

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AND SELF-MUTILATION IN ADOLESCENCE: AN INTERVENTION REPORT

Elen Alves dos Santos ¹; Lúcia Helena Cavasin Zabotto Pulino ¹; Beatriz Soares Ribeiro ²

ABSTRACT

This professional practice report presents workshops called “thinking and acting on the scene” held at a public school in the Federal District with adolescent students from Elementary School II, with complaints of self-mutilation. With psychoanalysis as the guiding reference, the results show the need to create spaces for the circulation of speech in and with teenagers at school. This text also emphasizes that the school psychologist can assist in conducting activities which reaffirms the need to give teenagers a voice in the school space and the urgency of an inclusive policy aimed at our young people.

Keywords: Adolescence; self-mutilation; school psychology.

Psicología Escolar y Automutilación en la adolescencia: relato de una intervención

RESUMEN

Ese relato de práctica profesional presenta talleres denominados “pensar y actuar en escena” realizados en escuela pública del Distrito Federal con adolescentes estudiantes de la Enseñanza Básica II, con quejas de automutilación. Tiene como referencial orientador el psicoanálisis, los resultados apuntan la necesidad de crearse en la escuela espacios de circulación de habla con y entre los adolescentes. Ese texto aún pone de relieve que el psicólogo escolar puede ayudar en el manejo de actividades que reafirmen la necesidad de dar voz a los adolescentes en el espacio escolar y la urgencia de una política inclusiva volcada a nuestros jóvenes.

Palabras clave: Adolescencia; automutilación; psicología escolar.

Psicologia Escolar e Automutilação na adolescência: relato de uma intervenção

RESUMO

Este relato de prática profissional apresenta oficinas denominadas de “pensar e agir em cena” realizadas em escola pública do Distrito Federal com adolescentes estudantes do Ensino Fundamental II, com queixas de automutilação. Tendo como referencial norteador a psicanálise, os resultados mostram a necessidade de se criar na escola espaços de circulação de fala com e entre os adolescentes. Esse texto ainda salienta que o psicólogo escolar pode auxiliar na condução de atividades que reafirmem a necessidade de conceder voz aos adolescentes no espaço escolar e a urgência de uma política inclusiva voltada para os nossos jovens.

Palavras-chave: Adolescência; automutilação; psicología escolar.

¹ Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade de Brasília – Brasília – DF – Brasil; elenpsi@gmail.com; luciahelenaczp@gmail.com

² Centro Universitário do Planalto Central Aparecido dos Santos – Gama – DF – Brasil; beatricerbrsoares@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In this article, adolescence is considered a social construction instituted in modern times in order to outline the phase of development between childhood and adulthood. In this perspective, educational institutions are an important parameter in the age based division between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Ariés, 2011). Even though the school is a privileged space for the construction of individuality in children and adolescents, the social position in which these individuals are placed is still one of not knowing. However, when there is a possibility for different forms of participation within the school, it is possible to hear from the children and adolescents knowledge of existential and scientific nature. In other words, they are active and their learning process, and certainly not submissive or lacking critical thinking concerning what they are given (Coutinho, Carneiro, & Salgueiro, 2018).

The school is a rich environment in which scientific knowledge is passed around and historically as well as culturally constructed. With this knowledge, other types of knowledge communicated while these other types of knowledge are subjectively constitutive and are not reduced school content. "The transmitted knowledge is a package containing have signs of affiliation and identification" (Lajonquieré, 2010, p. 168). Thus, the same individual with whom the school works with a focus on the cognition aspect, is also ruled by language. Therefore, they are individuals of the unconscious.

The psychologist in the educational context has possibilities for practice that involves listening to these individuals, which consists of a psycho analytical epistemology, of providing an opportunity to speak, and of promoting real forms in which the word might be passed around in the school environment. It is not a matter of creating a clinical environment at school. It is rather a matter of promoting spaces for reconfiguration of meanings for adolescent issues what the mediation of the school psychologist, as a means to help young people construct their own narratives.

According to what has been mentioned before, school is a space full of affection, feelings, and anguish. Such characteristics of adolescence reverberate among peers observed by the teachers. Nowadays, the practice of self-mutilation is a reality that exists in many public and private schools. This phenomenon is quite difficult to ignore and reveals a psychological suffering in adolescence that is evidence of the way the psychological development of adolescence has been taking place (Jucá & Vorcaro, 2019; Corso & Corso, 2018; Villa-Boas, 2017).

Therefore, this article presents a report on the professional practice of psychologists on adolescents with self-mutilation problems by means of a workshop

named "thinking and acting in the scene". This is a workshop designed by the first author¹, And it is based on listening to the accounts provided by students from Student organizations at a public elementary school. The students attended the lecture after the suicide of a classmate. Thus, the request for a lecture turned into a workshop in which the students were provided with the opportunity to express their feelings concerning issues related to adolescence. The proposed activities consisted of round tables and up theatric Simulations of situations that the young people considered difficult in their everyday lives, and that made them lose hope. Since then, the workshop has been realized with adolescents in the school context (Santos & Pulino, 2019).

The objective of the workshop is to provide students with an opportunity to express themselves by means of language and their own bodies on the anguish they have to deal with, as well as on their potential for the construction and reconstruction of their scenario in a collective way. The workshop was based on the proposal of the oppressed theater (Boal, 2010) And which it is assumed that theater is a political act. There is no pre conceived scene. The students themselves are the ones who choose the themes and act out on these themes freely using their own spontaneity and creativities and composition of these theater scenes. The workshop was also inspired by the comprehension that the body during adolescence is taken over by a process of change, and during the scene these changes might come out as possibilities for catharsis and free association (Santiago & Neves, 2008).

The workshop is structured in the following way: first, there is a short introduction of the students and the instructors. After that, it is time for questions concerning the experiences and situations of adolescence that are considered conflict ridden hard to be understood or solved in the daily lives of the present students. At a third moment, the participants choose one of the situations orally exposed and then the students act out on these selected situations in a voluntary way. The proposal of the activity consists of thinking over the issues of adolescence, and then acting out on these issues; the thinking must take place collectively at the moment of the theater exercise and, later on, during the roundtable. The scene is realized according to suggestions by the narrators and it gets interrupted in case of bad language or violence. during the fourth step, there is a dialogue on the scene and related questions.

In the realized workshop, the students who watched the scene were free to interrupt the scene and suggest

¹ The workshop was established as Centro Universitário do Planalto Central Aparecido dos Santos – Uniceplac – extension project in 2018.

new actions if they thought it was necessary. That way, the teenagers who watched the play hello could be the audience at the builders of the scene at the same time. Rather than just pointing at standardized answers, the experienced embraced the creative potential of the students, the anguishes, and the experiences these young people go through every day, while providing them with an opportunity to think and reflect collectively on reality, on conflict, and on possible strategies for resolution, by means of theatrical devices.

According to what has been explained, the workshop was created because the students asked for it and it was outlined by the voices of these adolescents. The experience with teenagers makes it evident that it is necessary to think of therapy-based solutions for this public. Especially considering adolescence in modern times and all the interventions and attempts at silencing. experience with teenagers it is possible to construct clinical/Educational/institutional tools. According to Winnicott (1994), every professional needs to develop their own ways to construct professional techniques as a response to what is being demanded.

Thanking and acting in the scene with adolescents with self-mutilation problems

The following professional practice report took place after the request by an educational instructor at a public for the second level of elementary education. According to the instructor there was an increasing number of adolescents who were self-mutilating. Thus, all the 15 students preferred to the workshop had already been provided support by the “Serviço de Orientação ao Estudante” (SOE), or Student Support Service, and their families were aware of the problem.

Total number of 8 meetings were conducted. each meeting lasted one hour and a half. Six of these meetings involved acting exercises and a subsequent roundtable on the scene. In the last two meetings that was a rehearsal for a collective performance. The scenes involved, family acceptance, depression in adolescence, the use of masks and self-mutilation, teenage potential, group formation, and participating /creating support networks. Due to the extension of the scenes, in this article we will provide a summarized version of a scene produced during one of these meetings. The session was realized by one psychologist and two psychology interns.

Scene: the use of masks and the practice of self-mutilation

The use of masks and the practice of self-mutilation was the 3rd scene (third day of workshop) and it was produced by the teenagers themselves. In this scene, the students attempted to display the reasons for feeling sad or depressed, while the practice of self-mutilation is a response and a means to mitigate that suffering.

The aspects mentioned were: domestic and sexual violence, bullying, and indifference /rejection concerning their feelings. many students reported feelings of loneliness, and problems with family members, especially due to the fact that they did not have their parents near have because their parents had too much work to do; a very recurrent aspect as well as the necessity to wear masks of “happiness” in their everyday lives so that they would not have to explain why they felt so bad. In a nutshell, the teenagers reported suffering that was attached to their own concepts of who they were for others, and to their troubled relationships established throughout their individual constitution.

The chosen scene was intended to represent the way they feel regarding society, and other people. Some observers (representing society) strike a pose of superiority while gazing at the teenagers who showed the signs of sadness, isolation, and self-mutilation all over their arms. The psychologist asked the students who were watching the play to come close to the participants they felt most identification with. The students in the audience gradually stood up and slowly chose their positions close to either the observers or the depressed students. A female student from the audience said that she would stand up between the two groups. She felt neither sad nor above all that. She wanted to help but she felt helpless and alone at the same time.

Another student commented that, despite the fact that he felt sad he was not joining the group of depressed people. he preferred to join the group people who felt rather superior but happy because he was tired of feeling sad. Putting on the mask of happiness seems like a good idea to him. Another student argued that not everyone who was smiling was really happy and that, when they got home, most of them dropped the mask and showed their true personalities.

During the roundtable on this scene, the students revealed that the practice of self-mutilation was supposed to help them deal with conflict and that the mask of happiness was just a device for hiding there are two feelings. Sounds good news reporter that their families and friends are not the ones to blame for all the anger, hate, anguish, fear, and apprehension they are going through. At the end of the meeting, it was suggested that it is OK to ask for help and that it would do them a lot of good to open ventilate their feelings with people they trusted.

This scene was chosen particularly in order to highlight a very recurrent phenomenon connected to self-mutilation: hiding it from others, not being able to express in words things they want to carve under their own skins. Concerning the teenagers who self-mutilate, there is necessarily hey connection between the adolescent body and others (family or society).

Considering that individuals are constituted in language, it is on other people that they base their representations and identifications that will outline their own bodies (Costa, 2003, 2014).

Teenagers, from the perspective of this current social model, project their own anguish over themselves, self-mutilating as a means to express their inner pain. Other teenagers resort to this device as a means to seek identification with the suffering other people, which might be real or fabricated by social networks, which makes this national and international epidemic (Jaffré, 2008).

The issue raised by this article is the need for spaces for expression where teenagers will have the opportunity to speak out there are complaints and perceive themselves as part of collectiveness have in order to construct ways to deal with suffering. It is clear that our adolescents are sensitive to conflict and that adults can work with them, not in order to cover up that suffering, but rather to create together healthy ways to deal with all the conflict we are going through.

In the example of the work related here, in the three first meetings, the teenagers were affected by feelings of hate, destruction, and death. By mediating and handling each account, the psychologist was able to help the students build ways to deal with pain that did not involve physical aggression. The group came up with strategies such as diary writing, the creation of spaces for conversation via WhatsApp, the production of drawings and paintings on canvas, and the practice of physical activities.

In this construction, the teenagers requested that the group shared with the other students of the school some of what happened discussed in the meetings. The students composed song and the performance involving getting rid of the mask in front of an audience in the conference room, in which the following statement was displayed: *“the masks represent the fake happiness that we wear when we leave home in the morning and have to face fear and the disapproving looks. We’re not here asking you drop your mask and walk around with a sad face. We just believe that we should all ask for help when we need it”*.

After that, they sang a song and handed out balloons on which every student in the audience was supposed to write on a feeling that was oppressing them, and then released the balloon, which would drift off carrying the bad feeling away. It is understood that communication among adolescents can be more effective among peers, and the mediation realized by a professional can promote and maximize such effectiveness.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our objective in this report on professional practice was to introduce the possibilities open intervention

with adolescents at school, while providing these young people with an opportunity to express themselves and collectively construct effective ways to deal with the problems of adolescence. We emphasize how important it is that psychologists pay attention to what teenagers say at school. It is not alright just listen to a young person say “I cut myself so I can feel alive” complacently. It is vitally important to provide these young people with spaces to discuss and reach solutions.

In this perspective, it is up to the psychologists working at schools to develop listening strategies not only for the adolescents, but for all the people involved in the school environment so that professional can collectively find new possibilities for intervention with the young people so that they might feel alive, real, and relevant at school. Such participation brings out new possibilities regarding the symbols that adolescents usually resort to during the act. By listening to the students and the report on their experiences, the school was recognized as an environment for protection and guidance, a supplier of solutions for these issues. Therefore, it is not a matter of blaming school for the discomfort of adolescence because we believe in work that connects score, family, social assistance, and health care services. The school is a privileged space children and adolescents, so it is important have that educational administrators and psychologists, especially, rethink the articulation of interventions such as this one where the students with self-mutilation problems, most importantly with the mediation of knowledge produced historically and culturally.

Freud (1996/1927) provides as with a warning regarding the impossibility of happiness, while considering the impact that suppose the leawood make us face the illusion of life, the hopelessness of nature when it comes to our own bodies an hour interpersonal relations. Complete happiness is unreachable and suffering is part of our inner constitution anyway. What we wish to suggest that school and psychologists work on a proposal of *education for reality*. A comprehension of education for reality, according to Freud (1996/1927) consists of providing an education in which the ambiguities of humanity can be discussed, well there’s no attempt disguising suffering, and where students are allowed “to become aware of their social necessities” (p. 115).

We also wish to emphasize that nowadays the body is put in evidence in many different ways in order to express the whimsicalities of every individual, such as body piercing and tattoos, while social networks reinforce the concept that it is necessary to use our own bodies as means of communication. Regarding the increase in cases of self-mutilation at school, it is important that psychologists find the real dimension of self-mutilation within this symbolic and contextual web

that is being exposed here in order to understand what teenagers really mean when they cut their own skin.

REFERENCES

- Ariès, P. (2011). *História social da criança e da família*. Rio de Janeiro: LTC Editora.
- Boal, A. (2010). *O Teatro do Oprimido e outras poéticas políticas*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Editora.
- Corso, D. L.; Corso, M. (2018). *Adolescência em cartaz: filmes e psicanálise para entendê-la*. Porto Alegre: Artmed Editora.
- Costa, A. (2003). *Tatuagem e marcas corporais* (Coleção Clínica Psicanalítica). São Paulo: Casa do Psicólogo.
- Costa, A. (2014). Afetamentos do corpo. In Costa, A.; Rinaldi, D. (Eds.), *Linguagem e escritas do corpo* (pp. 79-88). Rio de Janeiro: Cia de Freud.
- Coutinho, L. G.; Carneiro, C.; Salgueiro, L. M. (2018). Vozes de crianças e adolescentes: o que dizem da escola? *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*, 22(1), 185-193. Recuperado de DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2175-35392018014739>
- Freud, S. (1996). O futuro de uma ilusão. In: Freud, S. *Edição standard brasileira das obras psicológicas completas de Sigmund Freud* (Ed.), Vol. 17. Rio de Janeiro: Imago. (Trabalho original publicado em 1927).
- Jaffré, Y. (2008). Une épidémie au singulier pluriel réflexions anthropologiques autour des pratiques d'automutilation des adolescentes. *Corps*, 2(5), 75-82.
- Jucá, V; Vorcaro, A. M. R. (2019). Escarificações na adolescência: tentativas de reinscrição do sujeito por meio de cortes. In: Chatelard, D. S.; Maesso, M. C. (Eds.), *O corpo no discurso psicanalítico* (pp. 81-94). Curitiba: Appris.
- Lajonquière, L. D. (2010). *Figuras do infantil: a psicanálise na vida cotidiana com as crianças*. Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes.
- Santos, E. A; Pulino, L. H. C. Z (2019). Pensar e agir em cena com adolescentes em escolas públicas. *Revista Sul-Americana De Psicologia*, 7(1), 108-119. Recuperado de: <https://doi.org/10.29344/2318650X.1.1948>
- Santiago, A. L; Neves, L. (2008). Jogos teatrais e fracasso escolar: uma proposta de intervenção clínica e pedagógica sob orientação psicanalítica. *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psicologia*, 60(2), 75-89.
- Vilas Boas, L. M. (2017). *Cartografia da dor na escarificação do corpo adolescente: sobre identificação e fantasia* (Tese de doutorado). Universidade de Brasília.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1994). O jogo do rabisco. In: Winnicott, C. (Org.), *Explorações psicanalíticas*. (Trad. Abreu, J. O. A.) Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas Sul. (Trabalho original publicado em 1984).

Received: July 09, 2019

Approved: January 30, 2020

This paper was translated from Portuguese by Régis Lima.