THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY IN BRAZIL¹

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ABSTRACT. We present in this article some considerations about evidences of the historical development of the criticism movement on school psychology in Brazil. The process began in the 1980s and sought to break with the stance of traditional school psychology which, supported by the clinical medical model, used to classify and correct students with learning difficulties. This is a bibliographical research that aimed to analyze an emerging form of psychology that was concerned with giving a new direction in the school area and identify the historical and social roots of psychology and education. The main strand of this movement took place through a model of criticism to capitalist society with respect to its harmful effects on school education. Authors who rely on the method of historical-dialectical materialism stood out. We noticed that although this critical perspective has not been developed at the theoretical level, it is still under constructionin the practical field.

Keywords: School psychology; history of psychology; critical school psychology in Brazil.

O DESENVOLVIMENTO HISTÓRICO DA PSICOLOGIA ESCOLAR CRÍTICA NO BRASIL

RESUMO. Apresentamos neste artigo algumas considerações que evidenciam o desenvolvimento histórico do movimento de crítica à psicologia escolar no Brasil. Tal processo teve início na década de 1980 e teve como objetivo romper com a postura da psicologia escolar tradicional, que amparada no modelo médico clínico classificava e ajustava alunos com dificuldades de aprendizagem. Trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica que teve como objetivo analisar uma forma emergente de psicologia que se preocupou em dar um novo direcionamento à área escolar e compreender as raízes históricas e sociais da psicologia e da educação. A vertente principal deste movimento se deu por meio de um modelo de crítica à sociedade capitalista no que se refere aos seus efeitos nocivos na educação escolar. Destacaram-se autores que se fundamentam no método do materialismo histórico-dialético. Constatamos que esta perspectiva crítica, embora tenha avançado no plano teórico, no campo prático ainda está em construção.

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Palavras-chave: Psicologia escolar; história da psicologia; psicologia escolar crítica no Brasil.

EL DESARROLLO HISTÓRICO DE LA PSICOLOGÍA ESCOLAR CRÍTICA EN BRASIL

RESUMEN. Presentamos en este artículo algunas consideraciones que evidencian el desarrollo histórico de movimiento de crítica a la psicología escolar en Brasil. Tal proceso tuvo inicio en la década de 1980 y buscó romper con la posición de la psicología escolar tradicional, que amparada en el modelo médico clínico clasificaba y ajustaba alumnos con dificultades de aprendizaje. Se trata de una investigación bibliográfica que tuvo por objetivo analizar una forma emergente de psicología que se preocupó en dar un nuevo direccionamiento al área escolar y comprender las raíces históricas y sociales de la psicología y de la educación. La vertiente principal de este movimiento se dio por medio de un modelo de crítica a la sociedad capitalista en lo que se refiere a sus efectos nocivos en la educación escolar. Se destacaron autores que se fundamentan en el método del materialismohistórico-dialéctico. Verificamos que esta perspectiva crítica, aunque tenga avanzado en el plano teórico, en el campo práctico aún está en construcción.

Palabras clave: Psicología escolar; historia de la psicología; psicología escolar crítica en Brasil.

Introduction

In the historiographical data presented by several authors such as Massimi (1990), Antunes (1998), Pessoti (1988), Soares (2010), the history of psychology, more specifically school psychology, in Brazil was established amid a pathological practice of educating through the strategies of physical, moral and mental hygiene fomented by racist theories and biological and environmental determinism to justify the learning problems. Such justification strengthened the ideology of innate aptitudes and concealed social inequalities and exploitation, transforming a social problem into an individual issue.

Souza, Lima, Ramos, Barbosa, Yamamoto and Calado (2014a) state that traditional psychology has been structures upon the clinical care of children with 'learning difficulties' referred by schools, families and other professionals. In this type of work, it was and still is common to see the application of tests, anamnesis, observations, and in the end the production of a psychological report that ends up blaming the child.

Maluf (1994) argues that the basis of the traditional clinical model of psychology has been committed to "[...] treating in individual-centered manner problems whose origin is multi-determined, and which are socially influenced even in cases where their basis is organic in nature" (p. 178).

However, the late 1970s opened the way for the gradual consolidation of a critical perspective in school psychology through its approximation with the referential of historical-critical theories of education, as well as dialectical historical materialism (Souza et al., 2014a).

According to Antunes (2005), to discuss the history of psychology, starting from historical-dialectical materialism, is to understand its development based on the network of relationships where it is inserted, that is, the multiple social, political, economic and cultural

factors. In this sense, according to Souza (2010a), the reference of theoretical-methodological analysis of historical-dialectical materialist basis has been used by several authors, constituting what is called "[...] a critical perspective in the field of Psychology" (p. 20). According to the author, criticism to the psychological science, from a Marxist perspective, has taken place in several parts of the world such as United States, Canada, Europe and South America.

In order to grasp a better understanding of the process of building critical school psychology in Brazil, we will divide this text into three moments. The first is the beginning of the criticism movement in school psychology. The second deals with alternatives beyond criticism and, finally, the repercussions of this criticism movement on the performance of psychologists in contemporary times.

Starting the criticism movement in school psychology

In order to overcome the reductionism of the relationship between psychology and education which was characterized by the pathologization of students by attributing to them the blame for their school failure, a group of psychologists and educators engaged in a criticism movement. This perspective, according to Tanamachi (2000), established that it is necessary to seek both in education and psychology fundamentals that allow us to analyze the concrete reality as a result of multiple determinants and to carry out a critical analysis of the theoretical and practical assumptions of both the professional performance and professional and to re-evaluate traditional processes of evaluation and diagnosis. This critical perspective also sought to analyze the history of applied psychology in education to break with the traditional conception of explaining educational and human phenomena.

Following this model, we understand the word criticism not through its pejorative meaning, but as a process of transformation that implies a change of thought, and therefore a change of attitude that goes against the capitalist ideology and focuses on the person's overcoming process within society itself.

The work of Maria Helena Souza Patto (1984), entitled *Psicologia e ideologia: uma introdução crítica à psicologia escolar*, and of Sylvia Leser de Mello (1978) entitled *Psicologia e profissão em São Paulo*, were the critical discussion in school psychology in Brazil, according to Souza (2010a, 2010b). The authors reveal that the training in psychology focuses on traditional clinical care, based on the psychodiagnosis, application of psychological tests and psychotherapy, prioritizing the individual care under the clinical medical model unrelated to the material reality.

In her book, Patto (1984) remarks the ideological questioning of the formation of the psychological science. She states that even though psychological science was formed within a discourse composed of several schools, which could show its heterogeneity or disintegration, it rather displays a homogeneous and ideological discourse. Such discourse has the function of disguise the forms of social control and "[...] opens the way to the primacy of the ideology of adaptation as a conception to guide the actions of psychologists" (Patto 1984, p. 92). Therefore, according to the author, psychology was born committed "[...] with a social demand and a specific ideological determination [...]", that is, of "[...] selecting, guiding, adapting and rationalizing [...]" human behavior (Patto, 1984, p. 87).

At the outset, the discussion of the criticism movement was focused on the performance of psychologists both inside and outside the school, in the sense of his lack of preparation to face the problems present in the school environment. According to Maluf (2003), the main flaws pointed out in the literature (Ferreira, 1986; Libâneo, 1984; Urt, 1989;

Critical School Psycology

Patto, 1984; 1990; Yamamoto, 1990; Yazlle, 1990; Moysés and Collares, 1992) denounced the abuses of psychometric methods, the lack of clinical knowledge of performance, and the failure to articulate knowledge from other areas such as social sciences, philosophy and anthropology, which led to a sort of psychologization, that is, the emphasis on the individual nature of learning problems.

In this initial moment of criticism directed to the performance and training of psychologists, the Conselho Federal de Psicologia (CFP) played an articulating role among universities to elaborate a new curriculum for psychology courses. Thus, this professional institution started a project to collect data at the national level to find out how the practice of psychologists was structured in Brazil. This project became the book *Quem é o psicólogo brasileiro*, published in 1988.

Botomé (1988), who concluded the research carried out by the CFP (1988), found out among the interviewed professionals that in the period from 1950 to 1980, training in the educational area was observed to be deficient with regard to the preparation of future psychologists to deal with psychological phenomena in a more contextualized way and "[...] to act on all possible levels of work" (p. 284). What the author observed was an emphasis on subjects dealing with behavioral problems and the best theories that could be applied to solve them. Thinking about a contextualized way of understanding education should require "[...] a clear perception of multiple aspects and values of psychological phenomena or events, and not just those that are considered 'pathological'" (Botomé 1988, p. 284, author's emphasis).

Another critical discussion conducted by the FCP was based on the review of the literature on the performance of school and educational psychologists in Brazil from 1980 to 1992 by Witter, Yukimitsu and Gonçalves (1992). The authors found that the school psychologists performed, as a priority, the activity of psychological assistance to children with learning and behavioral problems through a remedial practice of learning.

Witter et al. (1992) further identified that the clinical work was very present in schools and that the actions of psychologists was too focused on the students. However, at the same time, the authors were able to perceive that the professionals were actually able to advance to other levels of work in the school setting, such as actions directed to teachers and the pedagogical staff. As for training, Witter et al. (1992) argued that textual productions addressed more the practice than the training in psychology and there was little relation between training and performance.

In this sense, according to Tanamachi (2000), the group of authors who initiated the movement of criticism to school psychology had as initial objectives:

The need to overcome these reductionisms that have characterized the trajectory pursued by Psychology in its relations with Education, the need to seek broader conceptions of Psychology and Education, and also to consider the set of attributions that are proper to it; these are the main trends pointed out by the group of authors who have participated in the movement of criticism to School Psychology (p. 79).

According to Souza (2014a), in this initial moment, the criticism movement invested on the ideological perspective of the performance of psychologists based on the positivist reference of science, which defended either objectivist or now subjectivist psychological approaches, and disregarded the social-political elements and economic factors that constituted the school relationship. Research in psychology then turned to the study of school failure as a multifaceted and multi-determined process.

Antunes (2008) claimed that criticism was directed to the pathological interpretations of psychology because clinical-therapeutics actions were based on medical model. However, such self-criticism could not remain within contemplative knowledge; it was necessary to present proposals for overcoming, that is, changing what was established.

Beyond criticism

According to Maluf and Cruces (2008), since the 1990s, the productions not only focused on critical aspects but also proposed alternatives for the performance and training of psychologists, as well as presented reports of experiences that were successful.

Souza (2009, 2010a, 2010b) explains that this criticism, which began in the 1980s, had repercussions in the 1990s, with the publication of the book *A produção do fracasso escolar: histórias de submissão e rebeldia*, in which Patto (1996) presents the social, historical and political aspects that produced lead to school failure. Thus, the focus of the failure was no longer only on the student, but started to question broader aspects. Meira (2003) also points out that among the studies on children with learning problems, especially poor children in public schools, the works of authors such as Campos (1989), Souza (1989), Boarini (1992) and Collares and Moysés (1992) stand out. Thus, other themes related to criticism of school psychology began to be the focus of several works.

Souza et al. (2014a) argue that criticism in this period

began to materialize into theoretical and methodological discussions in School and Educational Psychology that, starting from a historical-critical perspective of understanding educational phenomena, considered it fundamental to have as basis the purposes of Education and the presence of psychological theories of learning and development that contemplated the complexity of school life and that responded to the challenges of the formation of individuals within the scope of social reality (p. 48).

This means that the studies confirm the need to seek both in psychology and in education the theoretical assumption that interpret critically concrete social reality and psychology, in the sense of proposing models of action based on theoretical and practical presuppositions that break with the decontextualized form of understanding learning problems.

Therefore, Tanamachi (2000) argues that the criticism movement ended up incorporating the "[...] task of critically diagnosing and analyzing the history of psychology applied to education, whose purpose was to overcome the conceptions traditionally adopted to explain school education and the human phenomenon" (p. 80-81).

According to Souza (2010a), the works produced in the 1980s on the role of psychologists in education led to the need to discuss changes in the theoretical-methodological frameworks for understanding school issues. This had repercussions in the 1990s through various publications analyzing the performance of psychologists in the educational field from a critical perspective, which meant "[...] a theoretical and methodological break in the area of School and Educational Psychology with the classic explanations presented until then about poor school performance" (Souza, 2010a, p. 27).

In an attempt to propose changes in the structuring of school psychology as an area of practice and training, Maluf and Cruces (2008) emphasize that the psychology training courses, the professional councils, and the research institutions have collaborated to make the training to connect to the demands in society, in order to abandon the traditional clinical model that pathologized educational phenomena. To this end, the Conselho Fedral de

Critical School Psycology

Psicologia organized in 1994 a book with several researches on the clinical, educational, organizational and social areas.

In the 1990s, as Maluf (1994) was engaged in this movement, she made critical remarks in her work for the Conselho Federal de Psicologia about the emergence of psychology as a science and also the emergence of school psychology. She emphasized that the movement of criticism of school psychology started in the 1970s consists in "[...] the fragmented results obtained so far and the difficulties of using them in real situations" (Maluf, 1994, p. 159). For the author, the problem that arises is the unity of psychology and its tendency towards abstract practices, that is, practices that do not meet the real needs of people.

In this abovementioned collection, Maria Regina Maluf coordinates the evaluation of the research carried out with the professionals of the school area who work inside or outside universities. A very important fact found in the analysis of the interviews is that professionals recognize the need to reformulate the theoretical frameworks that support to the understanding of the relationship between psychology and education, that is to say, "[...] a non-reductionist, critical, socially committed relationship, recognizing the practical context as space for production of knowledge" (Maluf, 1994, p. 172).

As for the performance of psychologists in the educational field, Maluf (1994) perceives in the interviews that psychologists are committed to overcoming the bias of medicalizing school psychology (psychometry and clinical), adopting new mediations to understand learning problems. According to the author, this is a consequence of the training that, according to the interviewees' experience, has invested in a more critical conception of education, shifting the focus from 'problematic child' to the school context, a tendency that requires a greater knowledge of this reality. Maluf (1994) also perceives that group and individual work within schools has started from new references that understand the problem of repetition, avoidance, learning difficulties not only upon the bias of the child and his/her family, but also upon school education conditions.

For this reason, Maluf (1994) points out that this movement came to break with hereditary determinisms, as well as with biological, predictive and reductionist explanations of behavior, to give way to interactions between subjects and the environment. For the author,

Psychology, in its relations with Education, seems to be advancing towards a better understanding of the meaning of human behavior in the contexts of interaction in which humans are inserted. The psychologist who seeks to meet the educational needs of individuals and groups needs to go beyond the manifested behavior and immediate contingencies of learning: it is up to him to be concerned with understanding the microsystems in which the child is inserted and the multiple relationships involved, and recognize others as subjects, that is, people to be listened to (Maluf, 1994, p. 161-162).

Maluf (1994) identified in her research that training in psychology was taking the first steps towards the recognition of the "[...] social and historical character of the goal to meet the needs of concrete Brazilian society" (Maluf, 1994, p. 172). Among the changes observed in the interviews with the professionals about their performance, the author emphasizes the overcoming of the view centered on adaptation of the child to the school system. Thus, the view of learning problems has had a change of focus, namely, from the child to the school, and this happened because of the changes in the contents taught during training with regard to school psychology and in the quality of traineeships.

Unlike the decontextualized way of observing the psychological phenomenon, a tendency that Botomé (1988) found in the research conducted by the FCP in the 1950s and 1960s, Bastos and Achcar (1994) found that from 1980 onwards, training focused on "[...] understanding the individual and psychological phenomena in an integrated way with other phenomena, especially those of social, cultural and political nature" (p. 251).

The shift from a conception centered on non-historical and abstract subjects to the interdependence of the socio-cultural context, according to the authors, has influenced the performance of psychologists in education. In this new performance, they come to understand the behavior of students based on the social context where they are inserted. This reflects in the way of understanding learning difficulties, which no longer exclusively centered on the students' genetic and environmental conceptions, but are now socially determined.

Given this, the form of intervention of psychologists in the school setting will also undergo modifications. According to Bastos and Achcar (1994), these professionals start to seek partnerships with teachers to improve the quality of pedagogical action. A joint work therefore takes place, in which the psychologist deepens the knowledge about development and learning. The intervention ceases to be centered on the student and is directed towards the school community and the community at large.

Therefore, at this point, the criticism movement was structured around the materialization of the theoretical-methodological discussions that took education as a phenomenon inserted in a social reality and contextualized the psychological theories of learning and development that corresponded to this reality (Souza et al., 2014a). Furthermore, we realized that training was also articulated in the sense of proposing more contextualized forms of assistance to the student as required by training agencies based on the restructuring of the curricula. From 2004 onwards, this fact had a repercussion on the substitution of short curricula for the creation of curricular guidelines for training courses in psychology.

Critical school psychology in the contemporary world

According to Maluf and Cruces (2008), the literature continues presenting innovative initiatives within the context of training and performance of psychologists committed to a critical stance. However, the authors report that there are two aspects regarding training and performance in the field of education that deserve attention: a first strand that presents a discourse of criticism but that does not point out ways to overcome it, and another that shows new ways of acting.

These emerging forms of school psychology are not homogeneous. This is more evident in the actions of professionals than in their speeches. This critical perspective does not encompass a unified paradigm, but it presents the same discourse of criticism about the evil effects of society in school education. This means that criticism remains focused on the social context, but the theoretical bases are diverse. In this sense, Maluf and Cruces (2008) affirm that there is no contradiction between theory and practice, but,

dialectical movements of reciprocal influence between theory and practice occur. It is no longer a matter of seeking and naming a single truth, either in theory or in practice, but of recognizing 'provisional truths' capable of illuminating a reflection and action, in a procedural conception of scientific knowledge, which allows us to face with greater probability of success the educational problems presented to us (p. 94)

Critical School Psycology

8

In the bibliographic survey of the Brazilian literature of books and collections on the performance of psychologists before educational problems, Souza et al. (2014a) revealed that in the period from 2000 to 2007 (almost 30 years after the first criticisms about the performance and training of psychologists), critical reflections on the traditional model of Psychology were continuous, with emphasis on school complaints. Besides the critical discussion, proposals that offer new ways of understanding the process of schooling and the quality of teaching are presented.

Twenty-six texts were highlighted, among the following works: Saúde e educação: muito prazer! Novos rumos no atendimento a queixa escolar, organized by Maria De Lima Salum e Morais and Beatriz De Paula Souza (2001), Orientação a queixa escolar, organized by Beatriz de Paula Souza (2007), Psicologia escolar: em busca de novos rumos, organized by Adriana Marcondes Machado and Marilene Proença Rebello de Souza (2004), Educação especial em debate (1997/2009). Another highlight was the book Psicologia e educação na Amazônia: pesquisa e realidade brasileira, organized by Marilene Proença and Miguel Nenevé (2002); Psicologia na escola: um pouco de história e algumas histórias organized by Beatriz Belluzzo Brando Cunha (1997); Psicologia escolar e práticas criticas of Meira and Antunes (2003); Psicologia e escola: uma parceira necessária, Correia (2004), and Psicologia escolar: ética e competência na formação e atuação profissional, Sandra Francesca Conte de Almeida (2003).

Souza et al. (2014a) claim that the cited works present a variety of theoretical-methodological references that support the critical reflections of the authors, including Vigotski, Foucault, Agnes Heller, Piaget, among others who criticize the traditional form of psychology and propose modalities of action that articulate social, political and institutional aspects in order to overcome the reductionist way of understanding school complaints. In synthesis, the authors identified in these works a critical analysis of the traditional model of school psychology and proposals of alternative intervention models to respond to school complaints. The emphasis of these texts is to break with the pathological posture of traditional psychology based on the critical perspective of performance, which will understand the schooling process.

Another research, coordinated by Marilene Proença Rebello de Souza, also investigated theoretical-practical models that ground the work of school psychologists. Her research was carried out in the public education network of the states of Acre, Bahia, Minas Gerais, Paraná, Rondônia, São Paulo and Santa Catarina, through several researchers linked to public universities⁴. For the investigation of these models, Souza, Yamamoto and Galafassi (2014c) organized the data in three main sections: the authors provide the basis for the practice, the contributions given to education, and complementary information.

With regard to the authors and the practical foundation, the researchers perceived a variety of theoretical perspectives divided into clinical and educational; the majority of the participants work with authors related to both the education and the clinical area.

Data on the contribution of professionals to education were organized into three categories: a) the 'non-critical' stance, which deals with answers about the students' relation to the difficulties in the school, disregarding the school as an influencer in the learning process; b) the 'critical' stance, which shows the answers of professionals who claim to address learning difficulties based on the evaluation of the school context, the teaching work and the role of the psychologist in the teaching-learning process, as well as the historical contextualization of the school institution and c) the 'critical and non-critical' stance, a

⁴ These researches were compiled in a book titled *Atuação do psicólogo na educação básica: concepções, práticas e desafios*, published in 2014d by Marilene Proenca Rebello de Souza, Maria Cintra da Silva and Kátia Yamamoto.

category in which answers are sometimes allocated within a critical stance and sometimes based on the discourse of traditional psychology. In the analysis of these three categories, the authors found that the states that stand out the most in the critical discourse are the states of São Paulo (52%), Paraná (34.5%), Bahia (12.5%), Minas Gerais (9.4%), Santa Catarina (6.3%), Rondônia (5.3%) and Acre (0%). In the 'non-critical' stance, Acre (81.8%) and Rondônia (78.9%) predominate. And in the critical and non-critical stance, the states of Bahia (58.3%), Paraná (44.8%) and Santa Catarina (43.7%) stand out (Souza et al., 2014c)

This transformation, which is the fruit of the claiming movements, is evident when Souza et al. (2014b) identify among the services offered by psychologists that, even before the demands of psychological evaluation and clinical care of children with learning difficulties, the professionals have tried to prepare the teachers of these children under a critical reflection on what has in fact produced these difficulties. Furthermore, in the supplementary information, the authors mention that the interviewed psychologists try to involve several actors in the educational process (teachers, managers, pedagogues, out-of-school environments) as well as the family, to take focus away from the students and allow the participation of other important actors for the development and learning of the learner. The authors also argue that this does not mean the exclusion of more individualized actions, but it expands the institutional work to other actors that can contribute to the understanding of the school demand.

What has been happening since the 1980s in psychology, based on the criticism movement, is not only related to questions about the changes in the performance of these professionals, but also on the impact of their theories on the process of training and performance of psychologists, reaching a climax in 2000. According to Tanamachi (2000), these changes meant the need to seek broader conceptions of psychology and education in order to break with the reductionism of their performance, as well as to seek theoretical and methodological assumptions in a more critical psychology, committed to the transformation of human subjects.

Therefore, according to Souza et al. (2014a), criticism has been a starting point for the studies in the area to begin to emphasize themes related to school failure and professional training, as well as the critical performance of psychology, psychological evaluation, medicalization, public policies, among others, which have the aim to break with the psychology of adaption of the 1960s.

Final considerations

As we have seen, psychology directed to the school area has gradually undergone a transformation in its way of understanding school difficulties, both in terms of training and performance. In the initial researches of the Conselho Federal de Psicologia (1988, 1992), a psychometric and clinical (individualized) perspective predominated. This perspective, based on a reductionist conception present in the minimal curriculum, was concerned to train technicians able to select and measure the difficulties with the aim of adjusting man to reality. But from the 1980s onwards, training has no longer the reductionist view but rather an integrated view of the learner, taking into account the school context and the social reality of the country.

This critical path that began in 1980 was an achievement in terms of training, a result of many discussions of professionals committed to a form of psychology that breaks with the dominant ideology, starting to see the school as a place of transformation and not of adaptation. The 'clinical spirit' needed to be replaced by the real needs of the human being.

What we observe is that the beginning of the criticism movement in that decade was limited to the study of psychometric models and activities that did not present a proposal of overcoming. From the 1990s onwards, the historical-critical perspective of education made school psychology to take on new contours, that is, to understand the process of schooling rather than learning in the production of school complaints.

According to Souza (2009), nowadays, the critical conception of school psychology already has well-founded intervention proposals, but needs to become more visible socially and among psychologists. It needs to address the real problems of men, making sense for professionals and for society. In this perspective, the teaching of psychology is a training space to "[...] problematize and discuss issues that somehow refer to Psychology as a field of action and knowledge [...]"; it is to go beyond the study of the "[...] work of psychological intervention" (Souza, 2009, p. 181).

The knowledge produced within this critical perspective of school psychology needs to adopt theoretical-methodological models that support practices take the school context into consideration, based on multiple determinations, that is, its many social, historical, economic, political, cultural, and ideological relationships that make up education. This means that such critical model goes beyond what is established. It is necessary to see reality from a transformative perspective.

We can say, therefore, that the criticism movement is still in the process of consolidation, because professionals face difficulties to implement a transformative practice within a contextualized model, since adaptation theories insist on being reedited. However, it was possible to verify that the critical perspective has gained greater contours in the academic environment and in the practical and professional field.

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