



Contribution to the study of personality by 'pioneers' of the cultural historical school: Revisiting earlier research in search for learning

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Abstract

In times when vocational education and training (VET) faces challenges from a variety of research problems, for example, dropouts and motivation for vocational oriented studies, it becomes important deepening into different theoretical and empirical sources. The development of a comprehensive theory of personality in cultural historical school is the result of the works of what we could well consider as research 'pioneers' within this school. The presentation and analysis presented in this article tries to contribute to VET research through systematising and drawing attention to some of the most relevant contributions of these pioneers. Critical remarks are presented though a critical review is not within the scope of the article. The analysis presented here is made with awareness of the complexities and the risks involved in all attempts to summarise what was a remarkable creative production in research that extended for decades. The reader should also observe that the scope of the presentation and focus of attention here is limited to the specific contribution of these leading scholars to the development of a theory of personality. Been this limitation highlighted the article expects to contribute to better understanding studies of personality within the cultural historical school henceforth serving to the advance of research within VET.

Keywords: personality, individual, cultural historical theory, learning, cognition

Introduction

One of the many challenges when conducting research in the intricate field of vocational education and training (VET) is choosing the most convenient theoretical ground. Based on earlier research there is explicit claim in this article about the value and advantages of using cultural historical theory. This is of relevance for investigating a variety of research problems that include, for example, study of motivation, vocational identity and even in search for explanations and solutions to the problem of drop-outs. Under the umbrella of cultural historical theory, we find contributions in a great variety of areas concerned with the development of personality. If we take as example the development of a comprehensive theory of personality in cultural historical school this is a result from different contributions of so called research 'pioneers' within this school. This article tries to contribute to VET research by systematising and drawing attention to some of the most relevant contributions of these pioneers. Critical remarks are presented indistinctly in different parts of the analysis though a critical review is not within the scope of the article. It is worth stressing that the analysis that is presented in the context of this article fully acknowledges the complexities and the risks involved in all attempts to summarise a remarkable creative production extended for decades. The author will feel that the aims of the article are fulfilled if it contributes to better understanding studies of personality within the cultural historical school, serving in this way to the advance of research within VET.

The higher mental functions

- Vygotsky's influence in research on personality

Doing research about personality within the so-called cultural historical school places the researchers on the track of the works of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896–1934). This is the path I followed in an earlier study (Moreno Herrera, 2007) and consequently I am following here.

Vygotsky's works had a great significance for all later development of cultural historical theory. He transformed contemporaneous psychological thinking with a new conception of the development of the higher psychological *processes* (c.f., Vygotsky, 1960¹). The influences of his works in educational research are also far reaching and very much at the centre of debate even beyond the frames of cultural historical theory (cf. Daniels, 2001). A review of the extensive production of Vygotsky available in recent collection of his works (e.g. Rieber & Wollock, 1997; Rieber, 1998) gives indeed sounded arguments to support those calling him 'the Mozart of psychology' (cf. Schedrovitsky, 1982). In a short but intensive and academically productive life Vygotsky set up considerable new lines of research.

All his energy was concentrated on opening up new lines of investigation rather than pursuing any particular line to the fullest. That task remained for Vygotsky's students and their successors, who adopted his views in varying ways, incorporating them into new lines of research. (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 11)

Vygotsky's works focused on uncovering the regularities of the cognitive functions to demonstrate in this way the distinctive character of the human psyche. Influential scholars within the cultural historical school have acknowledged his ground contribution to the development of cultural psychology and the investigation of activity and learning process (e.g. Cole, 1996, 1988; Cole, Engeström & Vasquez, 1997; Wertsch, 1991, 2000). Although affective aspects of human psyches or personality were not fully developed in his research, they were neither neglected (Gonzalez Rey, 1985). Referring to contemporary psychological science, he wrote: '... up to now the main problem and the most important one of Psychology remains closed - the problem of personality and its development' (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 14).

Particular attention is given to the field of emotions and feelings already in one of his major works *The Psychology of Art* first published in 1925 (see, Vygotsky, 1971). It is here where he first indicates the role of the affective aspects in psychology and at the same time stresses the limitation that the poor development in this area has had for psychological knowledge.

Vygotsky's interest in the study of more complex synthesis of the psychic, which would take into account the affective aspects of psychological regulation, is presented in different works (e.g., Vygotsky, 1960, 1986, 1997). This could well be illustrated with his approach to the relationship between emotions and intellectual processes.

Our realistic thinking provokes more intensive and meaningful emotions than autistic thinking. The researcher who is eagerly seeking for something in the process of his thinking will be relating emotional experiences and ways into autistic ideas in such a degree, that probably a schizophrenic person cannot reach. The difference between autistic and realistic thinking is that in this last one emotional process play a more important role, despite of the fact that in both a clear synthesis of intellectual and emotional processes is obtained. (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 124)

Thinking is considered according to Vygotsky as a synthesis of emotional and intellectual aspects highlighting the unity between the affective and the cognitive; in this context, the role of experience in the child's psychic development is considered also from an affective point of view. The concept 'social situation of development' is to comprise both dimensions (cf. Vygotsky, 1978). In Vygotsky's view, experiences (practical social experiences) demonstrate a 'psychological unity' between what the child experiences him/herself and his/her contribution to that experience. This contribution is determined by the level of development he/she has previously reached. Vygotsky considers that the transformation of the influences of the environment leads to the expansion of the subject's psychological world. This expansion would permit external influences

that could be received at a given moment to be transformed into the subject's experiences. To Vygotsky development was linked to the mobilization of the affective potential of the individual (Vygotsky, 1960). The importance that Vygotsky attributed to human's affective aspects is equal to his concern with reaching a more complex synthesis of explanation of other psychological aspects that could develop a theory of personality (Gonzalez Rey, 1985). Some general principles 'drafted' by Vygotsky while examining the development of higher psychological processes, which he used to explain personality, are analyzed in the following.

Vygotsky considers the higher psychological processes as a distinctive aspect that functions based on integrated systemic units that has own qualitative specificity.

The introduction to the psychology of behaviour and the concepts of system and function represent a step forward in relation with the mechanical conception of behaviour. The atomistic attitude of empirical and objective Psychology makes it impossible to investigate on the higher psychic processes and their true psychological nature. (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 27)

In a critic to predominating atomism in psychology Vygotsky points out that the psychic cannot be studied by isolated functions, something that he applies consequently when studying the cognitive functions (cf. Vygotsky, 1978). The search for an explanatory synthesis of human psychology was a driving force in Vygotsky's works (see, e.g., Vygotsky, 1960, 1971, 1997). Authors such as Fernando Gonzalez Rey (1985) and Ivan Ivic (2000) consider that this remained an unfinished task in his works. Vygotsky himself admits this limitation in the following terms: 'The attempt of infant psychology to study of embryonic development of the higher psychological processes proves the fact that the same psychology of superior functions is in an embryonic stage' (1960, p. 26).

Another important principle presented by Vygotsky (1960) in his study of the higher psychological processes is the mediation of these processes by the subject's consciousness. Vygotsky conceives mediation of consciousness as the system of symbols and signs that represents reality in consciousness - language, arithmetical symbols, etc. This principle, although somehow examined by classics in Marxist Philosophy (cf., Engels, 1993) needed further development to be applied in the study of personality; here lies an important contribution of Vygotsky to the study of personality.

According to Vygotsky (cf. 1960, 1978) the conscious level is expressed in personality by means of complicated reflections and elaborations, which are highly compromised affectively and determine its most complex forms of behavioural expression. The conscious level is not just an expression of the symbols and signs by which the subject learns about his/her surrounding reality. It is also an expression of the complex operations that humans, as historic-social subjects, perform by means of the contents integrated in their accumulation of

experiences. Consciousness is not an exact reproduction of the external, but the group of processes and forms by which the external appears with a proper sense to the subject. The external is historically and socially conditioned by the very development of the subject.

A crucial contribution of Vygotsky to the study of personality is the concept of internalization defined as the process by which operations that were initially performed in an external level become internal psychological operations (1960, 1978). Criticisms to the influence of this relevant contribution in other research works have also been reported (see, e.g., Gonzalez Rey, 1985; Tarazov, 1981). In relation to the study of the cognitive processes in the field of personality this problem can be illustrated with the following approach:

The process of formation of personality as a process of internalization of historic-social experience creates in the individual an executive, operational type of creativity, an operational repeatability, and a complete number of corresponding psychic qualities. (Tarazov, 1981, p. 239)

The limitations of this approach, which somehow dichotomises the process of internationalization and misses its complex 'holistic' character, are that:

Internalization is in this case understood one-sidedly as an immediate mechanism of transformation from the external to internal. Meanwhile, Vygotsky's conception demonstrates that for him socialization does not act as a system of external pressure - of stimulus and pressure of driving reactions - but as a structural moment of the psychic. (Chudnovski, 1982, p. 155)

Gonzalez Rey (1982, 1985) calls this limitation a 'mechanist' application of one of Vygotsky's major contributions to the study of personality. The social character of the process of internalization has often been reduced to the resulting expression of the passing from external operations to the internal level. Leontiev is cited to illustrate this limitation:

As it is known, internalization is the transition in which processes that are external due to their nature, processes with objects that are also external, are transformed into processes which carried out at mental level, at the level of consciousness. They suffer a specific transformation, are generalized, verbalized, reduced, and most important they become capable to continue a development which transcends the possibilities of the external activity. (Leontiev, cited in Gonzalez Rey, 1985, p. 48)

Leontiev emphasizes the object, material moment of the operations that passes on to an internal level (see also, Leontiev, 1978). According to other studies within the cultural historical school this is considered a one-sided understanding of the process (Chudnovski, 1976, 1982). The fact that Vygotsky, due to his short life, did not managed to fully develop the relation of internalization with the general development of personality lead to these different interpretations (Gonzalez Rey, 1985).

In a following section we analyse further the contribution of Leontiev to research on personality, it is however relevant to bring his work in this context for

the connection it has with Vygotsky's specific contribution particularly in relation to the internalization process. This process has importance relevance in the system of psychological categories later presented by Leontiev (1978). According to Leontiev the external object has a paramount importance in the transformation of the external into the psychological, internal, level. The study of personality requires, however, investigating structures that will allow explaining the psychological aspects from the social point of view, not only in the operational level as Leontiev mentions, but within wider frames including the subject's active role not limited to object manipulation (cf. Chudnovski, 1981, 1982; Gonzalez Rey, 1985). Summing up it is of relevance to also notice that internal processes develop beyond the possibilities of external activity.

Vygotsky's works had a remarkable relevance from both theoretical and methodological points of view for all the subsequent research on personality within the cultural historical school. This strong influence, which goes beyond the relevance of the internalization process here highlight is widely acknowledge in most of the writings on research on personality (see, e.g., Antsiferova, 1981; Asiev, 1976; Bozhovich, 1976, 1977; Petrovski, 1981a, b).

Activity, consciousness and personality

- Leontiev's contribution to research on personality

The relevance of the contribution of Alexei Nikolaivitch Leontiev (1904-1979) to the shaping of the cultural historical school and the specific value of his works for studies on activity and personality has been highlighted by influential scholars in the fields such as Jim Wertsch (1981). In an earlier study I gave considerable space to highlighting core aspects of Leontiev's valuable contribution to the advance of research on personality within the cultural historical school (Moreno Herrera, 2007). Leontiev's explicit contribution to studies of personality has been controversial because of the focus on activity. Research on human activity could well be considered his major contribution to the development of the cultural historical school (cf. Nardi, 1996). *Activity, Consciousness and Personality* (Leontiev, 1978) is a core part of his far-reaching contribution and is an essential reading to understand his approach to the relation of activity with the development of personality. Rather than reviewing his contribution as presented in this major work we found more interesting to analyse the various criticisms that has been presented to his approach within the frames of the cultural historical theory itself. The criticisms serve us to argue that research on personality is far from being a completed endeavour within the cultural historical school.

The focus on cognition and the principle activity in the works of Leontiev (e.g., 1978) can be mentioned to argue that the relation of personality and emo-

tional processes were not totally developed in his work. The development of the category activity represents a turning point in research within the cultural historical school but still the role of activity as part of a coherent theory of personality remained controversial until the middle 1980s (cf. Gonzalez Rey, 1985).

In *Activity, consciousness and personality*, Leontiev writes that:

Before explaining the basic moments that integrate the process of activity, the subject seems to remain on the edge of the focus of research. It appears only as prerequisites of activity, as a condition of it. But the subsequent analysis of the activity and the forms of psychic reflex that it creates makes it necessary to incorporate the concept of concrete subject of personality as internal moment of activity. (Leontiev, 1978, p. 125)

Analysing this approach Gonzalez Rey (1985) concludes that the subject appears with no specificity inside the process of activity and is somehow reduced to the internal expression of the activity he/she developed in the object world. The category subject has taken a secondary and subordinated position. Leontiev, according to Gonzalez Rey, seems to have transferred the subject's secondary character in the theory of knowledge to the psychological theory. In the theory of knowledge the image in the subject has secondary character in relation to the object. As for general psychological theory the main aim is to discover the psychological mechanisms of the subject's active and creative role.

The above mentioned is one of the few works where Leontiev gives specific attention to the category personality. From his perspective 'the structure of personality is a relatively stable configuration of the elementary motivational lines hierarchically arranged' (1978, p. 172). Leontiev presents here, in a nutshell, one of the essential aspects of the theory of personality, i.e., the stable character of the structure of personality and its determination by means of the motivational lines. Leontiev recognizes the complex aspect of the subject-regulating role in activity but his analysis of the role of the affective area is still incomplete (cf. Gonzalez Rey, 1985; Nepomnichaia, 1977).

One of the most far-reaching contributions from Leontiev to the theory of personality is category personal sense. Leontiev searched for explanation to psychological categories in the structure of activity; from this context comes also the category personal sense as 'the reflex of the relation of the motive of activity with the end of the action in the consciousness of personality' (1978, p. 172).

According to Gonzalez Rey (1985) and Nepomnichaia (1977) several of Leontiev's disciples focused their research works in widening the psychological potential of the category personal sense and introduced the formation of sense as a new category in studies of personality. Summarising, the characteristics that these researchers endorsed to the formations of sense are the following. Senses are created from the subject's existence, they have a so-called 'object character', i.e., they are oriented towards the object of activity; sense is always the sense for

something. They are independent from the process of consciousness appropriation; from the system of meanings. According to Gonzalez Rey and Nepomichina most of these works disconnect the formation of sense from the world of meanings. The separation does not necessarily imply independence between this category and the process of consciousness appropriation. The study of this relationship is considered by both authors as the most important and urgent demands for the use of the category personal sense, as presented by Leontiev, in the development of the theory of personality.

From Leontiev's contribution (cf. 1978) comes also the assumption that in its functions, consciousness goes beyond the formation of meanings. Meanings are seen as something 'supra-individual' that includes the attributes of external objects in consciousness since humans form complex conceptions and reflections from the world of their sense and experiences. These experiences are a source for humans' attitude towards their world, and at the same time, a form of reflex of their surrounding world. The accuracy of the reflex in this case is not conditioned by the identity with the external but by the qualitative nature of internal expression of the external. This regularity is essential in the humans' intellectual approximation to their world.

Another important aspect to highlight in relation to the introduction of the category formation of sense in studies of personality is Leontiev's interest in the search of internal systematic units that will make possible to explain the complex phenomena of personality by means of subjective categories (cf. 1978). Still, until the middle 1980s research literature within the cultural historical school reported that the knowledge about the forms and mechanisms that determine the psychological signification of activity in personality are not yet fully explored (Gonzalez Rey, 1985; Nepomnichaia, 1977). Just like the case of Vygotsky, the great merit of Leontiev in relation to research on personality lays in the path for research that he opened with the introduction of the categories activity and personal sense.

Qualitative changes of the structure of the personality of the child – Bozhovich's contribution to research on personality

The works of Ludmila Ivanovna Bozhovich (1908–1981) are one of the most important attempts to systemize the development of a child's personality through the qualitative changes of its structure in the different moments of ontogenesis (see, Bozhovich, 1966, 1976, 1978). Bozhovich and her collaborators did a great amount of empirical research in education. The results of this research were influential in educational practices in the 'soviet bloc'. Bozhovich, a Vygotsky's disciple, worked on the complex task of developing Vygotsky's principles applied to the study of personality. She tried to apply consequently the concept

social situation of development to the study of the different qualitative stages that characterize the evolution of personality.

Vygotsky made another valuable contribution to the problem of psychic development when trying to discover not only its inner logic, but also the relationship between the child's psychic development and the influences of the environment. He started from the position that life conditions are spontaneous, not able to determine the child's psychic development and under the same conditions different particularities of the psyches can be formed. All this will depend upon the child's relation with the environment. (Bozhovich, 1976, p. 98)

Bozhovich, following Vygotsky's ideas, moves away from the consideration of the role of the 'instantaneous' in the social determination of personality. The instantaneous, the direct contact with reality, acquires a psychological sense only through the human being as subject of his/her social relations and activity (Bozhovich, 1976). Bozhovich gives priority to the study of the psychic internal aspects of personality in relation with the external influences. When dealing with Vygotsky's concept of social situation of development, Bozhovich refers to social situation of development as:

That special combination of the internal processes of development and the external conditions typical in each stage. This combination conditions the dynamics of psychic development during the corresponding evolutionary period and the new qualitatively peculiar psychological formations that appear in this period. (Bozhovich, 1976, p. 99)

When Bozhovich (1976) refers to the importance of the internal in the new acquisitions of each period of development, she sees the internal not as a sum of processes or isolated psychic attributes, but as a complex system where different formations and elements of personality are integrated, determining in its integration the qualitative specificity of each stage of development.

The concept social situation of development is an essential theoretical and methodological principle in educational psychology within the frames of cultural historical theory (cf. Petrovski, 1981b; Talizina, 1988). Bozhovich's works is the first attempt to explain each stage of the development of personality through the principle social situation of development (see, Bozhovich, 1966, 1976). The analysis that Bozhovich makes about the different stages of the development of personality permits the understanding of the type of essential formation that characterizes personality in its different stages. It also helps to understand the progressive liberation of personality from the immediate influences of the environment, until it becomes a 'true system' of self-determination. The conception of personality implicitly presented in the analysis of the stages of development made by Bozhovich became an operative model widely use in empirical research (e.g., Gonzalez Rey, 1982; Talizina, 1988).

Bozhovich doesn't make a periodization of development but rather presents a frame supported by empirical research about the distinctive psychological

formation of personality in each moment of its development (see, Bozhovich, 1976). This became a valuable source for subsequent works in this area (e.g., Talizina, 1988). Bozhovich had a formation in the field of general psychology and worked with Vygotsky and Leontiev. As a consequence of her activity in educational psychology, Bozhovich problematized one of the most relevant concepts in general psychology within the cultural school, i.e., the concept motivation.

Leontiev considers the object that represents a specific necessity as a motive taking into account the material and ideal levels, where the ideal level is the last sensory reflex of the material object (Leontiev, 1978). This definition of motive is, according to Bozhovich (1977) too short to allow an explanation of the complex levels of motivation that emerges in the diversity of activities and relations between the human and the environment. It does not explain either, the psychological essence of human motivational regulation.

Either in Leontiev's conceptions, as in many other psychologists, the analysis of the proper psychological process of the development of necessities, the process of transformation in new qualitative forms has been omitted. Leontiev tries solving the problem in a theoretical-abstract level and basing on historical materialism, precisely where he is lacking concrete, psychological information. (Bozhovich, 1977, p. 20)

According to Bozhovich (1977) the study of the motivational area of personality cannot focus only in determining the relationships between necessities and objects. This may be important to emphasize the socio-historic character of necessity; however, it does not permit to explain psychologically how necessities are related in the regulation of behaviour. The same happens with those complex formations that could not be defined as motives in what she calls a 'the narrow limits' of Leontiev's definition, as for example, self-valuation, ideals and others. The meeting with more complex forms of human motivation in empirical research makes Bozhovich to reflect upon the limitations of the concept motive as presented by Leontiev. The use of this concept represented more a position of principle than a necessity to explain what had been studied.

At the beginning we just kept to the opinions that Leontiev held concerning necessities and motives. But since the first moment, we were forced to slightly change the definition of 'motive' since it was impossible to operate with this term that always presupposed an object from objective reality. When we were trying to find out what necessities were 'crystallized' in a given 'motive', that is, what was behind a child's fondness for a specific object, we found a very complex combination of necessities, desires and child's intentions. In this combination it was hardly possible to understand the final intention and proper motive of activity. (Bozhovich, 1977, pp. 29-30)

This internal motivational complex that leads to specific behaviour of the individual needs more clarification in research. One of Bozhovich's major contribution in the study of children and adolescents' motivation was the extension of

the concept motive. Self-valuation, ideals and other aspects came into discussion as motives of human behaviour (cf. Bozhovich, 1977). Bozhovich also makes a relevant finding when presenting the specificity of human motivation as part of the unity between the affective and the cognitive which she studied having as a reference the principles developed by Vygotsky in the explanation of the higher psychological processes.

The lack of a true solution to the psychological problem of the development of necessities in Leontiev's work did not allow him to find the solution to another psychological key problem: the problem of interrelation between affection and consciousness. (Bozhovich, 1977, p. 20)

The psychological formations such as, ideals and self-valuation, studied by Bozhovich (1966, 1976) in the development of personality in the adolescent and youngsters are important evidences of the unity between the affective and cognitive. These formations express their active role in the regulation of behaviour by means of the adolescent/youngster conscious reflection and elaboration. This unity between the affective and cognitive is considered as a 'functional cell' of the regulating potential of personality.

Bozhovich gave attention to the problem of the unity of the cognitive and the affective but went further to study motivation in its most complex expressions (cf, Bozhovich, 1976). She did not manage to develop a complete conceptual system but her works largely paved the path to studies of motivation within the cultural historical school (Talizina, 1988).

Based upon her empirical findings on motivation Bozhovich focused in her last works on systemizing and developing theoretical constructs on motivation (see, Bozhovich, 1977, 1978). Bozhovich did a remarkable attempt to explain the most complex forms of motivation by means of Vygotsky's work. This could well be illustrated when she argues that 'in the research done in the affective-emotional sphere, we shared the postulate that necessities, emotions and feelings are developed by the same general laws by means of which all other processes and psychic functions are also developed' (Bozhovich, 1977, p. 168).

The works of Bozhovich here referred are in different ways continuous a call and a reminder of the need to give the affective-emotional sphere equal attention as the sphere of cognitive processes. In the study of personality, Bozhovich considers of mayor relevance to analyse the complex syntheses of the cognitive and the affective, this study is, in her view, essential not only to educational psychology but to the advance of studies of personality in general.

Holistic approach of the study of the psychic functioning – Rubinstein's contribution to research on personality

The works of Sergej Leonidovich Rubinstein (1889–1960) are among the most influential in cultural historical theory and had also important relevance for the specific area of personality. Rubinstein gave particular attention to the holistic knowledge of humans' psychological world. He considered this to be possible only by means of the integral/holistic knowledge of human through psychological research (cf. Rubinstein, 1949, 1962, 1967). Rubinstein gives great importance to human activity in the development of personality. From his perspective activity allows linking the psychic with the social being and is therefore the most essential form of objective expression of the psychic. Rubinstein does not analyse the objectivity of the psychic by its identity of structural superposition related to activity, but through the specific task the psychic performs with regard to the activity (Rubinstein, 1967). According to him, consciousness does not repeat the structure of activity, but is inserted into activity. He emphasizes on the subject's active character in relation with the world and insists on the conditioning character of the psychic in the different activities humans carry out. 'The psychic phenomena intervene in human life not only as conditioned, but also, as conditioning phenomena [...] The psychic is determined by humans' life conditions and influence their behaviour and activity' (Rubinstein, cited in Gonzalez Rey, 1985, p. 59).

A later study of the contributions of Rubinstein highlights that in his approach to psychological research 'the psychic is no longer derived from the social, or simply depending on it; the psychic component is on the contrary inserted in the individual's activity fulfilling a specific function' (Abuljanova, 1973, p. 142). Rubinstein (cf. 1962) gives particular relevance to the subject's independence and capacity to set tasks and goals independently and consciously as well as the capacity to give an orientation to his/her own activities. His emphasis on the conditioning character of the psychic had important methodological impact on research within the cultural historical school since it encouraged the search for mechanisms and ways through which the psychic can play an active and conditioning role. This had important implications for the study of how the psychic is formed avoiding that social determination will be reduced to the child's manipulating action in the world of objects.

The subsequent development of the active character of the subject as essential principle of the cultural historical school leads to the analysis of the social determination based on the active and reactive participation of the subject. In this specific aspect the works of Rubinstein are of remarkable value (see, Rubinstein, 1962). Rubinstein analyses the different ways the social aspects work on humans and presents it as follows.

The social dimension does not remain as an external fact with regard to the human being: it penetrates inside and from there it determines its consciousness. By means of: a) language, speech, this social form of knowledge; b) the knowledge system, that is, the theoretically consciously formalized product of the social practice; c) ideology, which in a class society reflects class interests and finally, d) the corresponding organization of the individual practice; where society configures both content and form of the individual consciousness of each person. (Rubinstein, 1949, p. 19)

The above suggests that the social character of the psychic should not be searched for in immediate and constant correspondence with the human being's external environment. On the contrary this is shown in the subject and has a creative and individualized expression in the subject's historical doing (Rubinstein, 1962). The social character of a process such as communication in which each subject transmits an individualized and synthesized expression of his/her own personal experience is determined by its social nature. These elaborations by no means can be reduced to any form of the individual present objectal relation with his/her world (Rubinstein, 1962).

In different works Rubinstein provided arguments to support the basic principle of the social character of the subject in the most complex forms of socio-historical existence of personality and in the most elementary reflecting relations of humans with the objective reality (cf. Rubinstein, 1962, 1967). When analysing the pre-Marxist materialistic conception of reflex, which separated the relation of image and object from the subject's reflecting activity, Rubinstein argues:

This interpretation makes unavoidable to deal with the dangers of the dual contrast of the ideal versus the material aspect and the framing of the first beyond the limits of the second. In fact, the initial components of the basic knowledge relations are not the image and the object, but the knowing and reflecting subject of the objective reality and reality itself with which the subject interacts. (Cited in Abuljanova, 1973, p. 113)

Rubinstein acknowledged the subject's role in the reflecting relation with the object even in its most elementary levels (see, Rubinstein, 1962). Rubinstein also presents the integral character of the subject of activity in his understanding of the necessary unit between the cognitive and the affective.

In the study of psychical processes first attention is usually given to the 'law' specifying how perception, thinking, etc. occurs. However, perception and the human thought, considered as a certain concrete experience and as a content of a person's life, commonly, includes in themselves not only the reflex of specific phenomena or given relations among objects, but also the meaning or sense that such phenomena and relations have for the individual. (Rubinstein, 1967, p. 172)

Rubinstein (1967) searches the meaning that the psychic processes has for humans through the unity between the affective and the cognitive in the functional manifestation of these processes. This manifestation does not have an abstract character, but is expressed in their integration in personality. The level of de-

velopment of personality is the one determining the form in which the unity of the cognitive and the affective is presented. Rubinstein considers that the unity of the psychic processes in the personality as a qualitatively superior level is expressed by means of the self-consciousness which acts as integrating aspect of different processes and qualities of personality. In summary 'the problem of the psychological study of personality does not end with the study of its psychic properties like capacity, temperament and character but with the discovery of the self-consciousness of the personality' (Rubinstein, 1949, p. 667).

For Rubinstein (cf. 1962) personality was not a sum of features or properties; his works gave special attention to the uncovering and analysis of the mechanisms and ways to explain its psychological functioning. In some of his latest work he claims that personality have reached the 'status quo' as research area in psychology (cf. 1967). Other studies of his works draw attention to the importance of his contribution in the opening of 'a whole new path' in research that does away earlier 'atomistic' approaches to the study of personality (cf. Abuljanova, 1980, 1981). Rubinstein's works are a valuable legacy in the attempts to define a comprehensive holistic approach to the difference process integrated in personality.

The relationship activity & ontogenetic development of personality – Ananiev's contribution to research on personality

Boris Gerasimovich Ananiev (1907–1972) shares credits with Rubinstein in the elaboration of a holistic understanding of personality. His works are of particular relevance for understanding the relationship personality-activity in studies within the cultural historical school (see, e.g., Ananiev, 1977, 1980). Activity, according to Ananiev (1980) could not be analysed in an abstract way, as a group of acts, goals and motives, but through its relationship with the subject. Ananiev studied activity in relation to the development the human being experiences from an ontogenetic perspective. His conceptualization of activity is somehow wider than Leontiev's (cf. Leontiev, 1978). Ananiev did not limit activity to the subject-object relationship; he opposed to the characterization of the stages of the development of personality based on the concrete form of activity that has the condition of fundamental activity.

The hypothesis that a form of activity arises from the other due to the internal laws of individual development can not be proven neither in the relationship study-work, nor in the relation game-activity. The activity of study should be combined with games since very early stages of development, the same happens with work. Children already in day-care centers and kindergarten should practice simple operations in an activity with a defined social purpose. We can say that it is not so simple to make game into a specific form of the child's object activity from his first year until the period in which he starts formal studies as many experts in child psychology tell us. Game as a particular form of activity has its own history of development comprising all periods of human life. (Ananiev, 1980, p. 20).

According to Ananiev (1980) sports in later stage of development of the individual is also part of games. In the same category it is possible to include different types of hobbies which could be considered manifestations of ludic activity, for instance collectionists of different kinds. What Ananiev considers game activity of the adult is an important part of life closely related to the so-called free time. There are often so complex transitions from work to game and study, that it is difficult to make any kind of unilateral characterization of human activity.

Ananiev (1980) goes beyond the objectal understanding of activity in which the psychological significance is specified by the role played by the elements involved in the appearance of an internal logic; these elements are, e.g., acts, goals and motives. This perspective widens the category activity to more complex forms of relationship between human beings and the environment. A considerable part of Ananiev's work was focused in understanding the role of activity in each period of development of the individual. This was done by analysing the system of meaningful activities within each period, rather than by focusing on a leading activity.

The contributions early mentioned in relation to activity had a great importance for the study of personality. They are useful for looking at different psychological constructions beyond Leontiev's conception about the structure of activity. Ananiev (1977, 1980) considers activity as systemic integration of 'three forms' that he regards as essential in the relations that the individual establishes with the reality; these forms are: communication, knowledge, and concrete activity. Each form of activity has a structural specificity and own way to influence the psychic development of the individual. Other psychologists following Ananiev's path call this category 'vital activity', to differentiate it from the 'traditional' concept of activity developed by Leontiev (cf. Gonzalez Rey, 1985).

Ananiev (cf. 1977, 1980) shares with Rubinstein the interest in searching a system which will allow explaining the factors that are involved in the social determination of personality. He worked intensively in setting up dynamic, more dialectics like, principles for research on personality. In this search he analyse the dialectics of the internal and external conditions of development considering both the history and present expression of these conditions. His works remarkably add to the explanation of social determination of the psychic.

The relevance of the affective area of personality is also in focus in the contributions by Ananiev (cf. 1980). In his opinion the different affective states of the individual cannot be explained following the standardized pattern of the study of the relationship existing between a specific external objective and the kind of affective response that this objective requires.

Frustration, like other affective states, comes into existence in critical situations. However, the dynamics of the emotional state is significantly determined by personality itself. Frustration could develop into an aggressive state in subjects with

little self-control. On the contrary in individuals lacking self-confidence, who are susceptible or introverted, frustration could develop in the form of depression. (Ananiev, 1980, p. 150)

According to Ananiev (1980) the affective states and emotions cannot be analysed outside their complicated determination by the personality. Affective states and emotions are not a direct or pre-established consequence of the objective aspects that emerge in the situation that the subject faces, but a consequence of the psychological significance the subject gives to them by means of his/her personality. The differences in the reactions to success and failure shown by youngsters with an appropriate self-valuation, in comparison to that of other with overvaluation or undervaluation of themselves, illustrate this regularity.

Studying further the inner complexity of the determination of different behaviours, moods, and reflections by means of the different mechanisms and internal formations of personality could well be considered the starting point in the elaboration of a psychological theory about personality (Ananiev, 1980). The relationship between motives and behaviour is essential and equally important, in Ananiev's perspective, as the relationship between the cognitive and the affective in personality.

It is necessary to insist that in the theory of personality the relevance of the intellect in the structure of personality is frequently underestimated. On the other hand, in the theory of intellect the social and the psychological features of personality that mediate the intellectual functions are insufficiently taken into account. This gap between personality and intellect opposes to the human being's real development. It is in this development where the social functions, social behaviour and motivation are always related to the process of reflex of the surrounding world by the humans. (Ananiev, 1980, p. 152)

Like Rubinstein does, Ananiev (1980) also considers reflex as a product of the subject that interacts with the object. The subject puts on the object all his/her potentialities and the characteristics of his/her psychic world; on this foundation, he/she builds the reflex of the surrounding world. Ananiev's work presents a conception of personality as a subject of behaviour, which is regulated by internal psychological mechanisms. It also presents a wider conception of the subject's links with the environment. The specificity given in his work to the categories communication, knowledge, and work made possible the study of the role that these categories have in the development of personality.

Concluding remarks - Common principles in the early works within the cultural historical tradition

I have attempted, in the earlier sections, to make comprehensive presentations of the contributions to research on personality by a group of the most relevant researchers in the cultural historical school. In the analysis presented above

main contributions to the study of personality are presented. Still, critical studies about research on personality within the cultural historical school refer to the various gaps and areas in need of further research (see, Gonzalez Rey, 1985; Shorojova, 1980).

After presenting the contributions and standpoints of some of the most relevant researchers within the cultural historical school it is now possible to draw attention to a number of communalities in their work. These common aspects are important principles for the study of personality and for a better understanding of the overall contribution of the cultural historical school in this area.

The first aspect to underline is the common acknowledgment in these contributions of the social determination of personality. They all consider personality as a historic-social product in the development of the human being. Personality is formed by means of the different forms of relationship of humans with the surrounding reality. Concerning these different forms of relationship it is possible to find differences among the mentioned researchers. Leontiev (1978), for instance, elaborated a conception basically oriented to explain the structural elements within the subject's relation with the world of objects, which he explains through the transformation from the external objective to the internal subjective in personality.

To Rubinstein and Ananiev, activity is a much wider category whose psychological relevance is not defined just by means of its operations or specific structure, but revealed by an active form of interchange between humans and their reality (cf. Rubinstein, 1962; Ananiev, 1980). According to this perspective, the psychological relevance of the category activity might be limited, but, on the contrary, the theoretical and methodological potentialities to use this category in the study of the personality are greater than what the study by Leontiev could suggest. The broadening of this category in the works of Rubinstein and Ananiev, and the level of coherence in the presentation of the category communication in Ananiev's conception of activity, were significant advances in research on personality.

The role of self-consciousness in the study of personality is another central aspect common to the contributions of these psychologists. The specificity of self-consciousness in the functional manifestation of all processes and formations of personality is analysed as an active moment of integration of the psychic under conscious elaborations and reflections (cf. Shorojova, 1980). The attention given by these authors to the mediateness of self-consciousness in cognition and in the motivational sphere largely facilitated the development of the principle of the unity between the cognitive and the affective in personality. This finding also allowed an active conception of personality in which the human being acts as subject in a broader sense and not just as a possessor of features and properties.

The principle of unity between the affective and the cognitive is essential in research on personality and is acknowledged by all the mentioned authors. The integral character attributed to the higher psychological processes is also a common feature in these contributions. This is also the case when it comes to the search for levels of synthesis in the explanation of the psychological that help to overcome the different functionalist positions in psychology. In the contributions of these researchers it is also possible to identify important principles of Marxist Philosophy such as the reflex of reality as main character of the psychic, the socio-historic nature of the subject, and the active role of the subject.

The presentation in this article also shows the various contradictions between relevant contributors to the development of a theory of personality within the cultural historical school. Assuming a dialectic point of view and considering contradictions as a source of development it is possible to conclude that the path to further and meaningful research was substantially paved by these contributions. Research within VET, in particular concerning problems such as motivation and dropouts, will benefit greatly from revisiting with critical eye many of what we call here original contributions from cultural historical research.

Endnote

¹ In this article and a previous study (Moreno Herrera, 2007) I had a very valuable help from Professor Nikolai Vasilievich Kohtriakhov, Moscow State Industrial University. He consulted the edition from 1960 in Russian language of Vygotsky's work *The History of the Development of Higher Psychological Functions*. We discussed my knowledge of this work from its presentation in the edition of Vygotsky's work by a group of scholars lead by Michael Cole published in 1978 with the title *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, and the translation in Spanish language. Again, in our discussion the question of accuracy of the translations of Vygotsky's works was a major subject, I finally decided to present quotations that Professor Nikolai Vasilievich Kohtriakhov translated from the edition of 1960. This decision was inspired by reading the acknowledgment made by Michael Cole in the preface to the edition of 1978: 'In putting separated essays together we have taken significant liberties. The reader will encounter here not literal translation of Vygotsky but rather our edited translation of Vygotsky' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. X).

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