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Psychoeducational preparation: an epistemological perspective from the education of older adults (Original)

La preparación psicoeducativa: una mirada epistemológica desde la educación del adulto mayor (Original)

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Abstract

Population aging constitutes, from the most diverse sources of human knowledge, one of the imprints that mark the scientific production of the third millennium. In this sense, the historical responsibility to construct and disseminate integrated visions of reality that favor the social understanding of this phenomenon rests. This work aims to characterize the educational process of the University Chair for Older Adults from an epistemological perspective. Theoretical methods such as analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive, and hermeneutic-dialectical were used. This study made it possible to clarify the main categories assumed in the research process, articulated around the complexity approach. The treatment of the educational process of the University Chair for Older Adults; revealed the theoretical and methodological deficiency in psychoeducational preparation to qualify the personalized gerontagogical influence of the geroeducator.

Keywords: psychoeducational preparation; university chair for the elderly; geroeducator; gerontagogical influence

Resumen

El envejecimiento poblacional constituye, desde las más diversas fuentes del saber humano, una de las improntas que signan la producción científica del tercer milenio. En tal sentido, gravita la responsabilidad histórica de construir y difundir visiones integradas de la realidad, que favorezcan la comprensión a escala social de este fenómeno. El presente trabajo tiene como



objetivo realizar una caracterización desde el punto de vista epistemológico del proceso educativo de la Cátedra Universitaria del Adulto Mayor. Se utilizaron métodos teóricos como el analítico – sintético, inductivo – deductivo y hermenéutico – dialéctico. Este estudio permitió explicitar las principales categorías que se asumen en el proceso investigativo articuladas en torno al enfoque de la complejidad y el tratamiento al proceso educativo de la Cátedra Universitaria del Adulto Mayor. Develó la carencia teórico-metodológica de la preparación psicoeducativa para cualificar la influencia gerontagógica personalizada del geroeducador.

Palabras clave: preparación psicoeducativa; cátedra universitaria del adulto mayor; geroeducador; influencia gerontagógica

Introduction

Population aging is one of the defining factors impacting scientific production in the third millennium. It is a phenomenon with implications for all areas of social life, necessitating the establishment of policies to protect this emerging sector in the global sociodemographic landscape. This prioritizes comprehensive care for this population group, addressing the full range of factors that determine their well-being and establishing political, social, and economic measures that enhance their quality of life.

Consequently, it is pertinent to analyze the potential of education as one of the vectors of development that evolves throughout life. Education for the elderly, while not a recent phenomenon, is more relevant to the present and future of societies, taking into account sociodemographic trends.

With diverse paths and perspectives, education for the elderly exhibits an amalgam of practices connected by university programs, with a multitude of objectives and approaches that are interwoven into research, scientific exchange, extension, and educational initiatives. In this regard, there is a need to prioritize the psychoeducational preparation of teachers as a basis for strengthening the training of the gerontological context and, consequently, satisfying the self-transcendence needs of older students.

Thus, this article aims to present a characterization from the epistemological point of view of the psychoeducational preparation of the geroeducator in the educational process of the University Chair for the Elderly.



Materials and Methods

Theoretical methods such as analytic-synthetic and inductive-deductive were used to understand the main characteristics of the object, determine the theoretical and methodological foundations that support the educational process at University Chair for Older Adults, as well as the inconsistencies between theory and practice that characterize it. Likewise, the interpretation of the results obtained in the different stages of the research, which makes it possible to arrive at theoretical and practical generalizations about the object and the field, as well as the hermeneutic-dialectical to explain and interpret the concepts and categories related to the research topic and in the reconstruction and critique of the consulted sources.

Results and Discussion

From a philosophical perspective, Marxist-Leninist theory contributes the conception of dialectical and historical materialism. This scientific conception of interpreting the world offers a corpus of laws, principles, and categories that allow for the understanding of reality. Understanding them provides tools for social transformation. While laws, principles, and categories serve as theoretical and methodological mediators, awareness of the role of practice takes on an instrumental role in questioning the subject's actions from a cognitive perspective. From this scientific worldview, the following premises emerge for the stated purposes: the reflexive nature of human subjectivity, the active nature of human beings, and activity and communication as regulators of human social integration in different contexts of action. These premises underlie dialectics, the main notion that Marxist-Leninist theory contributes to the study of the University Chair for Older Adults educational process in general and to the psychoeducational preparation of educators in particular. When Friedrich Engels capitalized on the scope of dialectics in works such as Dialectics of Nature and Anti-Dühring, he revealed clues for the analysis of complex phenomena and processes. Its relevance lies in observing dynamics and development as inherent qualities of the investigative focus. Thus, the complexity of the psychoeducational preparation of University Chair for Older Adults educators is revealed. This assertion situates the multiple dimensions of an educational framework where objective and subjective factors interact, among which the personality of the educator and the student stands out. From this epistemological status, Philosophy provides the necessary tools that allow the student and educator to become aware of themselves, others, the world, and even transcendence. Education draws from Philosophy, reflection, and the totality of its thoughts to clarify problems



related to pedagogy. Thus, the field of education will be able to reflect on the educational process from its fundamental philosophical assumptions. Applied philosophy within the field of education constitutes a reference for understanding the essence, problems, meaning, and significance of education. Therefore, all pedagogical innovations place it as a starting point when defining the purposes, functions, and roles of the subjects involved in the process. It provides theoretical and conceptual tools to guide the role of the educator and to understand the actions of students in the educational process. It is important to consider that both philosophy and education have the human being as their central focus, which is why they complement each other, but at the same time they will always require the support of other disciplines such as sociology.

When analyzing sociological references for research, a special interest is seen in the application of sociological knowledge to the study of education from various perspectives. This long history has resulted in highly useful contributions to the understanding of education and the educational process, in particular. The various sociological theories are positioned according to the greater or lesser emphasis placed on the extremes of these relationships: microsocial-macrosocial, individual-society, and action-structure. Bridging the gaps between these, education is conceived as a process of integration of the individual into society; it is understood as a changing process that develops throughout life to provide people with knowledge, skills, and values that allow for greater integration of the individual into society and the development of attitudes that seek full individual development. This process can occur both within and outside the educational system and can arise as a form of interaction in the student-educator relationship or as an individual. On this basis, the socialization process takes on special significance as a contribution of the discipline of sociology to the analysis of the educational process.

Socialization is the way society transmits its knowledge and culture, with the goal of integrating individuals into it. It occurs in two major stages: primary and secondary. Thus, individuals develop in the social sphere, learning norms, patterns of behavior, roles, and institutions existing within a society. Within the socialization process, articulation through education is fundamental, as it is through education that a society's culture is reproduced.

Education is the essential mechanism for the socialization of the individual and is inseparable from the process of individualization. Its dialectical articulation achieves both the integration of the individual into the specific sociohistorical context and their identification as an



individualized being, endowed with personal characteristics that distinguish them from their peers. The contradiction between individualization and socialization manifests itself during social practice, in which activity constitutes an essential element for the education of the individual. Parallel to socialization, the individualization of the subject occurs, since the objectification of social content is a distinctly individualized process of a personal nature, in which each subject processes reality in a very particular way, contributing the results of their own recreation as an active social entity (Blanco, 2003).

The socialization of education involves the transmission of society's values, knowledge, and behavioral patterns to the individuals who will become part of it as social agents. This process must promote social conditions that, regardless of relations with the State, favor human beings' integral development and consequent participation in social development.

Both Social Pedagogy and Social Education focus on the social, cultural, political, and civic dimensions of contexts and of those who participate in them as subjects of a given educational practice. In doing so, Social Pedagogy is seen as a praxiological science related to the educability of each and every person living in society, by using methodological strategies that promote prevention, assistance, inclusion, and social reintegration, both for those who find themselves in situations of difficulty, vulnerability, and/or social risk, as well as for those who are in "normalized" situations.

An understanding of the dialectical relationship between individualization and socialization, derived from the assumption of philosophical and sociological references, emphasizes the need to delve deeper into the subjective dimension of this framework. From a creative understanding of the foundations of dialectical and historical materialism, theoretical references are articulated from a psychological perspective through the historical-cultural approach. Vygotsky (1987) contributed a conception to explain the development of the human psyche.

Among the principles assumed by this approach are: the interactive nature of the human being; the reflexive nature of the psyche and its active character, constructed from this psychological reflection; the unity of the objective and the subjective, the external and the internal; the sociohistorical and cultural determination of the human psyche; the unity of the cognitive and the affective; and the integrated, systemic nature of human subjectivity. Based on these principles, psychological functioning is seen as a synthesis of the sociohistorical and



cultural mediation of human activity in an interactive sphere. From this arises the notion of psychological development as a contextualized process, reflecting culturally constructed ways of ordering reality.

In educational practice, Vygotsky's (1987) thesis on the mediated nature of relationships can be applied. Mediation occurs through systems of symbols and signs. In this sense, education is presented as a process of symbolic mediation, a kind of "filter" through which the individual mobilizes their behavior toward the object of practice, revealing the attribution of meanings that emerges from the understanding of meanings.

Thus, educational work moves from meanings to the search for meanings: the transformation and creation of new meanings, taking into account their regulating and structuring role. This assertion presents the category of experience as a prism through which old knowledge must be reread and restructured, and the resulting new knowledge constructed, as it alludes to the subject's selectivity in apprehending the surrounding environment. The experience expresses the relationship between the cognitive and affective that gives rise to the formation of psychological senses in the individual. The analysis is based on the conceptualization of the genetic law of psychic development, which is expressed as follows: "any function in cultural development (...) appears on the scene twice, on two levels: first as something social, then as something psychological; first among people, as an interpsychic category, then, (...) as an intrapsychic category" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 161).

The essence of this approach is significant for the educational process in at least two ways: first, the conceptualization of the resulting product—what is constructed as subjectivity or intrapsychically—as a direct consequence of educational action; the second direction expresses the importance and strength of psychological processes already formed or in the process of formation, which is manifested through references to internalization as a means of guiding and regulating behavior. The content of this law postulates the role of cultural heritage—a symbolic universe shared through education—in the process of constructing subjectivity. In this way, the mediating role of educational practice is appreciated, which, in interrelation with other conditions, shapes the content and structure of subjectivity.

Another relevant axes of Vygotsky's system is the social situation of development. This category is formulated from a dialectical interpretation of social conditioning in psychological development. It reveals the symbolization of reality and its construction in terms of subjective



meanings. This individual process expresses the impact of living conditions and education on the constitution of individuals. Vygotsky (1987) understands the social situation of development as the dialectical conjunction of external (conditions) and internal (processes) aspects and moments. This understanding represents, in the form of systems, the unique context in which the formation and development of each person occurs. The value of this category, for research purposes, lies in highlighting the role of mediation in the developmental framework of each individual, viewing this process through interinfluences. Through this, the correlation between education and development that occurs in each individual is verified.

This research subscribes to the idea that individuality constitutes the backbone of the social situation of development. It is conceived as:

a product of personal development, with a dual existence at the level of personality, as a quality and a process. It denotes the uniqueness, originality, and authenticity of the individual, based on the synthesis of biological, psychological, and social factors. It is based on the anatomical and physiological peculiarities of the organism. The hallmark of this inherent quality of the individual is provided by individual history, systematized in the personality, where subjective senses are configured and actualized as regulatory entities of activity and relationships, imprinting strength, direction, and dynamism on behavior. (Pérez et al., 2020, p. 12)

In understanding individuality, two levels of analysis must be assumed: internal (content) and external (form). Content refers to the subjective constitution of historical-cultural reality, which in its uniqueness determines peculiarities that differentiate each individual from the rest. Form indicates the uniqueness of the expression of each individual's personality characteristics, which also denotes a unique and unrepeatable character. As a quality, it is expressed from the initial stages of human development, in a discrete manner, with higher gradients of expression in keeping with the gradual complexity that personological content achieves in structure and function. This qualitative progression of the psyche determines the subject's self-movement, mobilized by its needs in different situations and contexts.

The social situation of development, taken as a principle, governs the interpretation of what occurs in the zone of proximal development. Both concepts are intrinsically intertwined in understanding the dynamics elicited by the educational process as an instrument of development. The category of zone of proximal development is defined by the distance between current and



prospective development under conditions of "help." Its classic definition identifies two fundamental aspects for educational practice: the need for a relationship with the "other" as the genesis of higher psychological processes, with this "other" seen as a more "capable" individual, and the emergence of potential as emerging from the relationship with this "other." The relationship with the other becomes central to Vygotsky's theory.

The emergence of the zone of proximal development, as a potential for execution, is much more complex and diverse than the direct internalization of the offered model. Thus, the zone of proximal development can be interpreted as the distance between the acceptable potential for a specific cultural context and the execution achieved by a specific individual within that culture.

The analysis of the zone of proximal development category places the concept of interpersonal relationships as key to its understanding, and the existence of socially created symbolic systems recorded in culture as the content of the relationship. These two ideas contribute to explaining human ontogenesis, while also offering a methodological tool for understanding the educational process in the context of research.

This is reflected in the understanding of the social situation of the development of older adults, as subjects of the educational process at University Chair for Older Adults, "bearers of regularities inherent to a stage of human development, as well as a series of limitations, largely stemming from prejudices instilled in them by culture" (Orosa, 2024, p. 11). Thus, the dialecticity of this process is verified in the interplay of acquisitions and detachments, which are constructed through ontogenesis with historical and cultural mediations, as a function of the context in which the individual lives. It is therefore irrelevant to distinguish between the somatic and psychological aspects of aging, as this constitutes an anti-dialectical mechanism, given that at this stage of life, each individual possesses biopsychosocial and cultural peculiarities that identify them as a unique entity.

A methodological approach to the social situation of older adult development emphasizes the need to analyze social position and internal position. Regarding the former, the polymorphism of the activity system, with a marked biographical nature, is highlighted. The communication system, for its part, maintains a unique relationship with the individual's social functioning, with socialization agencies such as the family, the workplace, and the community standing out for their importance. It should be noted that in Cuba, the University Chair for Older



Adults educational program is beginning to emerge as an important agency for social empowerment and the full development of the individual. Friendships and reference and belonging groups linked to the socialization of older adults are relevant at this stage. Social participation is mediated by the transfer of roles to new generations; this implies a new social position: the personalization of the attributions of the older adult role, inherent to the post-retirement process, constructed in family and community settings. Consequently, Cruz and Rincon (2017) defines the older adult's social role as articulated around the satisfaction of the needs for: activity, confrontation, action/realization, and knowledge of the world and of oneself within the scope of their activity system.

Regarding the internal position, it is necessary to recognize that intellectual development in older adults is impacted by the biological changes that occur. Sensory perception provides the relationship with the surrounding environment and, as a regularity, expresses the effect of limitations in some of the senses. The study of the behavior of different types of memory shows how they evolve and how they are differently affected by age, so we cannot speak of a single memory decline.

On a cognitive level, a decrease in the speed at which mental work is performed is observed, with a lesser effect on its accuracy. The ability to learn remains preserved with age, always considering the slowdown that occurs during adaptation to new situations. Some factors that mediate the learning process in older adulthood are: motivation, tendency to relearn, association, repetition and reinforcement, as well as transfer. At this stage, there is a decline in fluid intelligence, and therefore the ability to solve new situations in the very short term, as it is based on acquired knowledge, experience, and judgment. In general, capacities dependent on immediate memory decline more than those not influenced by time; thinking becomes more reflective.

Regarding language, some characteristics described in different studies are: a tendency to use longer and more complex sentences; a decrease in discrimination and comprehension of spoken language; a decrease in nominalization capacity; and "semantic error," a tendency toward circumlocutions and changes of topic, as the main manifestations.

The motivational development of older adults is as rich and diverse as that of any individual. Individuals structure their motives based on a sense of transcendence in younger generations, while external factors organize their motivational sphere based on maintaining



stable bonds with their peers. Affective development regularly manifests itself in a slight decline, and the individual's reactions slow down. Emotions appear more slowly and are less intense. Feelings are expressed with greater depth and lesser intensity. Likewise, passions are less intense, probably associated with the experiential maturity processes built over the course of life.

The preceding analysis makes it possible to assimilate the influences of the philosophical, sociological, and psychological axes and provides a theoretical framework for structuring the pedagogical axis, as part of a theoretical system that provides the keys to understanding the educational process and the psychoeducational preparation of educators at University Chair for Older Adults. The theoretical and methodological foundations that support this research from a pedagogical perspective require the adoption of a theoretical position regarding the concepts of education and preparation within the context of Gerontagogy as a pedagogical theory that allows for the analysis of the educational process in older adulthood.

Education, as a complex social phenomenon, is multifactorial; a condition that requires and demands harmony in the system of influences exerted on a person. Conceiving education as a process means, first and foremost, directing it, which implies assuming its integrality with its contradictions, barriers, and limitations, inherent to any process. This process is characterized by a dynamic and complex set of systematic activities, through which the actions of educators and students are interrelated, and is oriented toward training and development at the individual and group levels.

There is consensus in Cuban pedagogical thought in considering education as a process whose objective is the preparation of individuals for life. Its essence lies in achieving a worldview based on the solid foundation of scientific knowledge and its transformation into positive moral convictions and motives. In the educational process, the student cannot be considered a passive entity that refracts external influences. They interact with the environment and individualize the process until they achieve assimilation.

To understand the above, it is sufficient to analyze the object of Pedagogy, which studies the process aimed at the comprehensive development of personality, identified as the educational process. Although this has been the subject of analysis by numerous authors (González, 2022; Álvarez, 2002; García Suárez, 2024; Hincapie, 2018), who, although they have named it in different ways, its essence has remained the same. The common elements in their conceptualizations of the educational process support the idea that this process fundamentally



develops within the educational institution and is aimed at the comprehensive development of personality.

Education is increasingly conceived as the interaction between school and life, and between teaching and society. The educational institution bears the greatest responsibility for the comprehensive education of its students. This imposes on teachers the need to conceive and guide the direction of the educational process in its entirety; To achieve this, it is necessary to consider their particularities as protagonists of the process, and the characteristics of their personality as a complex element.

Given the above, it can be summarized as follows: the educational process is a complex set of interrelated actions and elements that seek the integral development of a person through learning; it involves various actors and takes place in different contexts. Its content is the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are transmitted and learned. Its general objective is to promote the integral development of the learners' personalities. It is multifactorial, prolonged, phased, concentric, bilateral, and active; it is linked to group work; it is difficult for everyone to perceive the results externally; and it is future-oriented. It consists of the following phases: planning, implementation, evaluation, and feedback.

As can be seen, without underestimating the invaluable value of the preceding theses in the pedagogical field, their analysis highlights the need to prioritize teacher performance, based on their preparation, with a view to contributing to improving the formative capacity of the University Chair for Older Adults educational environment, based on its essence and objectives, which constitutes the focus of this research.

Thus, preparation is a category that requires analysis for the purposes of this research. The systematic study by authors such as Acosta and García (2015) and Alberto and González (2021), among others, despite inconsistencies in the theoretical positions assumed, recognizes it as both a process and a result. These authors view preparation as a continuous process that improves professional performance through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values. They consider it to be the result of the management carried out at the individual and group levels. Planning and execution are distinguished as elements of the process, in accordance with the real needs and perspectives identified at the institutional, group, and/or individual levels. In a previous study, Escribano (2018) determined the fundamental features that define the concept of preparation, which are adopted in this research and are presented below: it is a formative process;



it is also the result of said process, which is expressed in the appropriation of content (of greater or lesser scope), which is defined based on the specific needs and demands of a professional activity and requires short-term processing; it is closely related to the specific functions, responsibilities, tasks, and roles that pertain to the content of said professional activity; it has an immediate, continuous, systematic, planned nature, and addresses individual needs.

These positions coincide in considering preparation as a formative process. Specifically, they recognize, on the one hand, the appropriation of knowledge, skills, and values, and, on the other, its systematic and continuous nature. From another perspective, educator preparation is considered a pedagogical activity. The theories that support psychoeducational preparation are varied and reveal a multidisciplinary field for understanding the process. There is no single theory of psychoeducational preparation as such, but rather a set of theories and models that combine to inform and regulate practice. Some of the most relevant for research purposes are: social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), communication theory, the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983), and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Psychoeducational preparation is a process structured in phases and spatial-temporal coordinates, sequenced, rational, and intentional. It is contextualized, adapted to the needs of individuals, from a collaborative and social action perspective. It is dynamic.

Gerontagogy, when used in a transformative and appropriate manner in the research context, allows for the enhancement of the skills necessary for the subject to play a role appropriate to their context and will assist the individual in adapting to their environment. Given the characteristics of the older learner, the following principles are considered: a multidimensional relationship between learning objectives; a relationship with the interests of the older adult; consistent interdisciplinary work; and the possibility of generalization.

Based on this, the role of the teacher, in light of gerontagogical theory, is connoted as a facilitator, and in this role, they address the characteristics of older adults during the process of exchanging learning experiences. In the Cuban context, Román (2005) calls it a geroeducator and recognizes values education as the essence of its practice. This position is shared by the author and enriches it by considering psychoeducational preparation as the core of the gerontagogical approach and the basic learning for life in a developmental context.

Thus, Gerontagogy allows us to articulate the theoretical frameworks assumed to understand the essence of the educational process and pedagogical preparation with



gerontagogical psychoeducational content. At the national level, this is embodied in the educational program of, for, and with seniors, affiliated with the University Chair for Older Adults.

Conclusions

The exploration of psychoeducational preparation from an epistemological perspective in the education of older adults reveals the importance of rethinking learning processes beyond traditional pedagogical frameworks. This approach underscores the need to integrate psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that respect the individuality, autonomy, and accumulated experience of the elderly. Recognizing older adults as active agents of knowledge construction positions psychoeducation not only as a tool for cognitive development but also as a pathway for emotional balance, social participation, and personal fulfillment.

By situating psychoeducational preparation within a solid epistemological foundation, the article highlights that education in later life should be conceived as a process of continuous growth rather than mere adaptation to age-related limitations. This perspective allows for the design of innovative strategies that stimulate motivation, resilience, and critical reflection, while strengthening the bonds between generations. Ultimately, an epistemological understanding of psychoeducation provides educators and institutions with a framework to create inclusive, meaningful, and transformative practices that dignify the educational experience of older adults and contribute to their holistic well-being.

The epistemological systematization carried out, allows us to explain the main categories assumed in the research process, articulated around the complexity approach. The treatment of the University Chair for Older Adults educational process reveals the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of psychoeducational preparation to qualify the personalized gerontagogical influence of the geroeducator.

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