

The relationship between psychology and school. Some hypothesis from work experiences.

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Introduction

This contribution, will propose a reflection on the relationship between psychology and school, in order to catch the demand addressed by the school context to psychologists, and analyze the function they have or they may have. We believe that reflecting on these issues would be usefull to a scientific discussion and would contribute to the construction of the psychologist's identity, which is seen in different contexts, and in particular in the school, as an aspect on which to query and formulate hypotheses.

We will propose some cases to create a literature on the psychological intervention in the school context. This contribution is the final product of a larger activity of reporting and exchange on our different experiences with the school. In fact we are a work group, founded one year ago, composed by psychologists linked by their present or former work in the school with different roles: psychologist, educator, AEC (educational and cultural assistant). We are also students in the same School of Specialization in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy¹, at different school years, who share an interest in creating a connection between training and work, theory and technique, psychotherapy and clinical psychologyl intervention, and finally between the demand addressed by the school context and the psychology professional competences². We reckon and we hope to demonstrate that exploring the issues come out in our experiences with the school context, we can also greatly enrich our clinical and psychotherapy expertise.

Our focus on the school derives also from the fact that many psychologists find a job - and often their first job - in this context, in different functions not always seen as psychological. We aim to demonstrate that, despite the common sense, these functions require a psychological competence, more than other professional skills, because of their high level of complexity. We are thinking to the psychologists that carry out their first work experiences, through social cooperatives, in the role of Educational and Cultural Assistant (A.E.C.)³ or educators in the nurseries; we are also thinking to psychologists that implement projects for the school.

Reflecting on these functions, we dealt with the fantasies of a young psychologist towards the job he expects to be able to play. If we think to our work experience in the school context, we may have angry fantasies, linked to an emotion experienced of doing a "fallback job" and to the mortification of our desire to play the "real" psychologist's work. If not explored, this fantasies of undervaluation may lead the psychologist to the claim of a "role" that gives him the power to do

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¹ Four years course of specialization in "psychoanalytical psychotherapy, psychological-clinical intervention and analysis of the demand"; www.sponline.it.

² The group of work "psychology and school" aims at promoting a reflection on the new and traditional functions of the psychologist in the school context. It's formed by students belonging to different years of the School: Valentina Alonzi, Filomena Brescia, Isabella Conti, Marina De Bellonia, Chiara Giovannetti, Danny Guido, Paola Izzo, Michela Nolè, Rossella Roselli, Maria Sarubbo, Chiara Sotgiu, Luigi Verducci and Cecilia Sesto, professor.

³ The Educational Cultural Assistant (A.E.C.) is a professional arrived at school in Italy with the Law 104/92, which has established his presence in the classroom with the aim of supporting the integration of students with physical or psychological disability at school.

what he thinks of his relevance. For instance, doing the "clinical interview" without knowing the demand addressed by the school and without having tested his competence as to respond to this demand (think of the creation of various counseling offices at school, but also to their frequent failure).

We believe that thinking of doing a "fallback" job instead of the "real" one, as "psychologist", takes us defensively away from asking ourselves what the psychologist can really do at school, what he does in relation to the problems addressed to him, and what value added this professionalism can offer to the school system. With this paper we intend to deal with this issue, proposing hypotheses and insights regarding some questions. We will try to reflect to what the psychologist does in the school context in the present day. In this regard, we wonder what are the most useful competences to organize a clinical psychology intervention designed to respond to the demand addressed by the school system.

Therefore, instead of role, we want to talk of *psychological function*. Let's assume that a function, to be considered so, must be organized and acquire meaning in relation to its ability to respond to the organizational and relational problems that the school addresses to the people who work in it, and consequently to the psychologist. He is thus called not only to provide technically competent answers, but also to give meaning to the function he is carrying out.

So, what are the problems we face at school? From our experience, we have noticed that Educational Cultural Assistants (A.E.C.) and educators, even when they have psychological competence, are often caught unawares by the critical events that punctuate their activities, and too often are not sufficiently aware of the necessary competences to tackle these problems, to which they may respond with inaction. Furthermore, we have found psychologists that, proposing "their" projects to schools, do not seem to grasp the relationship between projects and demand addressed by the school.

Let's consider what the school has entrusted to us as difficult to manage. In particular, the "diversity". With this term we refer not only to a physical and/or psychological disability, but in general to all the things that differ from the school's explicit or implicit and desired regulation. In particular we think to some behaviors: a child who bites another, a child who rejects the school, a parent who recriminates, complains or accuses; and more, we think to events of aggression between class mates, in particular those which have been given the name of "bullies", etc. From the different functions we carry out, and we will try to consider in this paper, we believe that the school asks us to "integrate" the situations which are problematic for it - such as those mentioned above - sometimes with the social mission of the school, other times with the rest of the class, or with the ministerial program to be developed, or with the expectations of teachers or families. In other words, the area in which we are called to intervene is represented by the relationships between teachers, pupils, parents and other people working in the school. From this point of view, being a psychologists in the school is no longer a random contingency, due to the necessity of getting a job within a context of shortage of work for this profession. But it becomes absolutely necessary and relevant, as long as we, psychologists, are able to respond to problem using the clinical psychology competences that intervene on relationships.

In this regard, we have noted that in the school context the request for integration of diversity may emerge through its opposite: the exclusion of individuals. There is a tendency to circumscribe and identify the problem with those people who are considered the most difficult, problematic, "who need to be corrected". The integration is thus pursued not including, but expelling, not integrating but homogenizing.

We try to develop and delve into these issues by using the reporting of some of our work experiences in the functions of A.E.C., of teacher in a nursery and finally in the design of projects for the school.

We propose the reading of a case an A.E.C. dealt with in a primary school (Sarubbo, 2011). As stated in the introduction, the use of this kind of professional comes from the necessity to support school teachers in the integration of students with physical, mental or social disability⁴ (Alonzi, Guido, Sarubbo & Sotgiu, 2011; Ricci, 2001; Zanolini & Usai, 1995). Scholastic integration is seen as "developing the potential of the handicapped person in learning, communicating, developing relationships and socializing" (L.104/92). In our country in order to fill this role, at present, no specific expertise is required: it can be pursued by graduates in different disciplines, or people with different education titles and levels. In the practice, the A.E.C.'s function is mainly carried out by psychologists and educators. We see this fact as a symptom of the uncertainty, on the part of institutions, in defining the skills of this figure. These uncertainties could significantly decrease realizing that we primarily deal with a problem of relationship and not of individual deficit.

Our hypothesis is that the A.E.C. may respond effectively to the needs of the school, to the extent that he is able to understand the relational dynamics, which, in our opinion, are an unavoidable resource for learning and integration.

In undertaking the work in the school, the A.E.C. finds himself faced with two professional issues: how to build the integration in the classroom and what strategies must be implemented. In our experience, we have tested that the disability/diversity can work as the apex through which to read the functioning of relationships in the school. We thus mean to propose the disability/diversity as an observation point to detect problems and criticalities that characterize relationships in the school setting. We wonder what problems derive from dealing with diversity at school, what idea of integration emerges from this context, what strategies it is possible to implement and what issues arise.

The first critical point we have traced regards the organization of learning spaces, or rather the spaces devoted to the school relationships. Generally, the disabled person enters the class only and always through dyadic relationships, with the support teacher or with the A.E.C., forming a dyad, which is imagined as inseparable by the context and, at the same time, which cannot be integrated in it. This situation is linked to the "alarmism" based on the assumption that there must always be a filter between the school and disabled, but also that acting as a filter can become the main objective of the A.E.C.. So much so that the service provided to schools by the cooperatives is a system based on the presence of the permanent A.E.C. or on its replacement with a substitute A.E.C.. We think that this system has been created since the school, the cooperatives and the municipalities consider as a problem that the school might be "alone" in dealing with forms of disability / diversity, even if for a day or for few hours. Let's try to understand what the school finds it hard to be alone with.

We will talk about Veronica, a 9 years-old third grade girl, who has been diagnosed with a learning disability. The child was removed from her family, along with the 8 years-old sister, because physically abused by her father. Her relocation from a large city to a foster home and to the school of a little town gives rise to intense changes, which lead to critical events and behaviors at school. Veronica refuses to stay in the new school and enacts aggressive behaviors: stones her classmates, yells, screams, swears and quarrels with her sister. These events, along with the "learning disability" diagnosed, cause the request for an A.E.C..

⁴ The request for the assignment of the A.E.C. must be submitted by the school to the municipal psychological service, together with the certification by the ASL (Sanitary Local Agency) or other accredited institution, containing information on the diagnosis and levels of autonomy and self-sufficiency of the pupil (Law 104/92, Art. 3 paragraph 1). The educational psychological service - in its functions of planning, monitoring and verifying the service for the autonomy and the school integration of students with disabilities, in municipal and public schools - gives the A.E.C. to disabled pupils. The next stage is entrusted to the cooperatives that territorially win the contract for the management of the Service. These cooperatives select the A.E.C.s.

At this point, we wonder what it means for the school to take care of her. What the school cannot handle in its relationship with Veronica as to require a figure of support. The school seems to tell us that it cannot deal with those who reject the school itself. This leads to the expectation that children, present against their will, can be "domesticated", that is they can become disposed to adapt to that minimum collusion proposed by the school system, which entails that the child is in school to learn and the teacher is there to teach a knowledge that is given once and for all. This seems to be the minimum necessary condition for the school and for the teachers to establish a relationship with the student. Veronica with her own behavior seems to defy this expectation of relationship. In our opinion, it is interesting to underline that the disappointment of this expectation, caused by the diversity brought by Veronica, questions the obviousness of thinking that a child must stay at school.

When the A.E.C. arrives at school, the head-teacher takes her to the classroom and introduces her to the "human case" that is disrupting the class. Immediately the teacher and the student leave the class. This scene is emblematic of the way the school imagines the relationship with disability: "outside the classroom" (De Bellonia, 2011). The "outside" seems to connote the symbolic space reserved for disability, and immediately suggests that it is lived as an inconvenience, as a complication for the teacher and the other students that need to go on with their work, which can't be treated in the "inside". It is a critical event liquidated through the action of "taking out". We'll see that in this context the categories "inside" and "outside" will be fundamental organizers of the relationships.

Veronica, in the hallway, barely says her name and remains silent; while the teacher immediately spends herself in describing to the A.E.C. Veronica on the one hand, the class on the other, aiming to establish a separation between the girl and the class, and, at the same time, between her work and the A.E.C.'s one. In fact she asks if the work with the girl will be done outside the classroom, since she sees it as something different from the teachers' work: teachers with the class on the one hand, the support teacher and the A.E.C. with the disable child on the other hand, side by side on two parallel tracks.

This representation is well expressed by the exclamation addressed by the teacher to the A.E.C. when she arrives at school: a "godsend", symbolizing her as a person who will relieve the teacher from the burden she has experienced as unmanageable inside the classroom. This exchange in the corridor takes place during a sort of countdown, because of the few minutes available to the teacher who is worried of subtracting time to the lesson: it is time wasted or at least not legitimated. This course of action will characterize the exchanges with the teachers and will be the first of several moments that will reveal how difficult it is to talk and to find opportunities to exchange ideas on methodology.

Veronica has a good attitude to reading and writing, but finds it difficult to understand logical-mathematical problems and concepts as "before", "after", "space", "differentiation". These concepts, seen through their affective symbolization, immediately call to mind the emotional density of the experience she is living. There's a "before" with her family, and an "after" in a foster house; there is a living "space" that is different, that needs to be reorganized (in many ways: people, classmates, school, home, town), that arises problems of identity and belonging. It is very important to keep in mind and find a link between the difficulties of the pupils and the specific events they are involved in and the feeling connected with them. In this case, the difficulties of the pupil may be easily liquidated giving them the label of "learning disorder", not understanding to what extent the experienced of the events she is living are related to her academic skills and motivation.

The beginning of the relationship is very problematic: Veronica refuses to stay there, denies the causes that brought her there, her difficulties, rejects the presence of the A.E.C.. So comes out her question to the school context: to give sense to her presence in that class and to her relationship with the A.E.C., working out the experience of hostile strangeness that these events evoke to her. This extraneousness is also experienced by the teachers, who seem to consider her as a "human case" not part of their teaching role.

The demand of integration addressed by teachers to the A.E.C. seems to be in the form of "you take care of her, we of the other". This paradoxical request for integration through an exclusion, perceived by the student, exasperated her difficulty in dealing with the changes she was experiencing, and drove her to react to them aggressively and rejectively, because they were too emotionally bulky. Let's see how the presence of Veronica in the class was organized on differences:

- The activities proposed to her were different from the others because of her different learning capacity. Only later it will be managed to agree on an alternation between individualized activities (for Mathematics and Italian) and activities with the rest of the class for other subjects (History, Geography, Religion, English).
- The requests addressed to the girl were mainly to "paint" or to "leave it alone if she didn't want to"; she was often "skipped" in the correction of exercises.
- She didn't stay at school in the two afternoons a week planned in the school program. "For the benefit of the class," said a teacher.

The experienced of hindrance and heaviness inside the class was increasingly cumbersome and the responses were more and more mutually exclusive. "It is we who suffer her, because as we explain there is someone who speaks with her". So even the A.E.C. was an expression of a different and disturbing presence in the classroom. The individualistic approach itself used to organize the activity inside the classroom (to do exercises, to ask questions to the teacher, to have the homework corrected) further complicated the possibility of supporting Veronica in the educational recovery. Just because the presence of the A.E.C. further highlighted her difference from the class, Veronica did not want to be helped and often copied by her desk-partner.

It has become clear that Veronica lived an experience of exclusion and diversity that was problematic on three levels: for her process of learning, for the relationship with peers, for the relationship with teachers. Veronica kept saying she couldn't stay there, she didn't know anybody, she always spoke about her old classmates and stood aside during the recess. She used to relate to others in an aggressive or provocative way; the classmates were afraid and held in their intention to approach her. With the teachers instead there was a strategy of mutual avoidance, so as well as they tended to avoid Veronica, she did not listen to their deliveries ("use the red pen", "pick up the journal", etc.). She would never join the discussions or raise hand when the teacher asked a question. Everything seemed to be arranged as to avoid each other staying together.

The A.E.C., taking on the experiences of the girl, identified some strategies to make it possible to enter that context, to take part in the learning process, to build relationships with classmates and teachers.

Learning Process

The objective was to make certain activities more accessible. The strategy was to link the activities required by the teachers with Veronica's learning level and abilities, but also with the emotions experienced by her in relationship with others. When she cried out in frustration of not being able to get the exercises in the manner required, alternative ways were found that enabled her to do them. Here is an example. One day the students had been assigned, as a task of Geography, to write down their route from home to school. Veronica was angry because she hadn't managed to do the task. In this case it has been fundamental for her to consider that the task was complicated not only because it was difficult to write a text that made sense, but also because her route had changed: there were no longer the same house and the same school as before. The A. E.C. proposed her to draw the route (drawing was an activity she particularly enjoyed which she was very good at) and accompany the drawing describing it orally, discovering all the details she met during the route. This allowed her to experience the satisfaction and gratification of succeeding.

The relationship with the classmates

The objective was to support the relationships with classmates. A possibility of closeness between Veronica and other students was searched both during the recess and inside the classroom. Through the relationship built by the A.E.C. with the other children, also Veronica's representation towards the A.E.C. changed. The A.E.C. passed from being refused, as figure that made real Veronica's diversity, to becoming a resource available for her as well for everyone in the class. More and more other children kept asking the A.E.C. for help. The shift of the A.E.C., also in the position and movements, from Veronica to the class allowed the girl to accept that it was possible that she had difficulties (as the other students did) and to use that resource, then to call the A.E.C. to be helped. The classmates are valuable resources to support the integration process. One day the A.E.C. proposed Veronica to do a reading assigned by the teacher together with her desk partner, taking turns, respecting them and listening to each other. For the first time Veronica will participate to the discussion with the class that follows to the reading.

The relationship with the teachers

The work with the teachers was to encourage new ways of interpreting Veronica's behavior, by confronting each other on the meaning of her feeling of staying in the classroom. Often, when students don't do what they are assigned and asked to, we interpret their noncompliance thinking of excuses and whims as causes for the malfunctioning of that relationship. This experience has shown that children's whims and excuses are not the causes, but the signs of this dysfunction: warning lights that turn on, pointers that can help us see what we are not seeing. Whenever Veronica wept, was distracted, asked to go to the bathroom, said she was tired or sick, this was related to the intolerance she lived in relation to how things were going at school. For a certain period she blotted out the tasks that the support teacher wrote on her diary. When she was chided for not doing homework, she complained that she was the only one who had homework in those days, unlike the classmates. Her teacher drew to her attention that those were the two afternoons she was not there while her classmates were studying at school, so they could not do even the homework. The possibility to discuss with the teachers the sense of what happened has generated some changes. It has been possible to reflect on what that event meant to the girl: not being at school in those two afternoons was a further element of difference from the rest of the class, which hindered her feeling part of the group and of the learning process. Symbolically she was doing this process outside, deleting tasks from the diary, not doing homework, etc. This attitude allowed her to protest once again for the exclusion and to retrieve a relationship at least through being rebuked. This will lead the teachers to understand the sense of exclusion experienced by Veronica, and her motivation to be with others. In the Group of Work for the Disabled (G.L.H.), that was periodically done at school, it will be discussed and decided upon the participation of Veronica to the two afternoons with the rest of the class.

The fluctuating inclusion of Veronica in the class, even if remaining her difficulties, has allowed teachers to experiment the possibility of inclusions. At mid-year the A.E.C. will be asked to stay not only with Veronica but with the whole class, also because "Veronica does not want to feel suffocated". It was thus disconfirmed the idea that disability was an obstacle for the completion of the ministerial program. It rather seemed that a question was rising to deal with the complexity of the students' emotional world, which resulted compressed in the race to the program.

Disability points out that what at school is casted out and regarded as an inconvenience is just the children's feelings, their emotional world, which, in the case of disability, manifests itself in all its immediacy, uncontrollability. Emotionality undermines a relationship thought as stereotypical and set: the student who follows the program, the teacher who oversees its development. The concern to complete the ministerial program seems to be the trick to outwit emotionality. Let's think to the students' actions deemed "incomprehensible" or "inadequate", that are contrasted without questioning and thinking about their meaning.

The changes made during the year have crosswise regarded Veronica's learning level, her motivation, her relationship with the A.E.C. and with the class. What made these changes possible, creating the possibility of being part of the process of the class, was taking charge of the emotions

experienced by Veronica in her participation at school and her difficulties. We believe that the function of the A.E.C. could be to identify and promote strategies that allow the student to benefit from the life of the class, not to be out of it, either physically or mentally. This way of working cannot be structured on a dimension of strong fragmentation (Sotgiu, 2011), as a mode of action dedicated to the individual student. This issue adds up to the individualistic modalities used by every teacher and every professional in the school to deal with pupils within the class.

The function of the educator in the nursery. The dialogue with the families

We will turn now to the psychologist in the nursery. Again, the psychologist is there playing a role that doesn't require a psychological status, but facing problems that require psychological expertise. We will start reporting a critical event and we will further develop some hypotheses on what kind of psychological intervention is possible in the role of educator.

We want to emphasize that "diversity" is seen, within this context, as "breaking the expected rules", which are collusively shared between nursery and families: let's think to those behaviors that, considered detrimental or dangerous to the child himself or to a classmate, seem to undermine the relationship with the families (Izzo, 2011).

We will discuss the case of Luca, in a private nursery that has an agreement with the Municipality of Rome⁵. A group of children in the class "24 - 36 months" is carrying out a teaching activity on Carnival with an educator; they are adorning with different materials (scraps of paper mache, styrofoam balls, bits of colored sponge etc.) some paper hats⁶. Luke puts two polystyrene balls in his nostrils; one is taken out, not the other. At this point the teacher, worried that the ball could obstruct the airway, decides to call the mother suggesting to go to the first-aid for a check. Later, Luke's dad calls and asks about the child and the dynamic of the event with an attitude of reproach both to the teacher, because she hadn't paid attention, both to the school that had used certain type of material. Luke's mother comes to the nursery, accompanied by an aunt of her husband and a nephew: she is agitated and worried, about to faint. She communicates her difficulty in "managing" this child that often, also at home, tries to slip small items into the nose.

During the whole afternoon until the closing time, the school remains in contact with the family to learn about the health status of the child. The day after the school learns from Luke's mother that the ball had been extracted after several transfers from an emergency room to another. The mother also says she was able to convince her husband not to lodge a complaint. The school is offended by the attitude of the family, who has questioned the role of the educator. The nursery's director decides to convene the mother. During the meeting she lets her know the regret at being blamed for what happened and in turn blames the family for not informing the teachers of similar incidents recently occurred at home. The director continues by assuming that this behavior was indicative of a malaise of Luke, in particular she attributes it to a request of attention by the mother, who had little time to see him because of her work shifts as a nurse. She suggests to her to be more present and to find a baby-sitter who would assist the child and collect him from school, rather than entrust him to different people (aunt or grandmother), because, in her opinion, this would guarantee a stability and a point of reference to the child in the absence of the mother.

Starting from this case, what seems to be undergoing a crisis, in the relationship between family and nursery, is the collusive agreement related to the protection and take care for children, in the specific sense of controlling that children do not get hurt. The concern of the nursery, and of the educator in particular, about these events seems to be related to the experience of "admitting" that they have failed in their function, not being careful enough. If explored this concern could become

⁵ The Agreement provides that the Municipality sends to other facilities the children that cannot include in its public nurseries. These facilities must comply with certain quality indexes as the measures of the area, the structure of the spaces designed to the activities, a "qualified" staff.

⁶ The Municipality provides that between teachers and children there is a ratio of 1:7.

an evidence of the relationship between school and family but also of the fantasies on the service that the school plans to offer.

Let's assume that the control over the child, claimed by the parents and ideally pursued by the nursery, is what the two parties have mainly in common. This case shows how an unforeseen situation, characterized as risky, can generate reactions of conflict between family and school: parents and nursery collide, blaming each other and aggressively dictating advices on how to better play the role of asylum or family. We therefore hypothesize that the conflict between family and nursery depends on the fact that the family establishes with the nursery a relationship based on the claim of control, while the nursery establishes with the family a relationship based on adapting uncritically to this claim, going so far as to feel threatened, persecuted and even diminished when it seems to be unable to keep up with the claim.

It seems that the nursery, in the attempt to adapt to the claim of the parents, strives to define and share its function and its goals with the families. In this sense, the nursery proposes itself as a substitute for the family context in the absence of parents, rather than participating in the educational process of the child with specific skills, belonging to this educational context and different from those that parents may have.

The emotions here too, as in the case of Veronica, are presented as a "weakness", a deviation from expectations, a disorder that is better not to talk about. For example it seems that no one can admit to feel frightened or powerless in relation to the episode, and use these emotions to make an hypothesis on the meaning of the actions of Luke, both at home and at school. In fact we think that such a behavior can have multiple meanings. Only a few: the desire to explore and learn new objects and parts of his own body, the desire to rise against the educator, to have his mother back beside him, etc. In other words, these behaviors convey emotions that can be taken as evidences that make sense only in a relationship and not apart from it. Let's think about the nursery that, in this case, read the child's behavior as due only to the mother-child relationship, drawing itself out of it. But to learn from the emotions experienced in a critical situation we have to give up to confuse the control of emotions with the government, in terms of actions to do, of unanticipated events.

We imagine that the psychological competence can find its place between these two parties, in their relationship. We think that the psychological competence, through the role of the educator, can have different declensions: the exploration and sharing between family and school of the mutual expectations on the educational function specific of the different contexts, nursery and family; the possibility to think and talk about the emotions that organize the different relationships and help to give specific meanings to behaviors otherwise stereotyped.

Designing psychological interventions at school

Here is a brief report of a psychological intervention made in the school context regarding an issue seen as problematic, usually categorized as "bullying" (Stella B., Stella C., Conti, Tomay & Falocco, 2009). In this case, even though the role is as a psychologist, it will be interesting to see that this is not a warranty of a psychological function.

We will try to show that the definition of the demand or which are the counterparts to be involved in the design of an intervention on the issue are not assumed at all. In fact, we think that the design of interventions in the school context often faces, since the beginning, with the transformation of problems into assumed matters and clients into assumed recipients as well, thus risking of not producing any understanding of the problem posed to the consultant psychologist by his interlocutors. Let's see the path done by some of us within a project of intervention on bullying in a junior high school.

Three psychologists participate in a competition for a psychological-scholastic research-intervention⁷ organized by the Order of Psychologists to which they are registered. The Order, as part of the permanent regional observatory on legality and the phenomenon of bullying instituted at the Regional Education Office, establishes a prize for the best psychological-scholastic research-intervention, in order to enhance the psychological professionalism with a scientific contribution on the issues of bullying and education to legality. The prize will be paid by the Order for the best project on the theme: "The phenomenon of bullying. Analysis of the youth culture in schools of all levels". It catches the eye that the title proposed for the research-intervention puts at the center of the investigation the "youth culture": since the beginning young people seem to be mentioned as the recipients of the project, assuming that the phenomenology defined as "bullying" is generated by their culture. The three psychologists, though interpreting "bullying" as a critical event of living together at school, which cannot be solely reduced to the conduct of students, had anchored the design of their project to the indications of the Order, in order to match its expectations.

The realization of the project: from the competition announcement to the school context

In the starting phase of their work at school the psychologists tried to negotiate the meaning of the research-intervention with the teachers, which at first appeared more interested in the procedure for carrying it out than in the use of the research as an opportunity to understand problems. The psychologists found themselves in a situation where teachers and students of the school, identified as recipients of the intervention, did not seem interested in the aims of the project. It seemed that only the Order was interested in it, advancing a demand to promote psychology profession with the pretext of the prize for the best research. The school, the head-teacher, the teachers didn't seem to be interested.

In the reconstruction of the case, we use the word "pretext" to indicate the opportunity offered by the project to the psychologist to promote clinical-psychology interventions within the school context. The use of the term points out a fantasy: that the psychologist needs a *pre-text* to work within the school. It also tells something about a relationship in which the *text* comes before the customer demand. But what possibilities of development, understood as the construction of a demand from the client, were found within this specific relationship? Then we will show in what way the psychologists will try to counterclaim the meaning of their participation in the project, as well as the participation of the various stakeholders of the school context: head-teacher, students and teachers.

The demand of the head-teacher

⁷ For a discussion on the establishment of the school psychologist please refer to the two bills:

- Bill 2839 – 20 October 2009: the aim is to overcome the presence of a psychologist in schools limited to occasional advices, short and exclusively "remedial", in order to equate the services offered by the school to European standards, instituting a mandatory and continuous presence of the psychologist available to teachers, students and school in general. According to the data collected by the National Order of Psychologists in collaboration with the regional centers of the National Agency for the Development of the school autonomy, the bill states that the school most relevant issues concern the lack of involvement in the study and the lack of attention during the lessons, the relational difficulties, the special educational needs, the organizational difficulties caused by continuous innovation and reforms and, finally, the most serious phenomenon, the aggressive and violent behavior of the students.

- Bill 4105 – 18 February 2011: the service of psychology in the school takes an experimental nature for three years. It is no longer mandatory but it is left to the regions and to the school autonomy the power whether to organize and launch this service or not.

In the starting phase of the project, the three psychologists had met several times a head-teacher of a school, interested to participate in the research, that had proposed itself to the School Office. During the meetings, aimed at defining the target audience of the interviews proposed by the psychologists as tool of investigation, the head-teacher was particularly alarmed because of some episodes in which some pupils had been involved. The psychologists found the head-teacher interested in figuring out what happened to the students called "perpetrators of bullying" and to their "victims" in order to help them overcome the problems at the base of behaviors harmful to themselves and others. The head-teacher also declared herself interested in understanding the conducts held as deviant, in order to take decisions regarding the teachers and the classes of students. She believed that bullying was a problem generated by a context different from school, most often the family, whose expression and complaint took place at school. Bullying was seen as something foreign to the relationship between pupils and the school context; it was seen as a diseased part of the pupil who, because of an uneasiness generated elsewhere and brought to school, plays out violent actions, or if he is the victim, he is not able to denounce them. The psychologist thus becomes the expert who can understand and resolve problematic cases around the bullying. He is also asked to preserve the "healthy" part of the school from the "sick" one, imagining a kind of contagion, due to imitation, among students. Consistently with this feeling of expulsion of bullying from school, after the first meetings, as we said earlier, the head-teacher interest in the issue seemed to have diminished, and it appeared slightly present in the other school members.

The intervention with the classes of students

In the research-intervention with the classes it was planned a first step of data collection through texts produced by students on their own idea of bullying, a second phase of discussion and role playing in groups of students, and a final phase of restitution of the work results through a workshop for students, teachers and head-teacher.

The emotional analysis of the text⁸ pointed out a complex vision of the bullying phenomenon, on which the psychologist suggested to the students an exchange of ideas. They organized some activities in groups of people from different classes, in order to activate a sort of internal observatory and laboratory on the assumptions about bullying and legality. The aim was to promote the development of a qualified question by the students, that is the awareness of being "clients" of a service, the school, to use in order to achieve their educational goals. They assumed that the awareness would motivate them to participate, also reducing their violent reaction (Carli, 2001; Carli & Panicia, 2003). The groups of work, through some role-playing, played the cultural models emerged from the research, in order to be able to treat the emotions linked to experience.

During the meetings with the classes it was observed a change in the participants: they moved their focus from the family to themselves and to their peers. At first in fact family seemed to be the dominant theme: the family of the bully, seen as the place where the bully was born and "formed"; the family that protects him and does not intervene to put an end to violent behaviors; or the family of the victim, which can be a place of shelter and consolation, but at times may also be absent or may refuse to support the child, since it is ashamed of his weakness. Through working with the classes on these interpretative hypotheses, it emerged that most of the behaviors in question and the underlying emotions were related to the school. It was clear that delegating the responsibility of the bullying to the families made the students powerless in the face of this phenomenon. The students began to look around and to think they could take control of the situation, perhaps with the help of an adult, such as a teacher willing to listen to them.

⁸ The Emotional Textual Analysis (AET) is a methodology of text analysis (speeches or documents) which allows, through specific procedures, to detect collusive processes through which a social group gives emotional symbolizations to a context or a theme. To deepen the methodology and the clinical psychological models it is based on, refer to the book *L'analisi emozionale del testo. Uno strumento psicologico per leggere testi e discorsi* (Carli & Panicia, 2002).

A significant change was also observed regarding the dependence on the adult. "Bullying" used to be described as a childishness, a behavior that can be carried out by immature individuals and that would pass with time. The victim can stand it waiting and hoping it will finish; and in the meantime he can find support and consolation from his parents. "Bullying" was seen as an issue to be treated through the complaint to an adult, as the only way to deal with the problem. "Bullying" was felt as the arrogance of some people against their peers, which gives rise to unpleasant feelings such as fear, and to which people mean to put firmly an end. "Bullying" seemed to be experienced as a violent set of rules aimed at being respected, not connected to future objectives of development. In this sense it was closed to the arrogance of mafia. The "bully" was also represented as something other-than-self, someone to keep at a distance, someone scary it is better to stay away from, someone to leave alone. The students started to imagine an evolutionary process in which they were no longer helpless and dependent, but they started to look for autonomy and for the ability to responsibly deal with the issues they were involved in. They could imagine themselves as autonomous from a relationship mediated by parents.

After an initial dependence from the psychologists, from which the students expected answers, solutions and confirmations, the intervention solicited the participation of the students, who managed to organize themselves independently. They began to exchange their ideas in three small groups and to organize their work, until the realization of a common product to be presented during the final seminar of the project.

The teachers' involvement

On the day of the seminar the psychologists also invited the teachers and the head-teacher, who felt to participate as spectators and guarantors of the discipline. This kind of participation speaks about the effort done, for all the duration of the project, to involve teachers in the objectives of the research.

Let's see what had happened with the head-teacher and the teachers. During the first meetings the head-teacher and the psychologists agreed the dates for the different phases of the project and the head-teacher charged herself of sharing the goals and how to conduct the research with the other teachers. Following the declaration of the impossibility to gather all the teachers in a presentation meeting with the psychologist during the school hours, the head-teacher decided herself to inform the colleagues on the activities of the research. Afterwards only a few teachers told to the psychologists that they were informed of the calendar of activities and the teachers who were aware said they had randomly read it on a circular. The psychologists began to present the research to all teachers as they met the classes and to agree with them how and when to collect the texts in each specific meeting.

This event can be read in different ways: the head-teacher has failed to effectively inform the teachers; the head-teacher was not sufficiently involved in the project; teachers are often inattentive and do not read the circulars, etc. These explanations evoke the representation of a school where it seems difficult to "keep all the parts together". The psychologists involved in the intervention tried to use this "lack" of information as an interruption of the "already planned" and to identify a useful space where even the teachers could decide on the sense of the project with respect to their classes, or what it meant for their teaching function to participate in such a project.

Answering to competition announcements and dealing with problems

We presented a case in which an intervention was designed starting from an announcement, because often, in intervention proposals coming from the school through the participation to competition announcements, the meaning and the objectives of the intervention in relation to the issue, such as "bullying", were not treated, and the meaning of the participation was not discussed with all the parties. The public administration culture tends to reduce the projects it promotes to the execution of duties: this often results in the translation of the problems of the client into objectives

and actions which were already inscribed into the scheme of the project of intervention which was approved before by another agency, other than the client itself. The problems "given" by the competition announcements also change depending on the prevailing culture and its way of interpreting social phenomena: the bullying phenomenon, for example, arises along with the growing concern about the security of citizens and with a concomitant loss of value of the school, typical of the present culture in general. But to be treated within a specific school context, the phenomenon requires a very punctual translation and contextualization.

We want to highlight the possibility to work so that also activities well formalized by public competition announcements, where there is a risk of conformism, retrieve the sense and the objectives of what they are working on. Procedures, phases, objectives outlined in the project in itself does not guarantee either that the project can be realized, or that it will be possible to reach any changes. In addition to the written project, there is also to deal with the project implemented and lived. In our opinion this entails the establishment of moments in which psychologists and clients question themselves on their use of the intervention and of the instruments put on field. The school environment often perceives projects as the sum of parts that must be carried out, another accomplishment among many, in the effort to find a resource in it.

We wonder what demand the school addresses to the psychology that deals with the design of projects. We hypothesize that projects may not solve the problems, but represent a work setting in which to encourage and to support the participants' interest in taking care of the problems they share, considering them as a resource. Here are some examples taken from the case we have presented: the interest of the head-teacher to take actions, towards the "bullying" problem, no longer based on the family as cause, but more related to what happens at school; the interest of students to find solutions other than reactivity, complaint, or acting as martyrs.

In the end, we think to a psychological function that should integrate and not substitute the skills of the client. In other words, a psychological function that feels the implication of clients, in the problems they pose, as a potential interest to know and to deal with them; instead of thinking to work as experts in relation to recipients that do not want to know anything except that their issues have been resolved.

Conclusions

There is a question we want to call back: what does the school ask to psychology nowadays; what are the problems it calls psychology to deal with? Through the cases presented, we have seen that the "diversity" from the expected, experienced by the school as a problem, is actually an important resource to highlight the emotional dimensions, otherwise treated as not existing. Let's think to the emotions evoked by Veronica, which were brought outside of the classroom together with the child herself, or to the emotions it was not possible to talk about in the nursery, that caused violent and blaming behaviors between parents and school, as well as bullying, that was considered as a typical character of some students, related to the family context, and not to the school one. We think that transforming the problem into individuals to be excluded from the relationship allows to separate and to distance themselves from the relationship emotions experienced as problematic and untreatable. We believe that the psychologist is called to intervene on these relational problems. From this point of view emotions become a resource that puts in relation the different actors of the school system, teachers, students and families. We believe that the school system as a whole, and not the single student, is the psychologist's client and the client of his intervention.

By reporting our experiences we have tried to highlight that, questioning the relationships' predictability, people succeed in recovering important and unnamable issues, which have required the intervention of a psychological function, that can be useful aside from assigned roles (A.E.C., educator, psychologist). We then assume that the clinical-psychological competence and the possibility to develop a clinical-psychology intervention are not granted by the role, but are linked to psychological functions that need to be constructed procedurally together with the interlocutor, in relation to the objective of the intervention.

To invest on the development of the psychological function, rather than on the power entrusted to the role we play, helps to develop competence and to detect and respond to social demands and to problems coming from different contexts. Questions and problems are strongly linked to the cultural changes in our society, which evolves continuously. We think that the question is not what role to hold, which might get quickly outdated, but what kind of psychology for what kind of issues.

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