
SCHOOL DIFFICULTIES IN CABINDA/ANGOLA: WHAT DO MONOGRAPHS SAY?¹

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ABSTRACT. This study analyzed two monographs of Pedagogy and Psychology, from ISCED/UON/Cabinda/Angola. The study was based on the Historical - Cultural perspective of Vygotsky articulated with Bakhtin's concept of speech genre. In these monographs we find a variety of senses and meanings. These senses and meanings appear as synonyms for poor school performance, school failure, learning difficulties. However, despite this diversity, we find as a common denominator the view that the difficulties are individual and from a biological background. They are located on students and their families. Thus, schooling processes in these schools in Cabinda, although they include students in schools, they also walk towards the exclusion of the same students, which tells us that the difficulties are not necessarily in learning, but in this exclusionary process of schooling. For monographs also point out the precarious working conditions of schools and teacher training, in addition to the linguistic differences between the local language and Portuguese – the language that is spoken and written in schools - as factors contributing to the exclusion of many of the students. This reveals the double face of modernity: on the one hand it includes students within schools, on the other, excludes them from the teaching-learning processes when sociocultural differences are expressed. Through our analysis we realized that in schools in Cabinda, as in many schools in Brazil, reading, writing and mathematics are taught as individual skills acquisitions and not as human activities as taught in Vygotsky.

Keywords: Cultural-historical psychology; school difficulties; primary school.

DIFICULDADES ESCOLARES EM CABINDA/ANGOLA: O QUE DIZEM AS MONOGRAFIAS?

RESUMO. Este trabalho analisou duas monografias dos cursos de pedagogia e psicologia, do ISCED/UON/Cabinda/Angola. O estudo teve como base a perspectiva histórico-cultural, de Vygotski, articulada com o conceito de gênero de discurso, de Bakhtin. Nessas monografias, encontramos uma diversidade de sentidos e significados. Esses sentidos e significados aparecem como sinônimos de baixo rendimento, insucesso ou fracasso escolar e dificuldades de aprendizagem. Entretanto, apesar dessa diversidade, temos como denominador comum a concepção de que as dificuldades são individuais e de fundo biológico. Elas estão localizadas nos estudantes e em suas famílias. Desse modo, os processos de escolarização nessas escolas de Cabinda, embora incluam os alunos nas escolas, caminham para a exclusão dos mesmos, o que nos indica que as dificuldades não são necessariamente de aprendizagem, mas, sim, que estão nesse processo excludente de escolarização. Pois as monografias estudadas também apontam as condições precárias de funcionamento das escolas e da formação de professores, além das diferenças linguísticas entre a língua local e o português, língua que se fala e escreve nas escolas, como fatores que concorrem para a exclusão de grande parte dos alunos. Isso revela a dupla face da modernidade que, se, por um lado, integra os alunos dentro das escolas, por outro, exclui-os dos processos de ensino-aprendizagem quando tais estudantes manifestam diferenças socioculturais. Por meio de nossas análises, pudemos perceber que nas escolas de Cabinda, como em muitas escolas no

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Brasil, ensinam-se leitura, escrita e matemática como aquisições de habilidades individuais e não como atividades humanas, como nos ensinou Vygotski.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia histórico-cultural; dificuldades escolares; ensino fundamental.

DIFICULTADES ESCOLARES EN CABINDA/ANGOLA: ¿QUE DICEN LAS MONOGRAFÍAS?

RESUMEN. Este estudio analizó dos monografías del curso de Pedagogía y de Psicología, de ISCED/UON/Cabinda/Angola. El estudio tomó como referente la perspectiva histórico-cultural de Vygotsky articulada con el concepto de género de discurso de Bakhtin. En estos estudios encontramos gran diversidad de sentidos y significados. Esos sentidos y significados aparecen como sinónimos de bajo rendimiento escolar, fracaso escolar y dificultades de aprendizaje. A su vez, a pesar de esta diversidad, encontramos como común denominador la concepción de que las dificultades escolares son individuales y que tiene un trasfondo biológico, radicando estas, en los estudiantes y en sus familias. De este modo, los procesos de escolarización en esas escuelas de Cabinda, aunque sean proyectos de inclusión terminan en la exclusión de los estudiantes, lo que nos indica que las dificultades no son necesariamente de aprendizaje, y si de un proceso excluyente de escolarización. Pues, las monografías también resaltan las condiciones precarias de funcionamiento de las escuelas de formación de profesores, además de las diferencias lingüísticas entre la lengua local y el portugués, lengua que se habla y escribe en las escuelas, como factores que inciden en la exclusión de gran parte de los alumnos. Esto revela la doble cara de la modernidad que, si por un lado integra los alumnos dentro de las escuelas, por otro, los excluye de los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje cuando manifiestan diferencias socioculturales. Por medio de nuestro análisis pudimos percibir que, en las escuelas de Cabinda, como en muchas escuelas en el Brasil, se enseña lectura, escritura y matemática como habilidades individuales adquiridas y, no como actividades humanas como nos enseñó Vygotsky.

Palabras-clave: Psicología histórico-cultural; dificultades escolares; enseñanza primaria.

Introduction

This article aimed at analyzing two monographs of finalists of the courses of Psychology and Pedagogy of the Higher Institute of Educational Sciences (HIES), University 11 de Novembro (UON), which addressed issues relating to what the authors termed “low performance”, “failure”, “low school performance” and “learning difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics”.

In the two monographs, we found recurring issues, enumerated by the authors, such as the operational conditions of schools in Cabinda, the training of teachers who taught or still teach there, language differences inside and outside schools, individualized look to understand the difficulties in the process of schooling, as well as socioeconomic factors of the students participating in these researches. These issues raised reflections relating the problems of school failure and, specifically, what was called “learning difficulties” in reading, writing and mathematical reasoning in those schools. To guide our research, we relied on the following questions: What has “learning difficulty” meant to the authors? What were the results achieved in the studies? For this purpose, we developed an analytical approach based on the contributions of Vygotski (1983/1995; 1983/1997) and researches related to school failure: Gomes & Sena (2000), Soares (2000), Patto, Angelucci and Paparelli (2004), Gomes (2005), Lessa and Facci (2009), Dos Santos (2012), Couto (2012), Pinheiro and Weber (2012).

The initial universe of our research encloses the monographic production of 41 studies between 2006 and 2011, in the HIES-Cabinda, thus subdivided: 149 graduated in Pedagogy, with 85 studies, of which we selected 24; in Psychology, 247 graduated were recorded, with 140 studies, of which we choose 17. Then we opted to highlight nine monographs that brought explicitly in their titles the motto of “learning difficulty” in reading, writing and mathematics.

In this article, we will analyze the work of two finalists of the course of psychology, taken from nine monographs selected previously, in whose titles the theme “learning difficulties” is explicit. We consider that looking and understanding another culture, contrastively, can help us to understand our own

culture of production of this failure and, specifically, what the authors of the monographs call “learning difficulties”.

Importance of monographs and a short history of the education in Cabinda

According to one of the students of the HIES/UON

The monograph is, in our point of view, an essential and indispensable element in the academic life of the student. Its practical effects lead to a new view on a particular subject. More than this, it is a great contribution to the scientific production increasingly desired. The preparation of the monograph is an exercise considered by many as unnecessary in the educational practice, but we believe that those people who think this way are completely wrong. Although recreating in us an expensive consumption of energy, being a heavy burden and, to some extent, providing a great emotional distress, little is thought, discussed or written about the benefits that can be posed with this scientific production (testimony of an undergraduate student).

Within this line of thought, we share with the initiative taken by the rector of the UON when this highlights the notoriety of the monograph as scientific production of graduates and establishes the obligation to elaborate the same in graduation courses of all organic units.

More than a significant scientific work to the training of students in the HIES, the monographs relating to the phenomenon of school failure and, in a specific character, to what the authors refer to as “learning difficulties” in the schools of Cabinda, are configured as our object of study because they are, up to the moment, the scientific production that is done at the Higher Institute of Educational Sciences, at the undergraduate level, considering that there are no *stricto sensu* post-graduation courses organized and in operation, nor even *latu sensu* courses that enable activities of research and extension in this institution. We are here talking about Cabinda, city in which we will present below, highlighting its cultural and educational characteristics.

Cabinda, with 7,283 km² and around 300,000 inhabitants, is the province further north of the 18 provinces of Angola, bordered to the north by the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), to the east and south by the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Republic of Zaire), and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The capital of this province is the city of Cabinda, known also under the name of Tchiowa (Brito, 2005). The local population belongs, almost entirely, to the Bantu people, whose language, Ibinda, is one of the dialects of Kikongo. To Martins (1972), «Kioua» (Tchiowa), name by which the city was known by the natives until the 1940s, designated “square”, “market”. In fact, Cabinda was a major slave market (more frequented, for this purpose, by French ships than any other nation). Market not only of slaves, but also of fishes, land products, cloths «lubongo», and salt, being all these products currencies for exchange.

Within this picture the educational systems in Cabinda have developed. At the beginning of the Portuguese colonization, the primary teachings were responsibility of the Catholic Missions. By reviewing studies of Púcuta and Tomás (2012, p. 37) about the analysis of the educational system in Angola, before and after the independence of the country, it was seen that, in the 1940s, the Portuguese government made “the famous missionary agreement”, stipulating that the education of indigenous people (Portuguese name for the Angolan people) would be under the responsibility of the missionaries; the agreement, however, had no effect because the colonial government never provided funding for this initiative. The urban education was rudimentary, based only on the learning of reading and the four calculation operations.

In 1950, in Cabinda, other schools of rural settlements were opened, as Ntó, Caio, Siadede and Malembo. To solve the problem of lack of teachers, the government creates the School of Teaching Profession of Cuima, in Huambo province, for the training of primary school teachers. Many young Cabindans were formed there, contributing to the development of the education in Cabinda. In 1960, the primary education was reduced to four classes preceded by a pre-class, which was conventionally called *initiation* or *pre-primary education*; and aimed at the adaptation of the child to the school

environment. It was formed then a single educational cycle – the primary education with duration of four years. In 1962, under pressure from nationalists, the Portuguese Government withdraws from the religious missions the direction of the education and starts to manage it alone, extending the school network to all villages.

Púcuta and Tomás (2012) reveal that the pedagogical relationship of that time was based on the intimidation: no student had word before the teacher, regarded as the “Almighty”. This professional enjoyed great respect both on the part of the responsible for the education of the students (parents or guardians) and the community. The traditional education was based on physical punishment under the motto: “If you save the stick you spoil the child”.

From 1964, the Lyceum education or secondary school was established in Cabinda, aimed at students wishing to expand their academic knowledge in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles. By completing the cycles, the students were able to qualify for university education. In 1972, it was created a plan for school development, named CALABUBE, which encompassed Cabinda, Lândana, Buco-Zau and Belize, aiming at expanding the school networks in the villages of these four municipalities through the disseminated schools, called Schools of Teaching Center.

With the independence of Angola, in 1975, the dynamics of the educational policies became widespread throughout the country, and Cabinda, being part of it, followed the same dynamics for the formation of a fair society and of a new man, highlighting the importance of the education and literacy process in this formation.

Explained the post-independence objectives, it can still be read in the official documents of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Angolan ruling party, the concern with the educational process. Such care is underlined by the reforms initiated in 1977 and approved in 1978 and by the resolution of the Central Committee of the Movement about the reformulation of the education and training system in the Republic of Angola.

Thus, education occurs through a unified system, consisting of the following subsystems of education: subsystem of Pre-school Education; subsystem of General Education; subsystem of Technical-professional Education; subsystem of Teacher training Education; subsystem of Adult Education; subsystem of Higher Education. According to official documents, the subsystem of pre-school education is the basis of the education, taking care of the early childhood, at a stage in life in which the actions of conditioning and psychomotor development must be performed. It is structured in two cycles: nursery and kindergarten. The subsystem of General Education is the foundation of the Educational System with the purpose of providing a comprehensive training, harmonious and a solid and necessary basis for further studies in the subsequent subsystems. It is structured as Primary and Secondary Education.

Our study in this text was focused on monographs produced in the subsystem of Higher Education, which aims to the initial formation of psychology professors at HIES/UON.

Theoretical-methodological frameworks

The theoretical-methodological framework adopted in this study is based on the historical-cultural approach of Vygotski (1983/1995; 1983/1997) and also in the productions concerning extensive studies on school failure, mainly developed by Gomes and Sena (2000) Soares (2000), Patto, Angelucci and Paparelli (2004), Gomes (2005), Lessa and Facci (2009), Dos Santos (2012), Couto (2012), Pinheiro and Weber (2012).

When returning to the notes of Gomes and Sena (2000), we see that the studies on school failure in Brazil, in the late 1970s, were marked by academic researches because of a change in the period, when a large number of children of lower classes lived in school failure situation, raising questions such as: Who are these students? How do they learn? Researches such as of Soares (2000) denounced the stigmatizing and exclusionary effects of the theory of cultural scarcity, which considers that poor children present linguistic and cultural deficits.

Since the last century, the discussions in the field of the difficulties of the education process have increased significantly and developed in interdisciplinary field. Gomes (2005), by making a survey about the so-called "school failure", also sought to incorporate the aspects that most concerned her. For her, the attempts to understand this failure, from the last decade of 80, were not restricted to the quality of the education; there was the inclusion of the debate on the cultural diversity of the students, considering issues of gender, ethnicity and social class.

Patto, Angelucci and Paparelli (2004) ensure that the differential psychology used various concepts of cultural anthropology to explain the low performance of black children and popular classes in the learning of reading and writing and in tests that were applied to measure their psychic capacity. For that bias, school failure was understood as the sum of repetition rates and school evasions. In accordance with the authors, it cannot be ignored that the school failure is not only a political and ideological problem, but it is also a pedagogical issue.

Lessa and Facci (2009) call attention to the need for a critical view on the understanding of the school failure and the need to make use of intervention models that exceed a clinical view, and that include the constitution of the human subjectivity, the affections and the emotions implicit in the educational process.

According to Couto (2012), we still witness the mass sending of children considered in school difficult situation to the psychological services, which can legitimize "the thesis that the origin of the failure would be in children themselves, in their social and/or family environment, and reinforce the psychologizing process of the school failure already denounced by Patto" (p.34).

Recently, Pinheiro and Weber (2012) concluded that even today a large part of the researches on school failure in the Brazilian elementary school relays explanations about this failure centered on the students, on their families and culture; however, there are others who expands their vision, analyzing the educational and social contexts as determinants of this phenomenon, such as Lessa and Facci (2009), Couto (2012) and others. Pinheiro and Weber also affirm that the school failure has been studied worldwide and that several denominations appeared, such as: "school performance", "learning difficulties", "repetition", "age/grade distortion" (Zago, 2011). This will be no different from the educational reality in Cabinda, as discussed below.

The context of production of monographs, contributed to our initial analysis, considering them as a genre of written discourse (Bakhtin, 1931/2003), which is structured as follows: Introduction, general and specific objectives, problem/hypothesis, dependent and independent variables, methodology and results. When trying to understand this context of production, it was necessary to know the consistency, similarities and differences, contrasts that the authors imprinted and what they wanted to transmit with their studies. Our analysis also favored the significances and meanings of "learning difficulties" for those authors, which involved power relations expressed through low school performance, role of linguistic differences in learning difficulties relating to these linguistic differences and "learning difficulties" regarding the socio-economic conditions of the students researched, the operating conditions of the schools, the training of teachers and the educational policies.

Thus, the monographic texts allowed us interesting dialogues with the school and social realities of Cabinda, aiming to understand the meanings and significances produced by the authors for what they call "learning difficulties".

"Learning difficulties"?

The title of this topic already tells that we distrust this term – "learning difficulties" – when entering it with quotes and a question mark. So from now on we will use the term "difficulties in the schooling process", given that we do not consider that only students can present difficulties, but these, if indeed exist, will always have relational solutions, that is, since they happen in the relationships between the educational process and the students. However, we will keep the term "learning difficulties", in quotation marks, when picturing the contents and concepts of the authors of the monographs.

For this article, as we have said, we will prioritize two monographs produced in the course of Psychology of the Higher Institute of Educational Sciences of the University 11 de Novembro. The title of the first monograph, written by Mateus and Lelo (2010), was "Causes of learning difficulties for students of 4th class, class A – evening period, Primary School No. 108, of the Fútila". The text brings to light issues related to students with visual, hearing, speech and mixed impairments and their inclusion and exclusion processes in/of the school. In addition, this monograph also raises other causes, of the difficulties in the schooling process relating to the functioning of the schools, organization, work conditions and initial teacher training.

The second monograph, written by Bungo and Cuango (2010), entitled: "Most common learning problems of the students of the 2nd class, classes C, D, E, Educational Reform, of the School Commander Gika, Cabinda". It was selected because it allowed us to problematize, on the one hand, the indiscriminate use of the term "learning difficulties" as a synonym for dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthographia or dyscalculia; and, on the other, to unveil extrinsic causes of the so-called "learning difficulties", such as: inadequate or insufficient education, low motivation, overcrowding in classrooms and economic factors, differing from most of the nine monographs that analyzed "learning difficulties" as something derived from intrinsic factors, manifested by the significant discrepancies in the development of the psychological processes of the students, such as perception, attention or memory.

Therefore, the selection of these monographs was due to the fact that these expanded the discussions of what the authors call "learning difficulties", when pointing the causes of the same relating to the schooling process. However, such works have not proposed to rethink the use of the term. Let us look at analyzes and interpretations.

First monograph

In the work of Mateus and Lelo (2010), we noticed the concern to explain to readers what motivated them to accomplish it: find out how the school conciliated the teaching-learning process and its obstacles in relation to the influences of the several tourist attractions offered to the village of Fútila at the time of the research.

It should be noted that the school is located in the midst of varied touristic attractions and is situated about 20 km from the capital Tchiowa, in Cabinda province. The village of Fútila established itself as a tourist area for leisure, very crowded, and the main entrance door to the oilfield of the company Chevron. The Primary School No. 108 had a director, a pedagogical sub-director, teachers, students and the staff, and worked in the early and late shifts.

To conduct the research, the authors opted for research instruments such as questionnaires and structured interviews; methods of direct observation, bibliographic and statistical; descriptive research and case study. In our view, there was agglutination of research methods without theoretical and explanatory discussion about them.

As common thread of the monographic work, Mateus and Lelo (2010) raised the following assumptions for the "learning difficulties": existence of students with visual, hearing, speech and mixed impairments; poor level of assimilation of the subject; troubled relationships between students and teachers; difficulty in the exercise of the teaching profession.

The power relations seen as troubled between teachers and students; family and school; teachers and teachers deserved emphasis by the authors of this monograph because they considered them as important factors to increase the degree of the learning difficulties of the students. The universe analyzed in this study was composed of: 41 students, whose ages ranged from five to ten years, six teachers and 20 guardians. On the socioeconomic situation of the subjects analyzed, it was found that some guardians were unemployed surviving from fishing, and due to tourist interests, the children were dispersed from the school and did not prepare their homework. During school hours, the local beaches were visited by 42.2% of the students; 24.4% participated in marathons typical of the region; 6.6% participated of the sea fishing; Furthermore, 26.6% stopped attending school to accompany their mothers at work in the field (Mateus & Lelo, 2010, p. 52).

The poor monitoring of parents and/or guardians in the school life was interpreted by the authors as one of the factors of higher incidence on the learning difficulties of students, combined with the precarious conditions of the educational institution: lack of lighting, desks destroyed, three students sitting together a same desk; others, sitting on milk cans; bumpy floor and damaged ceiling, all preventing classes to happen when it rained. There was also a lack of school supplies (31.1% of students without notebooks and 20% without pens) and books (48% of students), according to Mateus and Lelo (2010, p. 43).

Even considering the precariousness of teaching and learning conditions in the school researched, the teachers pointed out problems of writing, reading and calculation for 53.3% of them; 8.8% had hearing deficit; 6.6% of vision; 71.1% had speech impairment and 13.3% carried difficulties associated. This indicates us that the authors discuss what they term as "learning difficulties" through a predominantly biological approach, a perspective that we seek to analyze critically, because, even in Brazil, such a conception had, and still has great power to explain the phenomenon of school failure.

Regarding what Mateus and Lelo (2010) considered as impairment, especially of the speech, it is worth remembering the link of this with the participation of the students in the classroom or with the refusal to answer questions prepared by the teacher. Whereas many of the students did not like it (68.8% of the students), perhaps the speech difficulties have been misinterpreted, reflecting, only, the shyness or fear of them to express themselves and making mistakes.

It seems that the schooling process experienced in the everyday of the school of Fútila revealed possibilities of success of some students, but failure for most. According to this study, the relationship between teachers and students and the low participation of parents and guardians in the school life of the students were considered major agents of chance of failure, and such aspects corresponding to 50% and 45% of teachers, respectively. It is also worth dimensioning that many of the teachers did not live in that village or had their own cars. The dependence on the taxi made them, often, to arrive to school with an hour and a half late and leave before the regulated time.

About the schooling of the teaching staff, it was observed that 16.6% had between the 5th and the 8th grade (subsystem of General Education/1st Cycle of the Secondary Education), 66.6% between the 9th and 12th grade (subsystem of General education/2nd Cycle of the Secondary Education), and 16.6% attended the subsystem of Higher Education.

In addition, it was required polyvalence from teachers, as they should teach English Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Manual and Polytechnic Education, Physical Education and Musical Education. Given this situation, we can consider that the training and performance of the teachers also contributed to failure and success of the students.

Anticipating the practice and discussion of the social and educational inclusion, Vygotski (1983/1997) considered the students with visual, hearing, speech, among others impairments, as historical-cultural subjects who construct the classrooms together with their classmates and teachers. This takes us back to the data collected by Mateus and Lelo (2010) concerning the deficiencies and associated difficulties presented earlier.

Vygotski (1983/1997) had criticized the biological imprisonment of psychology to the understanding of the human being and postulated the need for cover to the field of historical-cultural psychology. He criticized the quantitative analysis of the problems of the visually, hearing, mental, among others impaired, arguing that the human psyche is not a homogeneous structure of isolated functions and that the human development is not reduced to an increase (or a maturation) of organic functions and psychological functions. These assumptions led to the perception of the disability as a finished structure and not as a process, betting on the idea that, in the existence of "biological defects", people would have insufficient or hindered development, determined only by organic causes.

The thinker argued that the development of people with disabilities should be seen and analyzed as qualitatively different, i.e., in the development process, the organic regularities and causes of disturbances will not cease to exist, but will be replaced and/or transformed by forming new mental workings, functions that have their origin in the social and cultural experiences of children.

Vygotski (1983/1997) emphasized, mainly that in case of a disability, the difficulties arising from it, faced by the child in his development process, would be the first stimulus to overcome them, seeking means of (re)organization and balance, compensation or adaptation.

In the case of the teachers of the school of Fútila, if they were supported by vygotskian precepts, they could have looked at the so-called visual, hearing, mental and associated impairments, that could shift them from the synonym of “defects”, “lacks” to a level of possibilities of development. Thus, possibly favoring the emergence of inclusive actions of teaching and learning, qualitatively different. This implies constructing, in the process of teaching and learning, the dialogue between the knowledge of the students, the social and cultural experiences of the village of Fútila and the school knowledge; however, always with the mediation of teachers, colleagues and the meanings that they produce for what is taught and learned in schools.

It is necessary to create advancement opportunities for the students, zones of imminent development (Prestes, 2011), understood here as areas of sharing of knowledge and possibilities for development (Vygotski, 1983/1997), which implies saying that the activities proposed by the teachers may or may not provide mental and cultural development of their students. However, to create these possibilities it is necessary to conceive the teaching of reading, writing and calculations as human activities, collective and not only as the acquisition of individual skills.

Finally, it is stressed that when teachers are attentive to the multiplicity of rhythms and biases of the learning and development processes, singularly experienced by each child, they are led to revise their concepts of school failure. By redefining such concept, it is opened up a range of guidelines that can lead the students to success, when dialoguing with the pedagogical practices, with the situation of the schools, with the teacher training and the socioeconomic and cultural contingencies of all involved.

Second monograph

In the monograph of Bungo and Cuango (2010), we find the term “learning problems” rather than “learning difficulties”. We must remember that the terms (“learning”) “problems” and “difficulties” contain conceptions differentiated over time. Nevertheless, Golbert and Moojen (1996 as cited in Dos Santos (2012, p. 74) “point out that its meaning encompasses all observable difficulties faced by the student to follow the natural rhythm of learning of their classmates in the same age group, whatever the determining factor of delay”.

To understand the “learning problems” detected, the monograph authors used the questionnaire, the statistical method and the observation – the latter was treated either as a research tool, or as a method. The participants of the second monographic study were 98 students, with ages ranging from 7 to 13 years, and nine teachers. The classrooms surveyed in this school were overcrowded: class C, with 96 students; class D, with 94 students, and class E, with 90 students. This is the rule in all schools of Cabinda, due to the constraints of the post-independence and civil war, which destroyed many institutions.

The authors also show that 100% of the students received the literary material and of mathematics for free by the school direction. This fact exclude a probable lack of didactic materials, which constitutes one of the most common problems of learning of students as we saw in the monograph previously analyzed. This action and the maintenance of the gratuity of primary education, which encompasses the Subsystem of General Education and the Subsystem of Adult Education show how the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Government of Angola, are engaged in favor of education (Isaías & Sambo, 2011).

According to argument of the authors, based on the opinion of 73.3% of the students, the assimilation of the contents was classified as bad. Another worrying phenomenon at this level of education, in our opinion, is the overcrowding of the classrooms, with 96, 94 and 90 students in each of the surveyed classrooms. When investigating the point of view of the students about the orientation of school works by teachers, the authors recorded: 41.7% said that they sometimes received orientation; 34.6% did not receive and 23.4% were oriented in their school works by the teachers (Bungo & Cuango, 2011, p. 38).

Another disquieting issue surrounded the question asked to the students: Did the teacher use to punish students who made mistakes? Punishments such as, kneeling down and hit with a wand or any

type of object that was within reach of the teacher in the classroom were reported in 51.9% of the answers, that is, physical punishments were used to maintain discipline in the classroom. We think that the punishments applied to the students with difficulties in solving any type of exercise imply conceptions of education carried out by the punishment, that is, by the conditioning and control of the bodies. Such an approach provides atmospheres of punishment, guilt, and fear, which still permeate the Angolan teaching practice and prevent the school to be also an environment of joy and satisfaction for children.

In the questionnaire addressed to teachers, the authors made sure that they never benefited from training seminars and 66.6% of them pointed to dysorthographia as justification of “learning disorders”, since students did not organize the words in the best way. Bungo and Cuango (2011) also affirm that dyslexia and dyscalculia constitute the most common learning disorders between the students researched.

These labels come from the definition of learning disorders, established in 1968 by The National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children, an American multidisciplinary group:

For this committee, children with learning disorder exhibit a change in one or more basic psychological processes involved in the understanding or in the use of spoken or written language. The disorder can manifest as changes in hearing, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic, and includes conditions that have been referred to as deficits of perception, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, development aphasia, etc. However, it does not cover learning problems that are primarily due to visual, hearing or motor impairment, to intellectual disability, emotional disturbance or environmental disadvantage (Moyses & Collares, 1992, p. 38).

This definition of learning disorders was problematized by Moyses and Collares (1992), with which we agree, because it refers, necessarily, to a problem, or, more clearly, to a disease that affects the student – the carrier – at the individual level, as an organic problem. For an individual problem, only individual solutions can arise. For a medical problem, there can only be medical solutions. This has as consequence the removal of responsibility of schools, of the educational systems, concerning the school failure, mainly of poor and black students, who are usually treated in Brazil with medications such as Ritalin, for instance.

The use of the term “learning disorders”, which also occurs frequently in Brazil, leads to crystallized diagnoses from the neurological and psychological point of view. Such expression appears to be widespread among teachers, although most of them cannot explain clearly the meaning of the term, its criteria and when it should be used. This practice reflects the growing process of biologization of social issues (in this case, educational), a process of undeniable ideological nature. This biologization and the consequent pathologization of learning hide the political and educational determinants of the school failure. The social circumstances would have minimal influence, exempting from responsibilities the sociopolitical system and the school institution inserted in it – as is happening in the schools of Cabinda.

From this conception results, then, that the individual is the main responsible for his destiny, by his living conditions; he is who has an illness that needs treatment. However, other researches have sought to go beyond the organismic explanation in an attempt to understand the processes of learning of reading and writing. Among them, we highlight the work of Alvarenga (1995), Gomes and Sena (2000), Couto (2012), Pinheiro and Weber (2012).

Continuing with the critical discussion of the use of crystallized diagnoses to explain the difficulties in schooling, Gomes and Sena (2000, p. 19), clarify their point of views in affirming that all children show great capacity for reflections on the written language through spelling variations (Alvarenga, 1995), customarily considered by the school as a reflection that the child cannot write. “Orthographic variations” was the term used by Alvarenga (1995) in place of “misspelling”. For him, the word “error” would belong to a theoretical framework that admits the existence of a social norm previously defined, as the only correct reference. In this context, language is studied as a closed object, ready and finished. Learning is seen as apprehension or assimilation of language rules imposed by the social system. Whereas the evaluation is seen as the measure of the results and never of the development of the mechanisms with which the students operate. Thus, the orthographic constructions of the students, which differ from the standard rule, are rejected, crossed out, devalued and considered as errors. The

term “spelling variation” starts with the point of view that language is an open object of knowledge, under construction, and that learning is a task of conceptualization of the organizing principles of language on the part of learners.

These spelling variations indicate what students think about the Portuguese language, what they have already learned about it and what they still need to learn. Vygotski (1983/1995) affirms that you cannot teach children only through artificial explanations, compulsive memorization and repetition. What a child needs is to acquire new concepts and words to give direction and meaning to what he learns. It is necessary to teach the written language, understood by Vygotski (1983/1995) as a human activity, as a social practice and that is located and not as acquisition of individual skills of reading, writing and calculation.

In view of this, cognition is considered by us as social and located (Garrido, Azevedo, & Palma, 2011), a historical and cultural process, closely associated with emotions. That is, we move away from a strictly individual and biological conception of cognitive processes. Based on studies of historical-cultural psychology (Vygotski, 1983/1995), we understand that social interactions constitute the human beings who participate of them. Social relationships become higher psychological functions. Thus, language and culture are intrinsically related to the processes of appropriation and understanding of the social practices of reading, writing and calculation in Cabinda.

The monograph of Bungo and Cuango (2011) takes into account the distance between what is proposed as a theory and the social practice of the classroom, but does not question the labels assigned to students by teachers, even when notes that the precarious training of the latter and the high number of students in the classrooms may have originated difficulties in the schooling process. These authors also record: 99.9% of teachers assign learning disability (dyscalculia) in mathematics to their students. For us, if the majority of students did not learn mathematics, probably the problem was not located only in them, but in the conditions of teaching and learning, in the operating conditions experienced at school.

Final considerations

In the two monographs analyzed, we found a variety of senses and meanings that the authors refer to as “learning difficulties”. These obstacles are perceived in different primary, secondary and adult schools in Cabinda/Angola between 2006 and 2011. Such meanings appear as synonyms of low school performance, educational underachievement, learning difficulties, school failure.

However, despite this diversity, we found as common denominator the conception that the difficulties are individual and of biological nature. They are located in the students and their families. By labeling students as dyslexic, dysorthographic and with dyscalculia, the authors attested the ideological movement of biologization of the Cabindan society that transforms sociocultural differences into sociocultural deficiencies. Thus, the schooling processes in these schools in Cabinda, although they include the students, they move towards the exclusion of the same, which indicates us that the difficulties are not of learning, but rather they are in this exclusionary process of schooling. In addition, they suggest the double face of modernity that on the one hand integrates the students within the schools; on the other hand, excludes them from the teaching-learning processes when expressed sociocultural differences (Gomes, 2015). This shows similarities with exclusionary schooling processes, Brazilian and global, which produce the school failure, as pointed out by Pinheiro and Weber (2012).

Through these analyzes, we could see that in schools in Cabinda is taught reading, writing and mathematics as acquisitions of individual skills and not as human activities, as shown by Vygotski. However, these monographs brought important questions to be reflected by teachers and the government of Angola, in different levels, such as political, linguistic, ideological and educational. In addition, they pointed out that, recently, the government of the country has promoted inclusive actions aimed at improving the quality of education in local schools.

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