

Representation of the school psychologist and perspectives of action

A qualitative study with teens of public school

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Abstract— The aim of the study was to analyze in which ways the conceptions of young people on School Psychology can contribute to problematize the psychologist's practice at school. The theoretical fundamental is position in favor of a critical conception of School Psychology. An empirical qualitative research was carried out in which were proposed semi-structured interviews with four teenagers students finishing high school in a public institution in Goiânia city - Brazil. The content analysis indicated the existence of gaps between a proposal of a critical School Psychology review and the conception of young people about psychology as a profession: it is seen markedly as clinical-traditional and characterized by a focused action at the student-problem. Results indicate lot of challenges for the construction of praxis in School Psychology: the need to overcome the clinical and individualistic model of the psychologist in school performance.

Keywords- school; psychology; youths;

I. INTRODUCTION

School Psychology is a field of professional activity and scientific production which main goal is to mediate human development and learning processes, contributing to promote and optimize them [1].

According to [2] the psychologist can assume traditional and emergents formats of acting. Traditional ones are actions that are better known by professionals in the field and generally deal with immediate issues that permeate the school context. The emerging ones present a more recent configuration and usually focus on a psychosocial dimension of the school.

The traditional ways of acting are: psychodiagnostics and treatment of student considered issues. The actions considered as emerging are: analysis and intervention at institutional level; participating in the construction of the pedagogical proposal of the school; coordinating groups aimed at the full development of students; conducting several researches aiming to improve the educational process; critically facilitating the implementation of public policies [2].

In Brazil, since the 70's, there has been a growing academic movement in defense of School Psychology based on the relationships between people in the school context and not on individual practices. However, it is known that the construction of the identity of the school psychologist goes through many difficulties, such as the still existent expectation, of a individualizing clinical practice within the school. In other words, the various actors in the school setting (students, teachers and caregivers) still expect the psychologist to perform a clinical role.

The fact that School Psychology is thought of as a practice very close to clinical practice can be questioned from the theoretical perspective of [3], [4] and [5]. According to the authors, the School Psychology based on individual clinical care neglects a critical proposal of action. Thus the need to envisage the group, the institutional perspective of school psychology. It is believed that thinking about actions in an educational context is to think of people interrelated in processes that are, in turn, built upon the various dimensions of humanity: such as social, political, religious, among others. Facing this problem, we intend to contribute to the debate about the possibilities of the school psychologist working with young people, having as a challenge the construction of a practice that contributes to the formative process of these students.

Therefore, the aim of this research was to understand the conceptions of young people about the work of the school psychologist: what they believe to be the job of the psychologist and what they expect from this professional during his school career.

II. THE METHODOLOGICAL COURSE OF THE RESEARCH

This study follows a qualitative approach, conducted through interviews with four teenager students finishing high school in a public institution in Goiânia-Brazil. The criteria for choosing the participants were the following: to be 18 or 19 years of age, to have finished high school and to have had some contact with the work of the school psychologist in the institution where he attended high school.

At the beginning of each interview, through the presentation of the *Term of Free and Informed Consent*, we clarified to the participants the voluntary nature of the research, the confidentiality that ensures the participant's privacy and anonymity, as well as the fact that the research does not bring him any physical or psychosocial risk. Having agreed to take part in the research, the volunteer participants were interviewed using semi-structured script.

Firstly, participants were required to provide general information about themselves, like gender, age and familiar composition. Then, the teenagers were asked about: what does the psychologist do in school; if there was a difference between the psychologist who works at the school and the psychologist who works outside the school; their opinion regarding the difficulties that this professional could face in his/her performance at school; if the school psychologist could contribute to the school career of the young people and, ultimately, in which way that could be achieved.

Each interview lasted for approximately 40 minutes and it was transcribed by the researcher. The research was analysed according to content analysis [6, 7].

Data analysis was carried out based on the theoretical collaboration of authors such as [6, 7]. Both describe content analysis as a set of methodological tools that apply to communications or to speeches. In general, the analysis of information produced in the research process was organized in three phases: pre-analysis, treatment of results and interpretation [7].

III. RESULTS

Findings indicated three subcategories based on participant's responses: Clinical-Traditional Understanding, "Firefighting" Psychologist and Perspectives of Action as referred on table I.

A. Clinical-traditional understanding

In general, the participants of the research related the tasks of School Psychology to the care of students. This care was described through the words consultation and weekly care. They also linked the work of this professional to the follow-up of the problematic student, who was represented as having low grades and unwanted behaviors in the school context. This understanding was also evident when we asked the participants if there was a difference between the work of

the school psychologist and the work of the psychologist who works out of school. At times, they answered that there is no difference between the two professionals, reaffirming a clinical-traditional notion of School Psychology.

The clinical-traditional understanding was considered by the participants of this research as something inherent to the work of the school psychologist, confirming the hypothesis of research. This understanding is probably an expression of common conceptions about the profession or about the practices of Psychology experienced by the participants in the school context.

B. "Firefighter" Psychologist

Participants also stated that the school psychologist is a professional who "extinguishes fires" at school, someone who deals with problems swiftly as they arise in the school routine, without necessarily going to the root and cause of these problems. In this way, the school psychologist fails to contribute to the formation of students and starts to develop a work similar to that of a school usher. As stated by [3], we can say that putting out fires does not lead to a critical school psychology, since developing emergency interventions does not allow us to plan ahead with medium or long term goals, making it difficult to promote improvements in the school context.

This criticism was directed to the fact that, quite often, the school psychologist proposes to solve everything, but in the end, does not pay attention to the essential: preventive interventions. In this way, by not being able to establish a preventive course of action in school, the school psychologist is seen a professional who is constantly "extinguishing fires" – problems involving school actors as they come out – and often has no successes in the educational process as a whole.

C. Perspectives of action

The participants pointed out that the work in groups should be an action of School Psychology, in this way, there could be greater contribution to the school trajectory of young people. They suggested that the psychologist should work on topics such as sexuality, racism, drugs and suicide within the groups.

Thus, we base ourselves on [8] the proposal of the importance of working with small groups. On the basis of Agnes Heller's theory, the author predicates that it is within these instances that the possibility of the transformation of everyday relationships alienated and alienating. Working with groups is a form of action in which small achievements can take place, as a visible revolution can not be made without an invisible revolution preceding it, that is, the great revolution cannot be accomplished before very small transformations are attempted. In this way, she affirms that it is on the plane of an invisible work in small groups that one becomes aware of alienation.

We believe that the school psychologist can contribute to this process, providing the creation of discussion groups on different topics in the school. On this matter, we assume, as [8],

TABLE I. CATEGORY OF ANALYSIS

Category	Subcategories	Description of participants	
Conceptions on School Psychology^a	Clinical-traditional understanding	consultation	weekly care
	Psychologist-fireman	routine problems	superficial solutions
	Perspectives of action	work in groups	

a. One of the categories analyzed in the research: "conceptions on school psychology"

that the group discussion offers less unilateral and segmented reflections of reality, since it is within the group that individuals can be confronted with opinions different from their own. In this sense, the group becomes an opportunity to transform particular issues in social issues.

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The goal here was to learn how young people describe School Psychology and what they usually expect from the professional in that area. From this goal, we could verify that, in a general way, the research participants represented the school psychologist as a clinical psychologist and also as the professional who focuses his interventions on the so-called problem students.

However, from the speech of those youngsters we also identify some possibilities of action for School Psychology such as working with small groups as important attribution of the psychologist in school. We consider that the group is the most democratic way to make students have contact with the work of School Psychology and it is also an interesting opportunity for young people to express their needs and their reflections of their education.

The results of the research also pointed out the need to definitively overcome the clinical and individualistic model of the psychologist's performance in school. This topic has been widely criticized by scholars in the area since the 1970s. However, our research has shown that it is still present in the everyday conception of School Psychology. Thus, it is paramount to consider that, the demystification of the psychologist as a clinician at school, depends not only on the school psychologist, yet the professional's own conception of

School Psychology is an important the gateway to the construction of a Critical School Psychology.

Considering the difficulty faced by psychologists in the delimitation of their attributions in the school context, it was verified that this study reached its objective of contributing to the understanding of the representations about the school psychologist, as well as contributed to some possibilities of action pertinent to the school psychologist add to the student's critical formation.

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