as in other schools, including broadening the collection of data beyond the interviews, with, for example, observation of the daily life of the classes is recognized.

Here it is recorded the importance of teachers bringing to consciousness the lens through which they see children, how they relate to them and how they understand the dynamics of child development. After all, "For the child, it is only possible to live your childhood. To know it belongs to the adult" (Wallon, 1986, p. 68). In this sense, the aforementioned Normative Guidance, based on the Curriculum Frameworks of Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) and resolution CNE/CEB No. 5/2009, indicates that pedagogical proposals must respect ethical, political and aesthetic principles and aim guaranteeing the child access to processes of appropriation, renewal and articulation of knowledge and learning of different languages (SME/DOT, 2014).

With reference to the role of evaluation in this context, it should be emphasized that its value lies in the task of producing consistent knowledge about what one wants and needs to know. In the case of students, it is necessary to know not only what they have learned, but how they learned, that is, what difficulties and factors

contributed to this learning. Thus, it is considered that the educator should intervene in infancy in order to "... offer, in each circumstance, the necessary resources for children's activity, in order to challenge, promote interactions, arouse curiosity, mediate conflicts" to that end, a participatory observer (SME/DOT, 2014, p. 15).

Still in this context, it is considered that the teacher of childhood should use these elements to "[...] compile reports to follow the learning process in a descriptive way, focusing on the experiences lived and still , to elaborate materials that can support families, both in the knowledge and in the accompaniment of the educational process" (SME/DOT, 2014, p. 17).

In this way, it is relevant to include in this debate the contribution of Vygotsky (1996) and its well-known concept of Proximal Development Zone (ZPD), which provides us with essential elements that allow us to mediation able to overcome the obstacles encountered.

Finally, it should be remembered that evaluation is fulfilled while fostering the dialogue that leads to self-understanding and self-assessment, and affective relationships are intrinsically related to the evaluation process, both in the teaching-learning aspect and in the a self-assessment in relation to the knowledge and practices of teachers.

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