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The conflict at school: clinical implications and mediation interventions

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Abstract

Among the various difficulties that today the scholastic world meets there is certainly that to manage some forms of conflict as the overbearances among students. The study of such theme has certainly allowed opposing the phenomenon limiting the possible clinical relapses.

Nevertheless in a lot of schools the methodologies of intervention are directed to exclusively intervene on the single individual, the victim or the aggressor.

From which two critical implications are had: the subject is labelled in irreversible way and produces the idea that the deviance realizes for the stable characteristics of the one or the other.

This paper presents the research and studies that a) configure the deviance as a phenomenon in stages in which potentially is always possible to intervene, b) emphasize the effects of labelling on the deviant behaviour, c) describe mediation interventions aimed at reduce the conflict between the parties.

Keywords: Deviance, Mediation, Labelling, Strategies in the School

1. Introduction

The complexity of the interactions activated in the scholastic context can often accommodate situations of conflict, both between students and teachers, between families and the school system, and often even among teachers. In this way, conflict dynamics tend to widen, to make it difficult for those involved to live together, and to have educational and psychological impacts. In the first case, a climate of conflict in school can reduce the engagement of the students and increase the phenomena of school dropout rates (Baron, R. To, 1988, Ladd G.W., Kochenderfer B.J., Coleman C.C., 1996). The literature contains discussions of how much pertains to the psychological implications and clinics bound to the conflict. Studies contain spacious references to social refusal, self-exclusion, victimhood, and psychological distress of various kinds (Williams K. D., Forgás J. P. von Hippel W., 2005; Estévez E.; Musitu G.; Herrero J., 2005).

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Equally frequently it happens that children who display "difficult" behaviour come to be identified as "bullies", provoking from the school strategies of discipline that objective of holding in check chaos and disorder. The predominant mode of action in these situations is that to address to the single transgressor. This modality deviates from "common sense" as it does not account for two aspects by now determined in the field literature: a) the change today from considering the development of these individuals as a journey in stages, like a real "career", more than the effect than characteristic individual (Iudici et al, 2013), and b) the effects of an intervention on the single "bully" may have a stigmatizing effect on the individual, strengthening the individual's deviant identity rather than changing it (Iudici A., Faccio E., 2013; Faccio, E., Iudici, A., Costa, N., Belloni, E., 2013).

2. Effects of the Intervention on the Individual: The Processes of Labelling and Stigmatization

Intervening on one of the components of the conflict means often not to account for how that conflict is generated and above all it means in many cases to neglect the effects that can be verified on the same individual. In many cases disciplinary action, beginning from the labelling process and social stigmatization, produces a change in the child's own public and private identity. Stigmatisation is defined as "a process that leads to mark publicly of the people like morally inferior, by means of negative labels, marks […] or publicly diffuse information" (Lemert, 1972, p. 91 tr. IT.; Goode And, 2004). Stigmatization acts to identify the deviant as part of his personal identity (Salvini, 1998; Heatherton, T.F., Kleck, R.E., Hebl, M.R., & Hull, J.G., 2000; Iudici, 2013).

Being labelled as deviant also produces several other effects. First, it results in a degradation of status: the individual will be labelled as a "bully", "mentally ill", or "victim" and treated accordingly (T. Moses, 2010). This reduces the individual to being recognized as a "type" of person. Next, the process may cause the individual to acquire specific knowledge, competences, and transgressive abilities that are potentially and eventually deviant (Iudici, A., Faccio, E., Belloni, E. Costa, N., 2013). Third, the individual may acquire a changed mental identity with a consequent change in the hierarchy of the values (Lemert 1972) and the possible affiliation to one "deviant subculture" (Becker, 1963; Campbell C., Deacon H., 2006). The isolation and self-segregation characteristic of these groups also contributes to further intensify the deviant status of their members. The individual may perceive a lack of necessity in self-representing in a normal manner and then abandon anchors to other forms of self. The deviant is induced to act in non-conventional ways. Finally, it can lead the individual to experiment with the secondary advantages of negative identity, both in terms of solidarity with other deviants and assistance and protection from some sectors of the society. Assigning the deviant status and a permanent role also gives the individual the right to be helped and assisted (Link, BG, Phelan, JC, 2001).

3. Deviance and Deviant Careers: The Phases

The construct of deviant career has been introduced in the literature by Goffman (1961, 1963) from his studies of "moral careers" of the mentally ill, and subsequently extended by Becker (1963) to deviant careers in general. This conceptualization has been successively applied to other forms of deviant careers, such as career gambler (Hayano, 1982), the consumer of drugs (Faupel, 1991, Dabney &

Hollinger, 2002), patients with psoriasis (Ginsburg, Link, 1993; O'Reagan & Ramsey, 1988), cancer patients (Bloom, Kessler, 1994).

This construct configures a sequential model of deviance, foreshadowing a succession of stages in the development of deviant behaviour that corresponds to the changes in the actions and the perspectives of the individual. The concept of "career" is based on the idea of an intentional agent, which plays a key role in the genesis and continuation of those activities defined deviant.

The first step in the deviant career consists in the perpetration of an action that breaks a determined set of rules. For this to happen it is necessary that the subject is "arranged to" (Becker, 1963; Matza, 1969) to put in action a specific behaviour, that the individual chooses deliberately to consider a deviant phenomenon from its "inside". For example, the individual must have access to a set of beliefs and ideas that expose the individual to create conflict situations, also called "pre-historical biography"(De Leo, 2002).

In the moment in which that belief is updated, for instance committing a provocative gesture towards another, then it is important to understand the social reaction to that gesture. In that reaction can be activated the processes of labelling and stigmatization described, which consequently can give a specific meaning to that experience and induce another reconsideration of itself in the light of that meaning. This is the phase of the crisis in which the subject can discuss his or her beliefs and determine which narrative mode best represents his or her needs. If, continuing in the process of reconsidering his or her own activity, the subject develops strong motivations and deviant interests, the individual can make the deviance a lifestyle and to organize his or her own identity around a transgressive model of life.

This process of passage from an accidental experience to a tested model of deviant activity (the phase of consolidation) is also determined through the interaction with other deviants. In this phase, the individual considers new types of experiences and begins to think of them as significant. The affiliation to the activities of a deviant group comes to shape itself like a real "conversion" of the individual (Matza, 1969), in the light of which the person reconsiders his or her affinity and reorganizes cognitive and emotional constructs. The implementation of certain deviant actions is thus the result of a series of social experiences during which the person learns the particular meanings, perceptions, and judgments that make these activities possible and desirable. Deviance is therefore an active and constructive trial that develops through various phases, within which the individual implements micro-actions that reflect a true path, that we call "itinerary of the deviant career".

4. The Strategy of Mediation

To exit from this state of impasse, it is necessary to identify a neutral space that can overcome the stiffening of positions, change the negative definitions of roles, reactivate the interrupted communication and face the redundancy of actions and reactions. Thus it is clear that those involved need to find ways and means that, beginning in childhood, are able to develop social skills useful to pursue scholastic objectives and those of active and responsible citizenship.

One of the elective strategies to intervene in such a context is that of mediation. The purpose of mediation (Moore, 1996) is to try to transform the experience of conflict in a moment of growth, in connection to the present resources and to the degree of development of the skills of student to identify

ways of conflict resolution more appropriate to the school context. (Williams & Winslade, 2010; Winslade & Monk, 2000; Beaudoin & Taylor, 2004). The following are some of the concepts used in training courses disbursed to teachers and students:

1.   Consider the conflict the result of an interactive process. This allows participants to avoid attributing conflict to the other and remove some of the responsibility for it. On the other hand, the whole situation has come about to create for the subject an opportunity for direct responsibility.

2.   Consider the conflict an opportunity for growth and not as an *a priori* negative. Starting thus, participants can give meaning to the conflict as an opportunity and not as a negative aspect to avoid. Consequently, it can prevent leakages or feelings of tension about the event itself.

3.   Clarifying and sharing differences could counteract the idea that diversity is necessarily an indicator of conflict and a source of abuse.

4.   Use the resources and the roles of those who can take part as the conflict has been generated. This could favour the idea that the responsibility is diffused, activating those who can supply a contribution and contrasting the theory for which the conflict is "a personal" issue.

5.   The subject should assume responsibility in the generation and in the maintenance of the conflict. Expressing responsibility means explaining how the conflict could unfold and persist through choices that tend to be unsustainable by those who are part of the conflict (Morgan, A., 1996).

6.   Generate situations in which to repair to the conflict. This means to concentrate the efforts not on the causes of the conflict but on the outcomes and the responsibilities in repairing the eventual created damage. This may produce an effective resetting of the same conflict (Lindemann, 2001).

7.   Locate shared resolutions by inducing in students in conflict the individualization of resolutions that can meet the positive opinions of others and therefore requires the development of "skills to understand the needs of others" and to identify "new realities" that previously did not exist.

Conclusion and Discussion

Bullying and aggressive actions between students and between students and adults often subtends a conflict among the parts. Very often the "common sense" intervention avoids conflict or labels people. The result is to perpetuate the conflict. It does not consider that deviance is a journey in stages and there is always the possibility to constrain the actions of abuse. An elective strategy is that of mediation, in which all of the actors involved try to transform the processes that generate the conflict.

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