



# *Ontological and epistemological aspects of the training of public servants*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The document presented synthesizes the philosophical positions, and in particular ontological and epistemological positions of the author, around the main theories, approaches and educational paradigms, as well as the process of development, purposes and objectives of the same related to his research topic of doctoral thesis that is a proposal of educational intervention for the strengthening of the processes of integral formation of public servants in Nicaragua through the creation of a school of government. Likewise, this document presents the main perspectives on the subject of various actors linked to it and raises the contributions that can be made with this topic to science and the community.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The study of knowledge has been one of the main problems of philosophy, and therefore of science and humanity, since its emergence. This problem is extremely complex, not only because

of the vast universe of knowledge that exists, its taxonomy and the methods, approaches and paradigms through which it is studied; but also because knowledge arises from a material basis, it is dialectic and its interpretations vary depending on the prism through which it is observed. On this Bakunin(1953) points out the following:

“The gradual development of the material world, as well as of organic animal life and of man’s historically progressive intelligence—both individual and social—is perfectly conceivable. It constitutes an entirely natural movement from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher, from the low to the high; a movement conforming to our daily experience and also in accordance with our natural logic, with the very laws of our mind which having been formed and developed only with the help of this same experience, is nothing but its reproduction in the mind and in the brain, its mediate pattern”. (Bakunin, 1953)

The study of knowledge, and its various expressions, has been dealt with by a multitude of women and men throughout history. They have studied this knowledge through various methods and from various philosophical, political, historical, social, economic and other positions. As a result of the above, and despite the idea that knowledge is increasingly transformed faster, the fundamental bases of knowledge, in most of the plots of science, have already been founded by scientists of past eras, so it is necessary to return to these authors to understand, in addition to the knowledge generated, their methods and positions. That is, to recognize the sources of knowledge from their original expressions.

Regarding the above, De Sousa Santos. It notes the following:(2009)

“When in seeking to analyze the present situation of the sciences as a whole, we look to the past, the first image is, perhaps, that the scientific progress of the last thirty years is so dramatic that the centuries that preceded us – from the sixteenth century, where all of us, modern scientists are born, to the nineteenth century itself –they are nothing more than an ancient prehistory. But if we close our eyes and reopen them, we see with surprise that the great scientists who established and delimited the theoretical field in which we still move today lived or worked between the eighteenth century and the first twenty years of the twentieth century, from Adam Smith and Ricardo to Lavoisier and Darwin, from Marx and Durkheim to Max Weber and Pareto, from Humboldt and Planck to Poincaré and Einstein.”.(De Santos Sousa, 2009)

Although the line of research that follows the thesis work of the author, to whom this document is expected to pay tribute, and this document itself, do not deal strictly with the subject of knowledge; the mention of it is fundamental to be able to fulfill the purpose of this study which is to establish, clear and firm positions regarding the philosophical aspects of the author in relation to his thesis topic.

In such a way that the present study starts from the following question of problem formulation: What are the philosophical positions that the author adopts in relation to his

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object of research? In the particular case, it is worth noting that the author's research topic is the proposal of a school of government that as an educational intervention contributes to the strengthening of the processes of integral training of public servants in Nicaragua.

Having clarified the above, which constitutes the academic justification of this study, it is important to emphasize that the objectives of the present study are: 1. To understand the diversity of approaches in the process of historical construction of pedagogical knowledge, in particular those useful for the integral formation of public servants; 2. To analyze in depth the approaches of the fundamental educational theories applied to the integral formation of public servants; 3. Determine the philosophical positions adopted in relation to the study of the processes of integral formation of public servants in Nicaragua.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The present research starts from the methods of Marxism, that is, dialectic materialism and historical materialism, this by the historical analysis and ethical that is intended to be carried out in this document of the historical evolution of the sources, approaches, theories and educational paradigms applied to the object of study of the research developed by the author.

Although the fundamental philosophical position from which this research is based on Marxism, some approaches of critical theory are taken up, in particular those that coincide with Marxist theory because they come from it, but taking care not to confuse them with the revisionist ideas that also predominated in the critical theory of the Frankfurt school. In particular, the theme of "participation, intervention and collaboration from critical personal reflection in action" is taken up from critical theory according to (Ricoy, 2006), quoted by Ramos (2015)

The research approach is qualitative, explanatory and non-experimental. It has followed a deductive, bibliographic and synthesis methodology. The above with the aim of being able, based on the reading of multiple positions, to decompose them into their essential elements in a summarized way, to take, based on this synthesis, philosophical positions regarding the problem under study.

## **3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

This section presents the main positions adopted by the author regarding the ontological and epistemological approach with which the subject under study is addressed.

### **3.1. Ontological approach.**

As defined in the introduction, one of the elements that complicates the study, interpretation and practical application of knowledge is that there is a diversity of positions among the authors who address the same problem. So, the issue of the positions that are adopted before a problem, turns out to be a key element for the study of knowledge.

The study of these positions is carried out by a branch of philosophy called ontology, which according to Hartmann “begins in a certain position, more than metaphysical problems, as well as the opposition between views and philosophical systems.” That is, there may be, before the same object of study, different points of view that derive from the different positions adopted by the authors who study it. To expand more on the concept of ontology, we take up what (1965, p. 15) Nieto Arteta (1949) wrote that:

“Pure ontology is a theory of function, of totality, of the unity and division of opposites, of unity and division, of immanence and transcendence, it is a certain conception of the fundamental categories of the various spheres of reality, and it is a theory of the pure category of reciprocal and functional conditioning. Pure ontology is a theory of the categorial complex. It’s a pure dialectic.” (Nieto Arteta, 1949)

This definition is extremely useful for the present study because it incorporates fundamental elements of dialectics, which is an essential part of one of the two methods of study used by the author for the development of this document and especially for the philosophical positioning in relation to the object of study. The latter, the philosophical positioning, or the adoption of positions, is finally the fundamental theme of ontology and also of this work.

In order to assume a clear philosophical position in relation to a topic and above all, in relation to the theories, approaches and paradigms through which that topic is studied, it is essential to first know what these theories, approaches and paradigms are.

At the dawn of humanity, and given the low degree of scientific and technical development of it, the main approaches moved away from science and closer to spirituality, hence the theological approach, dominant for many centuries, and even today with some degree of validity for certain groups. Then, with the development of science, more advanced approaches arise, such as positivism that indicates that the only valid knowledge is that which comes from the scientific method and naturalism that tries to explain phenomena from their relationship with nature and the laws of it.

These approaches were followed by others of greater complexity such as constructivism, which was based on the idea of the collective, participatory and scientific construction of knowledge and critical theory, which, as a general philosophical approach, advocated the importance of formulating a critique against the “hegemonic discourse of a homogeneous and

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homogenizing modernity, understood as the triumph of empiricist or idealistic rationalism, of capitalism as the only possibility of economically and socially organizing humanity” according to Galafassi.(2002)

The main exponents of this critical theory were a group of German scientists, with a strong Marxist influence, belonging to the Institute of Social Research, best known for forming the so-called Frankfurt School. Despite their initial Marxist position, they presented strong criticisms against dogmatic Marxism and certain ideas of Marxism, which provoked strong reactions and criticism from other fractions of the maximum.

“Inspired by a Marxist interpretation of social events, the Frankfurt thinkers never reduced themselves to a dogmatic materialism, which did nothing more than follow the path of positive science, but tried to revitalize the original critical impetus of Marx’s theories, rescuing from it precisely its dimension of totality in the analysis of the social. The group of thinkers of this school, encompassed in the Institute of Social Research, became a renewing center of Marxist theory that aspired to overcome the sclerosis of official Marxism and to radiate a new praxis, beyond the narrow limits of social democratic politics. Thus, the central objective of Horkheimer, in particular, but also of the whole group, was to promote all kinds of research that was related to the critique of society and new forms of alienation.” (Galafassi, 2002)

Those mentioned above constitute some of the most important general philosophical approaches applied to education. However, they are not the only ones.

There is a strong discussion about the existence or not, characteristics, scope and contributions of a Marxist didactic. This discussion takes place within the sphere of those who consider themselves Marxists and outside it. Despite this, what is undeniable is the immense contribution that Marxism has made to pedagogy and the impact it has had on the development of the latter.

Although Marxism is not born for educational purposes, nor does it have its greatest development within the limits of this plot of science, the applicability of Marxism to this science is evident because its methods, dialectical materialism and historical materialism, allow it to serve, rather than as Economic Doctrine, as an instrument of analysis, interpretation and transformation of reality applicable to all fields of science, in the case that occupies this work: didactics.

In such a way that there is a Marxist didactics and it is this, as an ontological position that the author assumes for the observation, interpretation, analysis and above all transformation of the problem under study. This is because the historical and dialect analyses of these methods contribute to a deeper analysis of fundamental categories such as structures and superstructures, social relations and others, and above all to their transformation.

Marxism is the most advanced scientific method because it brings together within itself, as Lenin explains in his article “Three Sources and Three Integral Parts of Marxism”, the fundamental ideas of German classical philosophy, represented mainly by Hegel and influenced in turn by the classical Greek philosophy of Epicurus and others; the French utopian socialism of Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon and; the classical bourgeois political economy of Smith and Ricardo.

The ideas of this Marxist didactic have been widely used by different historical figures of education, with or without recognition of their use. In particular, they served as an influence for the revolutionary transformations that took place in the Soviet educational system after the Bolshevik revolution, being some of the most prominent representatives: Krupskaya, Blonskij, Makarenko, Vygotsky, Suchodolski, among others.

### **3.2. Epistemological approach**

This section will define the epistemological positions, both general and specific to the author in relation to his object of study. To do this, it is important to first rescue a precise definition of epistemological. Bunge (2002) notes:

“Epistemology, or philosophy of science, is the branch of philosophy that studies scientific research and its product, scientific knowledge. A mere leaf of the tree of philosophy a century ago, epistemology is today an important branch of it.” (Bunge, 2002)

#### **3.2.1. General**

The study of knowledge necessarily starts from paradigms, models and approaches that allow its observation, analysis and transformation. With regard to these three categories, Silva proposes the following table that allows us to assess the differences between these categories. (2011)

**TABLE 1**

Differences between Paradigm, model and approach.

<b>Paradigm</b>	<b>Model</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Difference</b>
A paradigm is constituted by the general theoretical assumptions, laws and techniques for their application adopted by the members of a given scientific community.	A model is a generic scientific term that refers to a description that can be only qualitative or also quantitative of a phenomenon or reality.	Direct attention or interest to an issue or problem from previous assumptions, to try to solve it correctly.	The difference is found in the paradigm (these are assumptions), the model (description of a phenomenon) and the approach (the way to respond to a problem).

Source: Taken from (Silva, 2011)

Despite the differences raised above, it is common for a research approach to arise from a research paradigm, so that to define the general epistemological position of the author around a research approach, it is necessary to understand what these approaches are, or at least which have been dominant, and the paradigms from which they arise. To do this, based on what was established by Orozco Alvarado, the following table has been constructed that collects the main features of each of the dominant paradigms in the theories of education, which have been a watering hole for current research approaches.(2018)

**TABLE 2**

Paradigms of education.

<b>Paradigms of education</b>	<b>Main features</b>
Behaviorist Paradigm	1. Acquisition of rote knowledge; 2. Conservative education; 3. Prioritize conceptual content; 4. Hegemonic role of the teacher; 5. Passive role of the student, etc.
Cognitive paradigm	1. Focused on the process of constructing meanings; 2. The contents are means of research and problem solving; 3. Creative thinking is developed; 4. Learning is a process of constructing personal meanings; 5. It is analyzed how the learner learns; etc.
Constructivist Paradigm	1. Promotion of collaboration and complex thinking; 2. Reflective skills are developed; 3. The teacher becomes a mediator, leaving aside his hegemonic role; 4. Greater closeness to the student and contextualization; 5. Awareness of the teaching-learning process; etc.



<b>Paradigms of education</b>	<b>Main features</b>
Socio-critical paradigm	1. It fosters values such as reason, freedom, humanity and so on; 2. Citizenship training is a priority; 3. Ideological character of curriculum and practice; 4 Contents are a means and not an end; 5. Encourages the formation of a conscious, critical and responsible citizenry; etc.
Paradigm by competencies	1. The student is the center of the learning process; 2. It implies a know-how where the student establishes close links with the learning contents; 3. The student finds meaning and application to the contents learned; 4. The student is able to explain to others what he has learned; etc.

Source: Own elaboration based on (Orozco Alvarado, 2018)

In the previous section, relating to the ontological position, an ecliptic position was established by the author, in which the Marxist position was taken as the main reference, and in particular the use of its methods: dialectical materialism and historical materialism, to the object of research study. While the dominant ontological position in the author’s choice is that of Marxism, the author combines with the same elements of critical theory that, as clarified above, was strongly influenced by the former.

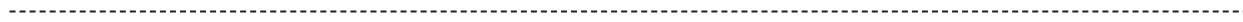
In such a way that, in the definition of the general epistemology position, and despite not being one of the paradigms or approaches of education, the definition of an ecliptic position, fundamentally Marxist, but with elements of critical theory and to a lesser extent others of the constructivist approach and the competency approach, was chosen.

### 3.2.2. Specific

In general, the epistemological position adopted is Marxist, but not from an orthodox or exclusive point of view, since this position incorporates elements of other authors that are mutually inclusive as those of the aforementioned approaches, in particular, of the paradigm and the approach of critical theory as a pedagogical approach.

In relation to the main pedagogical approach that is Marxist didactics, it is based on a large number of philosophical theories that come from the sources of Marxism, in particular from the three quoted from Lenin. It is important to recognize this vast universe of theories that nourish Marxism, many of which also serve to base other approaches, to understand the richness of this Marxist didactic that is taken as a reference to define the epistemological position of the author.

“According to Bensaïd (2003), Marx’s way of conceiving knowledge is part of a tradition to which positivist science has been refractory: a history of thought that contains in Spinoza and Hegel its highest philosophical expressions and that refers to the primacy of the whole over the parts. This type of reflection threatens the fragmentation of scientific discourses, since the





question of the whole implies its search even in the study of the singularity. That is, knowledge is conceived first and foremost as a universalizing movement and not as the static (and empirical) reading of reality. From the recovery of Hegelian logic, Marx conceives empirical existence as an expression of the real nucleus or movement, that is, as “mere appearance”, as read more than once in his work. (Córtes, 2008)

In the previous quote, in addition to the sources from which Marxism drinks in order to conceive the various phenomena, the philosophy on which its analyses are based stands out; that is, the dialectical philosophy that allows us to understand phenomena not in a stony and perpetual way but on the contrary in constant transformation. The quotation continues and in it appear other relevant elements to be able to understand why the author opts to assume a Marxist epistemology as the historical analysis that must be made of the phenomena and the depth of it that far from conceiving the phenomena in isolation, proposes to science and scientists, transcend the mere description and understand these phenomena from the analysis of the relationships that between, inside and outside them are manifested through complex social processes.

“This implies that reality is neither essence nor appearance, but its unity, and the specific and historically determined form that that relationship assumes will be the object of science. Marx says in *Capital*: “all science would be more important, if the way things were manifested and the essence of things coincided directly” (2000: T III, 757). The substance of scientific knowledge is, then, the transcendence of the phenomenal forms in which society is presented. If “understanding”, “instrumental reason” or, in other words, “bourgeois” science, do nothing but reduce its knowledge to description and, at most, the relationship between parts, Marxian criticism transcends the narrative to enter into the core of social processes and the ways in which they manifest themselves. (Córtes, 2008)

This represents a complex challenge for the researcher who is forced to carry out dialectic and historical analyses and incorporate in them the use of the scientific method, abstraction and others; as well as to incorporate categories such as those of social relations into their analysis. But not only that, the researcher is also forced to assume a critical position that, recognizing the complexity of the phenomena and the myopic analysis that, due to their positions and own interests, broad sectors have imposed as dominant, allows to “put in crisis” these dominant ideas in order to contribute to the realization of profound and revolutionary transformations in and for society.

“Criticism, as the word implies, means putting in crisis what is thought. The search for the intimate nature of capital is thus related to a destructive and heartbreaking will of a reality that appears as harmonious. A path for which the vocation for facts proposed by positive science is not only not enough, but can even become an obstacle. It is not so much a question of arriving at the “truth”, as of understanding reality as a process and truth as a becoming,

where essence and phenomenon are two moments in motion. In a word, what constitutes Marx's project is the permanent insufficiency of dialectical knowledge, a type of knowledge that knows itself to be poor with respect to the world on which it reflects and that, even so, knowing that it cannot close it in scientific formulas of blackboard, seeks to make it self-aware of its overflowing character, against everything that seeks to stagnate him or identify him with one of his moments." (Córtes, 2008)

Because of the above, the specific epistemological position that is assumed it is Marxism.

It has also been said that some pedagogical approaches secondary to the main position are taken up that make this an ecliptic position and that these are the approaches of critical theory to a greater extent and of constructivism and the competency approach to a lesser extent.

This is justified because the epistemological approach that is suggested to be applied in the processes of integral training of public servants, must be based on the following elements of critical theory, constructivism the competency approach:

1. The student is the center of the learning process;
2. Promote values such as reason, freedom, humanity and so on;
3. Citizenship training is a priority;
4. Ideological character of curriculum and practice;
5. Contents are a means and not an end;
6. Encourages the formation of a conscious, critical and responsible citizenry;
7. Promotion of collaboration and complex thinking;
8. Reflective skills are developed;
9. The teacher becomes a mediator, leaving aside his hegemonic role.

Synthesized principles of Orozco Alvarado (2018).

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

1. There are various approaches, positions and educational paradigms valid in the process of historical construction of pedagogical knowledge, among them, the behaviorist, cognitive, constructivist, socio-critical and others.
2. Marxism as a method of analysis, interpretation and transformation of reality, has various applications, so useful in the educational field that one can speak, despite not being a classic paradigm of education, of a Marxist didactic.
3. The ontological position of the author in relation to his object of research is, fundamentally, Marxist didactics, which allows a rigorously scientific analysis of reality.
4. The epistemological position on the subject is eclectic, based on Marxist didactics and combining it with aspects of critical theory, constructivism and the competency approach to a lesser extent.

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