

**Psychology and curricular emphases education**  
**Psicologia e formação em ênfases curriculares**  
**Psicología y formación en énfasis curriculares**

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**Abstract:** This research mapped the curricular emphases in the Psychology Courses of Rio Grande do Norte/Brazil and discussed the concentration of studies and its impacts on the training of graduates. Lately, the Psychology education in the country has undergone transformations and it's necessary to investigate their processes. Supported by the historical-cultural psychology, we contextualized the research; exposed the theoretical assumptions; discussed about the Psychology education in Brazil and RN. Methodologically, data were collected by qualitative research and theoretical studies. The information was analyzed in groups based on historical-cultural psychology. We discussed about the rising number of courses and the predominance of emphases which can educate for the population's needs distanced practices. We concluded by highlighting the antagonisms of the emphases: they allow an education which can surpass traditional acting areas, but these abilities may solidify the interventions centering on the individual, forgetting the historicity and class struggle in society.

**Key words:** psychology education, emphases, historical-cultural psychology

**Resumo:** A pesquisa mapeou as ênfases curriculares nos Cursos de Psicologia do Rio Grande do Norte/Brasil e discutiu a concentração de estudos e impactos na formação e profissionalização dos formados. Nas últimas décadas o modo de formar psicólogos no país sofreu transformações, urge investigarmos esse processo. Auxiliados pela psicologia histórico-cultural contextualizamos a pesquisa; expusemos pressupostos teóricos; tratamos da formação em Psicologia brasileira e no RN. Metodologicamente é uma pesquisa qualitativa com estudo teórico e coleta de dados. As informações foram agrupadas e analisadas a partir da psicologia histórico-cultural. Discutimos a expansão do número de cursos e a predominância das ênfases que podem formar para práticas distanciadas das necessidades da população. Finalizamos apontando que as ênfases comportam antagonismos: podem permitir formação que ultrapasse áreas tradicionais de atuação, mas competências e habilidades podem solidificar intervenções desvinculadas de historicidade e da luta de classes travadas na sociedade.

**Palavras-chave:** formação em psicologia, ênfases, psicologia histórico-cultural

**Resumen:** Este trabajo registró los énfasis curriculares en los cursos de Psicología del Rio Grande do Norte/Brasil y discutió la concentración de estudios y el impacto en la formación y profesionalización de los formados. Recientemente, el modo de formar psicólogos en Brasil sufrió transformaciones, urge investigar sus procesos. Auxiliados por la psicología histórico-cultural contextualizamos la investigación; exponemos los presupuestos teóricos; tratamos la formación en Psicología brasileña y en RN. Metodológicamente es una investigación cualitativa con estudio teórico y recolección de datos. Las informaciones fueron agrupadas y analizadas a partir de la psicología histórico-cultural. Discutimos el aumento del número de cursos y la predominancia de los énfasis que pueden formar para prácticas distanciadas de las necesidades de la población. Finalizamos señalando que los énfasis admiten antagonismos: pueden permitir formación que va más allá de las áreas tradicionales de actuación, pero

competencias y habilidades pueden solidificar intervenciones desvinculadas de la historicidad y de la lucha de clases librada en la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** formación en psicología, énfasis, psicología histórico-cultural

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## Introduction

The present study concerns the context of a State in Northeast Brazil, Rio Grande do Norte, where psychology training has been developed and investigated for more than three decades. The research mapped the curricular emphases adopted in the Psychology Programs of the State and discussed the concentration of studies and impacts on the formation and professionalization of graduates. The State is unique in its location, in one of the Brazilian regions with the greatest lack of urban resources, compared to the most developed region, Southeast. It is a small state, nevertheless, since the implementation of its first psychology course in the 1970s, it has been studied in its formative character and in the results of this formation for the performance of graduated psychologists. The referred Program, although located in a region of the poorest of the country, has been evaluated by the regulatory agencies of the Ministry of Education and Culture with the maximum score. The performance of the students also has excellent results in the tests of ENADE - National Student Performance Test. In the four evaluations, it achieved maximum evaluation. In this study the proposal is to look at the training that has been offered throughout the State.

The Psychology Program of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN),

until 1997, was the only training institution for psychologists in the State, that is, more than 20 years. In 1997, Yamamoto, Siqueira and Oliveira carried out a research that characterized the academic formation and the exercise of the profession in the State.

The professional activity that was outlined in the investigation of Yamamoto et al (1997) stated that the interests of the teachers of that course directed the professional work of those who were graduated as psychologists. The author also identified that, in terms of performance, more than 65% of State psychologists worked in the health area, leaving a small percentage for the work, education and social areas. A scenario in which formation privileged interventions based on a model of action that focused on the individual, almost never considered as part of a broader context.

This research has already completed two decades, and from then on, the way to form psychologists has undergone significant debates. At the national level, psychology is reviewing its general training guidelines. The most important legal document in this sense is the National Curricular Guidelines (DCNs - Resolution 08 of May 07, 2004), instituted since 2004 (Seixas, 2014), with changes in 2011 and undergoing a new revision in 2018. Since the Guidelines 2004, programs that train psychologists should elect emphases that

concentrate studies in some fields of psychology.

To guide the discussion about training in Psychology, the research adopts some foundations of Historical-Cultural Psychology. A theory that had its cradle in the Soviet Union of the first decades of century XX and that has its most expressive representatives: Lev Semyonovich Vigotski (1896-1934), Alexis Nikolaevich Leontiev (1903-1979) and Alexander Romanoich Luria (1902-1977).

In the early days of the systematization of the knowledge of Historical-Cultural Psychology, Vigotski (1931) devoted himself to discussing what had been practiced in Psychology until then. He proposed a Psychology that takes historical-dialectical materialism as a philosophical basis, enabling this science to make a reading of reality considering the material bases of its constitution, historicity and the interlinking and interdependence of phenomena, considering the totality.

The historicity of human development is one of the great legacies of Historical-Cultural Psychology, and both Vigotski (1931), when discussing the genesis of higher psychological functions, and Leontiev (2004), in explaining the development of psychism, consider this processuality. They disagree with deterministic psychologies when they assume that people are already born humanized. Leontiev (2004) will say: "what nature gives you when you are born is not enough for you to live in society. It is still necessary to acquire what has been achieved in the course of the historical development of human society" (Leontiev 2004, p. 285). That is to say, it is an acquisition that supposes appropriation of the cultural goods produced in the course of history.

This assumption of historical-cultural psychology in relation to the formation of the human race needs to be considered in a study that discusses how is happening the formation in Psychology.

## Methodology

This is an exploratory and explanatory research. Exploratory because no study has been done in the State of Rio Grande do Norte, encompassing all the existing programs. It is explanatory because, in consonance with the contribution of Historical-Cultural Psychology as well as a description of the data, the researcher seeks to rescue the historicity present in the context of events.

Regarding the procedures, it was documental, with data collected on the page of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Secretariat of Higher Education in order to consult the programs of Psychology authorized to work in the State. From the consultation, 10 programs were registered in operation. Therefore, the research universe was composed of all the HEI that form psychologists. Data was collected via Internet, in the page of each HEI. And since this study is a clipping of a larger research on formation in school psychology, it should be noted that it was submitted and approved by the ethics committee with the presentation certificate for ethical assessment # 79092317.6.0000.5537.

With respect to data approach, it was characterized as a qualitative study. As Kripka, Scheller and Bonotto (2015) discuss, in qualitative research, it is sought to build an understanding of data in which the process is more important than the product. Quantitative data are also presented as a way of accessing the reality of the subject under investigation.

## Results and Discussion

The data show that, only in the last decade, there was a 150% increase in formation, since until 2007 only four institutions had psychology programs in the State. Today there are already 10, and only two are in the public sphere, in line with national data.

UFRN began training in 1976 and in 2015, in accordance with the recommendation of internalization of public education, created the Psychology Program at the Faculty of Health Sciences in the Region of Trairi. The

second program, in the State, was created by the Universidade Potiguar in 1997, and today it is part of the Laureate International Universities network. Following are the two other programs that have also formed a group: Centro Universitário do Rio Grande do Norte (2004) and Centro Universitário de Formação de Executivos (2006). The other six, including UFRN - FACISA (2015), began their activities in the last decade: Centro Universitário Maurício de Nassau - UNINASSAU (2012), Faculdade Evolução Alto Oeste Potiguar - FACEP (2013), Universidade Potiguar - UNP - Mossoró (2014), Faculdade Estácio do Rio Grande do Norte - FATERN (2014) and Faculdade Diocesana de Mossoró (2016).

In Brazil, the federal governments of presidents Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2013) and Dilma Rousseff (2010-2016) promoted incentives that leverage access to higher education by the private and public sector (Chaves, 2010). As seen in the growth data of the RN psychology programs, the increase mainly in the private network, is a response to the policies of those governments. In addition, it explains a contradiction: if on the one hand there is merit of broadening access, on the other hand, shows higher education as a profitable commodity for the institutions that have benefited from these incentives.

Still in line with the above, in investigating the expansion and privatization of higher education, Chaves (2010) drew attention to the formation of oligopolies in the country. These are national and international companies that have bought and merged Higher Education Institutions. Many of them have been and continue to benefit from federal funding through PROUNI (the University for All Program) and the FIES (Student Financing Fund), which financially subsidize the insertion of many students into private HEIs.

At the national level, studies from Lisboa and Soares (2009) point out that the great majority of the programs in psychology in Brazil are from private institutions and the interior of the States, which reflects a marked internalization in recent years. The most recent study by Seixas (2014) corroborates with

previous data that most Brazilian psychologists are trained in private institutions (83.3%). At the international level, if we take the example of Argentina, of the programs of psychology investigated in 2014, it is possible to verify the existence of a total of 70 programs. Of these, more than 80% are in the private network and only 17% are in the public system. Also, 53 of these programs (5 public and 48 private) are subsequent to 1990 (Klappenbach, 2015). In that country, trained psychologists doubled their numbers in little more than fifteen years (García, 2009).

The training emphases of the programs in the RN show that out of the 10 programs, 7 (seven) of them prioritize the clinic as a training emphasis, with health being the second most signaled. The socio-institutional processes appear in three and the educational processes appear in two programs. These numbers confirm what has historically been identified, that is: the training to act in the clinical area continues to be prioritized in the programs that form psychologists. The questioning raised in Brazil in the 1980s is still unknown: who do we psychologists really serve?

Among the programs that went live in the last decade, all brought the clinic as a training emphasis. The concentration of studies in this field indicates a tendency to act, still, far from the life of a majority of the population that remains in unequal conditions of existence, and has no access to the services of psychology, not even in the public sphere.

This study argues that training needs to promote studies concerning the foundations of philosophical, historical and sociological conceptions that explain reality. Without some of these contents, which allow a broad reading, we cannot unveil the causes of psychic suffering. Therefore, regardless of the emphases adopted, training in Psychology must guarantee the appropriation of knowledge that helps to question the circumstances that cause human problems to emerge.

With the thought of Shuare (2016) who, in prefacing a reprint of her book: "A Psicologia soviética: meu olhar", indicates that the theme

of formation in this century is of great importance due to the transformations occurring in human life and activity at the end of the last century. While referring to Soviet psychology, some of these transformations affect all contexts in which capitalism has contributed to accentuate the gap between rich and poor. Psychology training has been organized and processed on a material basis and in concrete conditions that determine it. Thus, the market demands consolidate it as a formation that still fails to produce confrontations through interventions that oppose and transgress the order that produces and sustains the concrete problems of the majority of the population.

The prioritization of emphases also points to a configuration in terms of professional practice. As presented in the systematization of data, some HEIs also prioritize the socio-institutional and educational practices that, in terms of interventions in Brazil, outline a movement of greater possibilities to favor the processes of appropriation of culture and humanization, approximation to the suffering of a portion of the population that lives in a situation of high social vulnerability and that articulates community and social movements to overcome this reality that accentuates inequalities.

### Final Considerations

Finally, the history of psychology in the State of Rio Grande do Norte reveals that HEIs, although they have sketched a considerable movement in terms of expansion, remain with a formation in process of commitment to the social reality of the population. The emphases that are posed as a possibility of concentration of studies can allow a broad training that goes beyond the traditional areas of performance, but the skills and abilities taught in each emphasis, contradictorily, can solidify models of action centered on the individual perspective and unrelated to historicity.

The compulsory choice of an emphasis, which will concentrate studies, can become a trap, because keeping this workload, which

obliges the students to an almost exclusive dedication, the psychology programs will be able to direct them to the development of the foreseen skills and abilities to the emphasis chosen, and to leave to the margin of this teaching the appropriation of the contents necessary to a wider understanding of the processes of humanization. Training, therefore, needs to prioritize contents that enable academics to understand the concrete man, synthesis of social relations. A historical, dated man who reflects, at the same time as he produces, the conditions of dehumanization present in class society. The political dimension, therefore, cannot be forgotten.

These provocations come at a very timely moment, as the training-oriented DCNs are being reviewed and, after approval, the programs will also have to promote this review movement. New propositions may arise and, perhaps, the expansion of teaching possibilities. However, despite what can be addressed by the new DCNs, it is relevant that the courses are clear of the policy options that are made by choosing one or another training emphasis.

This research does not intend to exhaust the discussions in this sense. And although it is a local study, it provides a vision of how the formation of the psychologist in Brazil is taking place. There is still much progress to be made, however, it has brought relevant contributions in relation to the need for greater articulation between the options defined in our pedagogical projects of the program and the concrete, objective reality of the population.

#### Authors' participation:

a) Conception and design of the work; b) Data acquisition; c) Analysis and interpretation of data; d) Writing of the manuscript; e) Critical review of the manuscript.

M.A.B. has contributed in a,c,d, e; M.G.D.F. in a,c,d, e; M.L.L.N. in b,c, d; S.R.F.F. in b, c, d.

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