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The Network of Meanings and Educational Psychology: Theoretical and Practical Possibilities

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Abstract

This paper raises questions regarding the practices of educational psychologists in the school context. The aim is to contribute to the construction of practical knowledge by presenting a study of how the theoretical perspective of the Network of Meanings can help professionals structure their practices in school settings. The dialogue surrounding the practice and the theoretical perspective of the Network of Meanings reveals that educational psychology is involved in all work levels of the school space: pedagogical, administrative and political. In addition, the theory's multi-dimensional approach to human development provides input to reflect on the role of educational psychologists in schools as a whole. Thus, the Network of Meanings approach is considered as an important framework to discuss, elaborate and implement educational psychology practices in the school space.

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1. Introduction

Reporting research results is always a task that challenges the author's ability to identify and prioritize findings that are guided by the objectives of the research. However, reporting considerations related to practice is more complex, as the researcher must narrow down the important elements seen, through the eyes of those who have lived the experience and which are inter-connected, equal parts of the process. The discussions revealed here originated from an analysis of the systematized practices of five educational psychologists and an examination of the theoretical

perspective of the Network of Meanings as a methodological framework to understand human development and to structure actions towards that development in the school context. The purpose is to raise questions regarding educational psychologists' objectives in schools, highlighting the possibilities and contributions for pedagogical matters, with a focus on human development rather than health\clinical services in school.

In this sense, and with the intention of preserving objectivity in this limited space, the ideas are presented from four perspectives. First, we point out important considerations regarding the theoretical perspective of the Network of Meanings, while understanding the educational psychologist's role in the contemporary educational setting, especially the Brazilian environment. Next, we briefly explain how the data was constructed and offer a contextualization of the educational setting where this work originated, thereby establishing a platform for those discussions considered relevant in the interlacing of the specific theoretical framework and educational psychology. Finally, are addressed elements that were found to be important but not yet explored, such as concerns with the training of educational psychologists that thus far, in some graduate universities in Brazil, have not prepared psychology students to perform in schools, but more often in psychological offices.

1.1 Educational Psychology and its challenges

Educational psychology as a field of study and a focus of psychological research is a relatively recent phenomenon that is growing and becoming widely debated globally due to its potential contributions in the educational context. However, despite efforts to disseminate research results and the accumulated field knowledge, difficulties with identifying the outcomes in school practices and educational policies persist (Anderman, 2011). Educational psychology is more often recognized in studies directly related to health and the education of teachers in the school context (e.g., Caprara, Barbanelli, Steca & Malone, 2006; Garner & Waajid, 2008; Pyhältö, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2010; Patrick, Anderman, Bruening & Duffin, 2011; Lohse-Bossenz, Kunina-Habenicht & Kunter, 2013). Thus, this research aims to contribute to educational practices by analysing the role of the educational psychologist in the school space, reinforcing the potential of this practice through a critical educational view (Marinho-Araújo, 2010; Maluf, 2003).

This critical perspective means that topics such as violence, learning difficulties, school engagement and dropout, that were and still are the focus of studies in the area (Meira & Tanamachi, 2003; Goeke-Morey et al., 2012; Borges et al., 2011), must be reviewed within the practical perspective of psychological work inside schools. The initial exploration of these subjects will revolve around discussions about the environment where these phenomena occur and the individuals who participate in the process (Martinez, 2005; 2010; Almeida, 2003; Souza, 2007; Marinho-Araújo, 2010).

These discussions aim to build two main ideas. First, in the professional practice sphere, the aim is to dissect the structure of psychotherapeutic service and the follow-ups that are exclusively focused on questions related to mental health in school. The second is to develop a work that is oriented to assist the schooling process and to develop the social relationships within school space/institutions (Oliveira & Marinho-Araújo, 2009; Patto 1990; Angelucci, Kalmus, Paparelli & Patto, 2004), thereby deconstructing ideas that deposit exclusively the responsibility of development on the individual and disregard the social processes (Souza, 2007). Therefore, by considering the situation where the educational psychologist is part of the school's staff, questions are raised regarding the professional education/training to act in the school context, an issue that has been examined from different perspectives.

Referring to the Brazilian setting, aligned with the continuous demand for consideration and discussion about this topic, the struggle for recognition and amplification of the psychologist's work within schools still faces great challenges. In the political/economic arena, obstacles exist regarding the implementation of the regulation (PL 3688/2000) that addresses educational psychology services in all public schools; and, also, in the educational ambit, regarding the appropriate training for these professionals. Therefore, it is necessary to illuminate the reflections and practices about educational psychology that indicate its possible role and contributions to this field of knowledge in the school community, especially to elementary education.

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