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Methodological and epistemological demands in advancing the study of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint

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Abstract

Historically, psychology has given little attention to the ontological definition of its main theoretical representations and has consequently avoided the epistemological and methodological challenges that new theoretical constructions should have implied. This fact, to some extent, has resulted from the rupture between psychology, particularly American psychology (Note: I refer to American psychology not only because it was characterized by this theoretical orientation, but also because at the beginning of the 20th century American psychology came to have a position of leadership in world psychology, due both to its level of organization as well as to its growing number of publications.), and philosophy and the other social sciences since the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, American psychology is strongly oriented toward being recognized as a natural science. In following that goal, methodology has been an object of special attention to the detriment of theory and epistemology. That "methodolatry," has defined the trend in psychology of considering above on methodology as scientific, independent of the problems to be studied and of its requirements in terms of knowledge production. In fact, the methodology of psychology has oriented itself up until the present toward five main ontological definitions of what psyche is: behavioral, cognitivist, semiotic operational, linguistic, and discursive, with emotions being understood as epiphenomena within each of these representations.

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There were some important antecedents in psychology that, implicitly or explicitly, were critical of this dominant methodological orientation of psychology. Allport (1967, 1978), as a pioneer in questioning the kind of generalization that was hegemonic in psychological research, was critical of the empiricism and instrumentalism that was hegemonic in psychology. Freud implicitly developed new epistemological principles that led to a new means of knowledge production through clinical practices (Freud, 2011), while K. Lewin and his team were the only psychologists to explicitly interrelate epistemological and methodological questions in their discussions (Dembo, 1993).

The low level of interest in theory on the part of psychology has been so pronounced that psychology has not been capable of looking back at its antecedents in order to propose its own version of doing qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology became fashionable in psychology in the 1980s, mainly on the basis of what was being done at that time in education, anthropology and sociology (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; among others). It was introduced within psychology without any kind of new theoretical proposal from which new epistemological demands could emerge, toward which a new kind of methodology could have been oriented.

The main theoretical umbrella used for all the qualitative approaches that proliferated in psychology in the 1980s was phenomenology (Giorgi, 1995). As a result of the lack of philosophical knowledge that characterized psychology, those psychologists that began to use such methodologies without any theoretical basis declared themselves as phenomenologists. However, those versions of qualitative psychology that assumed phenomenology as their theoretical basis characterized themselves by their descriptive/inductive character, making experience, as it was related by the other, their main focus of attention.

The cultural-historical tradition in psychology, as it developed in Soviet psychology, influenced many approaches in Western psychology, most of which have had their origins in American psychology: socio-cultural psychology, cultural historical, activity theory, cultural psychology and so on. However, it also influenced, to a lesser extent, other Western strands, such as German Critical Psychology and some of the authors within social constructionism and cognitivism.

The emphasis on the social origins of psychical processes was a general characteristic of all of the approaches that are integrated around the label of cultural psychology. However, as Valsiner (2014) states:

> We invent many nice words in cultural psychologies, but when it comes to elaboration of the process mechanisms involved, we remain mute. Somehow, the history of

> psychology over the last century has discouraged the reconstruction of possible processes that might generate relevant outcomes – both valued positive or negative – in the future. Instead, psychologists almost automatically proceed to list presumed causal entities – "variables" – that are expected to participate in the generation of new phenomena. (p. 148)

Valsiner, in the quotation above, stresses the lack of new theoretical paths that has characterized psychology, including cultural psychology in the last century. Within the circles of Vygotskian studies, it is interesting that many authors, instead of advancing Vygotsky's legacy, continue to look within Vygotsky's foundational concepts for more diverse answers for every new research problem. In fact, the lack of interest in new theoretical constructions, and the narrow use of their own theories by psychologists, has revealed the dominant empirical character that hegemonized psychology in the last century. However, this fact has had several consequences that have characterized our discipline until the present day, among which are the following:

- A split between theory, research and practice.
- Theories are understood as systems to be followed and applied to research and practice instead of being understood as systems of intelligibility, the relevance of which is inseparable from their movement and development.
- As a result of the previous statements, research is understood as an empirical enterprise (empirical research) and practice is understood as opposed to theory.
- The previous principle has led to the split between application of instruments and interpretation of results in both research and psychological practice.

These four points, among others, to some extent, capture the current state of affairs in psychology, in which new theoretical paths rarely emerge, and when they do appear, do not advance new epistemological discussions upon which new methodologies can be sustained.

This paper has the following objectives:

- Following our ontological definition of subjectivity (González Rey, 1997, 2002, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) as capable of considering emotions as intrinsic to subjectivity, new epistemological principles were defined that allow for methodological options through which emotions can be studied via the new qualitative level of their development. This new qualitative level of emotional functioning, on which this definition of subjectivity is based, results from a new kind of subjective unit, ones that are at the same time emotional and symbolical, not as a sum, but as two sides of the same phenomenon. These units were theoretically coined within our theory as subjective senses. This paper aims to show the heuristic value of this concept for psychological research.
- To advance a constructive-interpretative methodology that can gain access to the subjective configurations through which the main experiences of an

individual are lived. This implies transcending descriptive approaches to the studied phenomena and introducing the idea of a theoretical model as the goal toward which the construction of information is addressed throughout the research process.
- To make evident that the capacity for generalization of the studied cases is not due to their uniqueness, but result from the construction of theoretical models within which different cases are interrelated through the researcher's theoretical constructions.

Understanding psychological research as a theoretical enterprise

Psychology historically has characterized itself by its narrow comprehension and use of theories. Research in psychology has been mainly understood as an empirical enterprise, in which variables, their relations and the results of quantitative instruments have replaced the function of theory as well as the role of ideas in knowledge production.

As Koch (1999) stated:

> Here, let me merely identify "an a-meaningful thinking" as the type of method dominated cognition that transfers the responsibility of the agent of inquiry to one or another set of sacrosanct methodic stratagems or heuristic rule – systems: an escape of uncertainties and challenges of ardent problematic effort via the cozy presupposition that the rules somehow contain the answers. (pp. 121–122)

That "a-meaningful thinking" that, according to Koch, has characterized psychology does not need theory precisely because the methodic system and its stratagems have the answer for any problem to be studied. The set of instruments has replaced the agent of inquiry, who is reduced to interrelating variables in order to come to some depersonalized conclusion (Danziger, 1990). For a long time, research in psychology was recognized only within this empirical representation.

The idea of empirical data as the basis for interpretation in scientific research has also led to the exclusion of the researcher's ideas as not being a part of science. In fact, this neutrality as a principle of one way of doing science has prevailed until the present in psychology. The primary character of empirical data, the constraining of interpretation to collected data, and the exclusion of the researcher's ideas are three of the main attributes on which the definition of scientific research as empirical is based.

Nonetheless, the history of science shows the contrary; theoretical representation has always preceded the different methodological paths from which those representations gain intelligibility within the scientific community. As Rovelli (2017) stated: "For Einstein, the theory of general relativity is not a collection of equations: it is a mental image arduously translated into equations" (p. 76).

The whole history of physics represents a sequence of brilliant theoretical intuitions that have only later been formulated into equations.

In psychology, however, theoretical intuition has been developed within specific institutionalized fields of knowledge that have historically been preserved from the tension between scientific research and new theoretical advances. So, for example, the advances in psychoanalysis have resulted from new theoretical paths to which some psychoanalysts have ascribed themselves, rather as a question of faith than as the result of scientific work.

While in physics, theoretical construction and intuition are sensitive to translation into mathematical language, the matters of interpretation and theoretical construction in psychology are oriented by general theoretical principles defined a priori in the theory. Interpretation, in fact, moves toward one among several that are predicted from the theory results. This is clear in the way in which interpretation is used by Freud, as in the following statement: "We all know that the person who is being analyzed has to be induced to remember something that has been repressed" (Freud, 1937, p. 258, as cited by Sundén, 2011). Sundén (2011) has questioned the position of Freud as follows:

> "To be induced" is, for me, very close to be influencing or even suggested to. Freud seems to be very much aware of the risk of influence when he discusses the meaning of the patient's "yes" or "no" to the analyst's suggested construction. There is no final answer to that. It all depends whether or not the constructions lead to new material coming to the surface. I think Freud is here very dependent on his favorite conviction about psychic determinism. (Sundén, 2011, p. 28)

Despite Sunden's emphasis on interpretation as a process, he shares the same beliefs as Freud in "new material coming to the surface." This position expresses the epistemological realism that repression implies; that is, repressed material is ready to come to the surface through the patient's memory. In fact, interpretation in psychoanalysis is, rather than a construction, an induction that has as its basis several universal principles toward which the interpretation is oriented. Interpretation from this perspective does not represent a theoretical construction, but a procedure through which certain repressed content emerges into consciousness.

The previous reflection on how the principle of repression in psychoanalysis guided interpretation as a methodological device is an expression of how theoretical representation anticipates methodological procedures. This principle, despite having been rejected in the past by some mainstream psychologies, is also applicable to so-called empirical psychology. Without a representation of human psyche in behavioral terms, whether as variables, traits or behaviors as such, the prevalence of quantitative empirical procedures would not be possible.

The main epistemological challenge faced by our theoretical proposal on subjectivity is that emotions, as part of the whole system of human expressions, due their symbolical character, from language to gesture, have to be followed

through a hypothetical process. That process only gains the status of scientific result once the researcher, based on different partial constructions, coined by us as indicators, becomes capable of assembling them into a theoretical model. This theoretical model is not identified as the truth, but as the best construction to generate intelligibility about the studied problem at one given moment. The fact that it is the best option is not given by the theory, but by the interrelation of these indicators assembled within a theoretical model becoming the best source of intelligibility about the studied problem in comparison with other models.

The theoretical model par excellence in our proposal is subjective configuration; this concept is theoretical because it offers an a priori representation of how experience and psychical functions are subjectively configured. To be subjectively configured means to be organized within several subjective senses, the assembly of which becomes a subjective configuration defining the motivational character of any human experience or psychological function. Nonetheless, subjective configurations have to be constructed in singular ways, whether within individuals or social instances. Unlike psychoanalysis, in our proposal nothing is inducted through memory, because subjective senses and configurations are processes that occur beyond any conscious representation that can be memorized.

In fact, one strong point of our proposal on subjectivity is that emotions are intrinsic to its functioning. Until the present, in psychology emotions have been seen as external to other psychological processes. It is not rare to see papers that stress emotions in their relations with thinking, imagination and actions, as if these functions are not also emotional.

The fact that subjective senses are a qualitative unit of emotions and symbolical processes does not permit their study through the intentional expressions of human beings. Subjective senses represent how the cosmos of social symbolical constructions, such as race, age, gender, sexuality, illness and morality, among others, are lived by concrete individuals and groups as a result of a single living history that has become present in different ways through the interweaving of the multiple current social networks within which individual and social biographies subjectively emerge.

What are the ways in which an authoritarian father appears, through different subjective senses, in a child's classroom activities? This not only depends on the direct father–child interactions; of course, these interactions appear in the subjective senses, but the way in which they appear depends on how these relations with the father have been lived by the child. In such a process, the child's relations with other members of the family and with his/her social networks in the different areas of social life, among many other processes, can also intervene. We can only have access to this process through research or professional studies that allow, in an indirect way, the construction of several indicators, the congruence of which allows a theoretical model to be advanced that, at the end of the research or study, permits the researcher to see how these subjective senses are organized in a single subjective configuration.

In fact, the whole research process in this constructive-interpretative approach is a theoretical construction; nothing is collected, but the information from different paths and instruments is transformed into indicators, which have a theoretical existence, as part of a theoretical model that is being constructed, because indicators are never taken directly from what is consciously expressed by individuals and groups.

An interesting approach that complements very well our idea of theoretical models is that taken by Dreier (in press):

> We can, hence, not comprehend an aspect of societal practice, context, scene and situation as an isolated element of stimulus. Instead, we must grasp how it is involved in a particular social practice that hangs together in a particular way. Its qualities and meaning do not adhere to it as an isolated element but are affected by the composition of the social practice it is involved in and its particular status in it. (p. 6)

Dreier has highlighted one important characteristic of the knowledge produced through theoretical models; it is oriented not toward elements, but toward the way in which one element "is involved in a particular social practice that hangs together in a particular way." The learning of the system in a context within which one element gains meaning is always a theoretical construction that can be sustained as the best in comparison with others at that moment, but which always represents one path among the many others that are possible. As any theoretical construction is historical, the best theoretical construction at one moment may not be the best at another. Dreier's ideas are oriented toward the comprehension of social practices, while ours are addressed to the comprehension of the subjective configuration of human experience. However, the methodological approach to the theoretical construction of both systems is very similar.

There is no theoretical construction, i.e. a theoretical model, the heuristic value of which is given by being the last, best and definitive construction in relation to something; the heuristic value of theoretical models is given by their capacity to allow a path of constructions capable of coming to conclusions that have not been possible before by other means.

The case study as an important way to construct theoretical models

For a long time, case studies were referred to in psychology as "applied work," mainly within clinical methods and not in science. Discussion in relation to the value of case studies has been reduced in psychology to the contradiction between the nomothetic and the idiographic approaches, i.e. to the contradiction between the study of a unique case, thereby attempting to understand and explain how one psychological feature occurs in one unique case, and an orientation toward defining laws about the studied matter through "significative samples" of selected

individuals. The study of one personality through an epistolary of letters, as conducted by Allport in his famous book, "Letters from Jenny," has become a reference for what the idiographic approach was about (Winter, 1993).

In fact, what was under discussion was the need for the deep study of singular cases, capable of using unique expressions and details, as well as the need to make comparisons between arguments that were impossible to reproduce and impossible to reduce to general variables sensitive to statistical procedures. The idiographic approach represented a different form of knowledge production that was impossible to realize through the nomothetic approach. Nonetheless, one important point has not been discussed until more recent times: is it possible to generalize the knowledge produced by an idiographic study?

This question seems to be simple, but behind it lie many epistemological questions that should be clarified. We have shown the difference between theoretical generalization and inductive generalization (González Rey, 1997, 2005). The latter is based on what different case studies have in common, but theoretical generalization is based on theoretical models capable of generating different explanations of the studied subject. The development of such models significantly increases their capacity for explanation of the studied matter. Generalization does not follow from what different people have in common, but from the definition of one configuration or system that allows the assembly of different units that change in terms of their content from individual to individual and from one situation to another, while permitting explanations of the same phenomenon.

The concept of subjective configuration, for example, carries a high level of generalization because, even if there is a change in the subjective senses that are organized and generated by the configuration, we know that human functions and actions are subjectively configured, defining one general representation from which any research study or professional action can be advanced.

Dreier (in press) highlighted an important point in relation to the capacity for generalization based on case studies:

> Cases represent different, concrete nexuses with different qualities, meanings, dynamics and possibilities of an investigated phenomenon or problem. If we make it our purpose to capture only what these cases have in common (Valsiner, 2015, p. 237), our analysis illuminates generalities but discards differences between them. We then miss the chance of coming to know how a general phenomenon or problem hangs together with varying other aspects in nexuses and how these various nexuses affect the general phenomenon or problem and subject's possibilities of dealing with it and changing it. (p. 10)

In fact, it is possible to find common elements in different cases, hence the importance and value of case studies. A case study is a path toward formulating a theoretical model through which, despite the differences between one case and another, all the cases addressed by a piece of research can be accounted for, allowing knowledge to be advanced about units that are integrated within a kind of system that is sensitive to its actions and nexuses in relation to other

phenomena. The development of a theoretical model through different case studies makes it possible to advance general explanations of the studied system, allowing the articulation of such explanations within the same model through which the study is oriented. Different cases studies may be articulated to each other in such a way that the differences between them come together within the theoretical model on the basis of being a new general explanation of the studied phenomena. This process, in fact, represents the construction of a theory with a high capacity for generalization across the several cases studies that succeed each other through the study of a concrete subject.

So, for example, following our different case studies of children with learning difficulties (Bezerra, 2014), it was possible to see how the fact that they did not have a social space in the classroom affected them. However, the way in which each child is affected by this fact represents a subjectively configured singular process. One child,[1] who has not been accepted at home, who has a very violent father and a mother centered on his younger brother, needs very intensive and expressive affection from the teacher and others. However, his resources for finding this affection are not the best; his aggressive behavior, indifference to school tasks and to his peers, defiant positions and so on are some of his behavioral devices at school. Rather than affection and acceptance, these behaviors have provoked others to reject him.

When the researcher, began to work with that classroom, focusing on C and four other students with serious learning problems, she worked through individual and collective activities, having two main objectives. First, she aimed to improve the children's level of learning and second, to find out how these difficulties were subjectively configured, i.e. which subjective senses appeared to be configuring these learning difficulties. C established a very good relationship with the researcher, because he felt that someone was paying him attention. He found in this relationship the social space that he had never had either in the classroom or in his family.

C participated very well in the activities that the researcher organized in order to find out how his dominant behaviors were subjectively configured and continued to be part of his everyday life. In a very collaborative setting, he completed stories about his life, actively participated in narratives organized by the researcher and drew whatever was asked of him during the sessions, in which he was active and communicative. In fact, his participation in all of the activities involving dialogue with the researcher was very good, showing a level of intellectual development that did not correspond to his results in school. Nonetheless, the sessions addressed toward work on aspects of school discipline were not so good. He would not focus on tasks introduced by the researcher, he was extremely distracted and at times C even became aggressive.

In the researcher's report[2] of one of the field sessions, she wrote:

> I proposed to C a mathematics problem, the solution for which demanded several skills that we had been working on together in previous sessions. However,

> he insistently repeated, "I don't know how to solve it". Suddenly, he introduced a new focus of conversation in order to distract me from the exercise. He said, are you also working with D^3? My affirmative answer led him to say: "You will never advance with him; he's a great donkey!" Faced with that situation, I opted to not answer C immediately, saving his statement as a possible communicational resource for later in the dialogue. However, the opportunity to use it appeared immediately because, instead of commenting on his attack on D, I repeated to him to solve the task and he again said: "I don't know". So, I commented to him: "And D is the donkey!!", in a clear challenge to him. After I said that, he turned to me and said: "Do you think that I don't know how to solve the problem?" He focused on the problem and found an excellent solution in a short time. Once he finished the problem, he looked at me very proud.

The previous example is evidence that our proposal of a constructive-interpretative method for the study of subjectivity requires the "researcher's immersion within the field," because the individual's expressions and behaviors throughout open and dynamic fieldwork may be very unexpected and only attain a theoretical meaning within the context in which they emerge as a result of the researcher's interpretation. C rejected the school and, as result of this, expressed a negativism in relation to school tasks. However, when his subjective senses resulted from other sources, in this case the researcher, the emergence of his orientation toward solving the task does not result from the task in itself, but from his relationship with the other, who could be a teacher, a researcher, an assistant or a peer.

The theoretical model of the subjective configuration of C's failure in school allowed the researcher to understand subjective senses that made C feel excluded, not accepted and insecure at school. So, new relationships, such as those that he sustained with the researcher, could generate subjective senses capable of producing new feelings within the human relationships at school, without which improving his learning results would not be possible. However, C's behaviors at school did not change; he continued to be defiant, arrogant and little interested in school matters. In fact, C would avoid exposure to situations of failure and his way of doing this was to appear indifferent to school tasks, maintaining the defiant behavior that made him feel strong in front of others.

His way of dealing with his family and the school, both of which were generators of subjective senses – confrontation, negativism and the search for a social space – that complemented each other within two interrelated subjective configurations through behaviors, were not accepted both in school and in his family. However, the entry into the scene of the researcher generated a new subjective configuration, the main subjective senses of which were related to the affection and support represented by this new relationship. Nonetheless, at first this new subjective configuration still did not influence C's position in relation to school. C's good relationship with the researcher and its relevance for him were a means for beginning to change his behaviors at school, but this process would still take more time. This interesting process with C shows that individual work with students passes

through many different stages, throughout which new subjective senses and configurations emerge, with changes in behavior at school being only one possible path during this process.

Nevertheless, the above mentioned research permits the conclusion that having a social space in school, based on strong affective relationships with educational agents and peers, is an important factor in mobilizing new subjective resources, without which intellectual deficits are impossible to overcome. This important theoretical construction has a high level of generalization and represented the starting point for new research within the same research program, conducted by Oliveira (2017), in which the researcher simultaneously oriented herself toward creating new cores of social relationships among peers, between the teacher, and the students, and between the researcher and the teacher, and included students with poor school performance within these three relationship cores. The positive effect of this way of working brought faster and better results for the integration of students within the tasks addressed toward improving their school performance.

What conclusion is it possible to draw from these examples? Firstly, they allow confirmation of how students' positions with respect to the study result from multiple subjective senses which emerge in individuals through the complex interweaving between how an individual history is experienced and how that history is inseparable from the current subjective senses and the configurations that emerge within the students' current social networks. Secondly, the examples clearly express how subjective configuration is something dynamic, taking on unexpected expressions in terms of a child's behavior that demand a very flexible position on the part of the researcher, both in the way that the researcher continues his/her fieldwork with respect to the case, and in the theoretical constructions that should be built in order to maintain the main theoretical path that is assumed to explain the case. Finally, one case study has led to new principles being considered in following case studies within the same research program, in order to take new steps toward a general knowledge of the studied subject.

Another case study has led to a theoretical model, a subjective configuration, which, although changing from one case to another, allows a theoretical construction that is generalizable to other case studies, even though the subjective senses that are organized and generated by the studied configuration can change. At the same time, the concept of subjective configuration is highly sensitive to what is defined by Dreier as a nexus, in which subjective configurations are living subjective systems that exist in the contradictions that unfold and in paths of the active individual in their current everyday life. The concept of subjective configuration is highly dynamic and malleable, which makes it capable of integrating, transforming and resisting all of the collateral effects of the actions of individuals and groups.

The singular character of the case studies cannot be identifiable with uniqueness, due to the existence of theoretical models. The theoretical model appears with the first studied case, but once it emerges, the next case study appears as a continuation of the first, with many elements achieving meaning for the research as a result of the dynamic theoretical model. The theoretical model is a construction

that advances from one case to another, becoming the main theoretical result of any research on subjectivity. Generalization results from the sequence of constructions built via a single theoretical model based on different case studies, which is capable of generating intelligibility about any problem under study with a high level of generalization. Case studies do not just complement research; they represent a new way of doing research— i.e. theoretical research.

An example of a very different subjective configuration than that of C is expressed by D, an eight-year-old child who shared the same classroom as C. Unlike C, D is anxious to be recognized at school for his school achievements. At the very beginning of the researcher's presence in the classroom, when she still was observing and attempting to find her place within the classroom, she participated in the commentary on a story that the teacher was covering with her students. However, she did not do anything to integrate D into the activity and D seemed to be disconnected from it. However, at the end of the activity, D asked the researcher if she would like to listen to him telling the story that the teacher had told.

The researcher immediately expressed her interest in listening to the story. D told the story in detail and assumed a very active position when another child approached and interrupted the researcher while she was paying attention to D. D turned to the other child and said: "I am telling the teacher a story; wait your turn". This spontaneous and self-determined way of defending his personal relation space was an indicator of the importance of having another person paying attention to him and expressing affection for him. D, unlike C, transforms his relation with the researcher into a subjective resource for advancing in terms of his school tasks. This evidenced that, despite his difficulties in learning, he had interest in advancing his learning process. However, the interest he expressed in the tasks used by the researcher as paths to improve his cognitive skills and capacities changed when the researcher attempted to integrate him into collective tasks with other children. The fact of having to expose himself in front of the group made him feel shame due to his history of failure at school.

The subjective configuration of D's learning difficulties, in common with C's, showed fear of social exposure, insecurity generated by a history of failures at school, and the feeling of failure in anticipation of school tasks. However, their different stories and family contexts led them to generate different subjective productions in the face of these subjective states and positions at school. They both needed to gain a social space in the classroom, and their relationships with the researcher came to be an important support for both of them. However, while C attempted to monopolize the researcher's attention, mainly centered on his personal relation with her, D was interested in advancing in terms of the school's demands through his relation with the researcher.

One important difference between the personal histories of C and D was that, while C faced a climate of hostility and aggression at home, being relegated in relation to his sister and brother, D on the contrary lived in a climate of overprotection. D's family was very poor, living in a very small, uncomfortable

apartment. He lived with his mother and sister, who both completely centered their attention on him. Nonetheless, as result of that climate of mollycoddling and overprotection, D almost always stayed at home deprived of social contact, a fact that influenced his shyness and lack of social skills. While C was aggressive, defiant and negative in his behaviors, D was calm and shy, looking to advance on challenges that were a source of frustration. However, behind these different behaviors appear subjective configurations that allow a view of how subjective senses and processes are inseparable from learning processes.

School is a living social scenario within which individuals and their subjectivities are inseparable from many different nexuses in which new subjective senses emerge, new configurations develop, and many paths are simultaneously experienced by individuals and groups in each system of human activities and communication. Our definition of subjectivity represents one way to conceptualize human functions as interwoven with each other within subjective configurations, making it possible to access to different human stories and current networks of social relations through the subjective senses and configurations in which the social cosmos of relevant experiences appears together at the present moment of human actions.

This way of conducting research represents a continuous theoretical process within which one construction leads to another in such a way that there is no room for data collection, because the research is oriented toward changing and developing theoretical models dynamically. Once one theoretical model can be defended as the best construction among others, on the basis of the indicators and hypotheses that allowed its construction, it will represent the best option at that particular moment for intelligibility about the problem under study.

Some final conclusions

The main concepts assembled within this cultural-historical theory of subjectivity allow a new representation of human mind as a self-regulating, dynamic and generative organization that exists in the interweaving of individuals and social groups within complex networks of relationships within which their different systems of activities take place.

The theoretical representation resulting from this theory represents the construction of a new ontology of human phenomena defined by the units of emotions and symbolical processes as two sides of the same phenomenon, which form one new qualitative phenomenon.

Consequently, as has occurred with each new ontological definition in the history of sciences, this theoretical proposal has led to epistemological and methodological positions. In this case, the constructive-interpretative methodology, based on the qualitative epistemology, was the result. Theory, from this epistemological perspective, does not represent a sum of a priori meanings, in which the results of research and practice should be embedded. On the contrary, the concepts of the theory should be constructed as theoretical models that guide and develop research and professional practice.

This constructive-interpretative method represents a theoretical way of doing research. Subjectivity, according to this definition, cannot be accessed through induction, description or variable correlations. Based on constructive-interpretative methodology, the case study is a general methodological device. Its value is not empirical; on the contrary, it represents a cornerstone of psychological research as a theoretical enterprise.

As has been demonstrated in this research, the case study has become a path for generalization through the theoretical models generated in the course of the research. In this kind of research, generalization never happens through empirical elements, but through the theoretical construction of singular empirical facts that result from the theoretical models.

This theory, to a great extent, develops itself throughout the sequence of singular case studies and becomes integrated within the theoretical models. For this reason, this theory represents at the same time an epistemological position, forming theory, epistemology and methodology into a system in development.

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Notes

1. For this research, this child is identified as "C."
2. The researcher was M. Bezerra, and these notes of her field work are related to work for her master's degree under our supervision (Bezerra, 2014).
3. D was the letter that identified another of the students that participated in the same research as C.

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