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THE CARE OF PROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATIONAL FIELD

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Abstract

The most valuable assets held by the educational system are their professionals, teachers and educators. They are the ones who need to take care of themselves in order to be able to teach as they are the ones who are exposed to the influence of the situations and problems of vulnerability and suffering of their students. Educators must be conscious of the effects produced, when working in environments involving psychosocial risks, in order to be mindful and proactive instead of coping outside of their comfort zone. By not doing so, ill-being settles in the work teams and in the end it impacts on the people they care for. For the purposes of this study, five theoretical practical proposals are presented: interdependence, collective intelligence, focusing on subjectivity, acquiring a molecular perspective of situations and finally social supervision as a means to help others and oneself. These reflections are the result of a systematic practice and of a study carried out during the supervision of 10 teams and 60 professionals in the psychosocial field. We will contribute to generate ideas, strategies and implement resources to propose a culture of care in global terms: towards the people we care for, towards teammates and towards oneself.

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Keywords: Educators, professional cares, supervision, tiredness.



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1. Introduction

Professionals in the field of education demonstrate tiredness and speculate about the feelings of ill-being. They talk a lot about it but the comment line cannot be crossed without a true recognition of their ill-being. In practice, when confronted with how one should take care of oneself, one almost always links it with being healthy and physical exercise.

This article shies away from a physiological focus and is contributing to a new perspective resulting in the creation of think tanks about the educators' work and thus generating specific strategies to boost the mental health of teachers and educators whilst at the same time improving their proficiency in the education of the boys and girls they have in their charge.

It also tackles the problems and proposals made from a psycho social perspective, based mainly on authors guided by psychoanalysis such as Bleichmar (2009), Dejours (2006), Leal (2003, 2006) and Molinier (2013, 2015).

The proposed strategies steer away from an orientation of fatigue by compassion or by the vicarious trauma expressed by Rothschild (2009) in his work "Ayuda para el profesional que ayuda" as well as by the psychophysiological positions considered by Figley, Adams, & Boscarino (2008) and Figley (2014).

The article raises awareness on how the teachers can address the psychosocial issues, caused by the vulnerability and poverty of their students. These situations must be analysed in order to focus on their effects on the professionals working with those particular students or children.

2. Problem Statement

Educational professionals' manifest great mental fatigue which they express through complaints within the team of educators at school. Burnout has become a real problem for all educators. The built-up stress of the teachers, trying to do their job under really difficult conditions, influences their emotions.

This situation of burnout must be treated as soon as the educator becomes aware of its importance, especially when one requires a very proficient educational professional with professional, personal qualities and an important social and cultural involvement.

Therefore, the concepts of interdependence, the building of solutions through collective intelligence and the necessary attention to their own particular subjectivity are developed as strategies able to modify the psychosocial risk of this group.

We suggest the supervision strategy in an effort to attend to the professional sufferings associated with educational work in social contexts of vulnerability and crisis, and generally all the relationships between subjectivity and educational work: The professional's sufferings have been neglected and overall the relationship between subjectivity and work (Dejours, 2006).

The implementation of supervision spaces has already successfully been tested among professions such as social workers and therapists (Puig, 2014).

3. Research Questions

The two main questions we have to ask ourselves as a starting point in this qualitative study are the following:

- What psychosocial concepts make up a ‘care culture’ in educators?
- What strategies and techniques need to be used in order to care for teachers and educators?

4. Purpose of the Study

- To submit the results obtained through the discussion groups during the practice of supervision with professionals from the field of education: educators, teachers, free time monitors and therapists.
- To contribute to the generation of awareness about the effects upon professionals working in situations of psychosocial risks.
- To promote the self-care of educational professionals otherwise the ill-being or burnout might be transferred inside the school team and thus to the children.
- To give a new perspective, which aims to generate new strategies to promote educators’ mental health, while maximizing their educational proficiency with the students in their care.

5. Research Methods

The research has been carried out between 2013 and 2014 coordinating more than 10 teams of professionals by means of the discussion group methods. Altogether, about 60 professionals, who have clearly shown their needs, became aware of the necessities and the effects that working within a situation of social crisis produce and thus the need to generate, whenever possible, new practices and instruments in order to be mindful towards others and themselves. In doing so, we avoid settling in a personal ill-being and discomfort during the meetings with the person we serve or inside the teams.

The main focus of the research is the professional one but we will also talk about how we take care of the attended children and people, since the proposals that will be developed are based on three approaches:

The right to take care of others, the right to take care of oneself and the right others have to take care of one. Professionals are the most valuable resource of the educational, health and social services system and must face, daily, overwhelming complex life stories, sometimes full of pain and frustration, which are hard to bear and that challenge them.

Another approach of this current work is that it is multi-disciplinary and conciliatory. It reports on the involvement in processes of supervision since the late 80s and the line of research made on this subject. It is situated at the intersection of different theoretical frameworks: social work, systemic theory, psychoanalytic theory, the ethics of the care that Gilligan (1985) offers and the transforming capacities described by Sharmer (2007) and Kofman (2007) that integrates arts, practices and sciences which help individual and collective abilities to evolve from various approaches: one from “the being” (more internal) and the other “the acting” (more external).

All of this is achieved by means of another research method called: Systematization of the practice of the supervision sessions, also known as the theoretical reconstruction of a practical, specific experiment carried out (Gagneten, 1987; Aguayo 1992; Ayllon, 1995).

Indeed, through the practical systematization of the sessions and the contents of the supervisions, the experiment as supervisor and as supervisee has been analysed. Different proposals developed in this article have also been tried out.

6. Findings

In this section, we summarize the most relevant concepts and practices involved in building the self-help module following the examples given by the professionals in the field of education during this study.

6.1. Interdependence

People are interdependent, they need each other to survive, to grow up when they are young, to feel that they are part of a group when they are adults and to care for each other when they are old.

The ethics of care, born in the United States at the hand of Gilligan (1985), recognize vulnerability as a common condition of humanity. In her work, she underlines that human beings are vulnerable, tremendously fragile and dependent throughout the different stages of life. They have to accept that they are vulnerable and that they need each other.

These statements are opposed to the neo-liberal value of total autonomy and the independence of the need of others. Gilligan tells us that we are interdependent.

With the prevailing neo-liberal approaches and the public policies decreasing, the guarantees of the welfare state are endangered. This situation means that we have to renew and emphasize the culture of care, entailing looking out for each other and being respectful towards others, which is always full of mutual exchanges.

It is not enough to be professional. People want to “be informed, feel safe and know that their problems and concerns are taken care of” (Molinier, 2015, p. 2). This is more necessary than ever. We all need it to feel well, to give others and each other a feeling of well-being.

6.2. Collective intelligence

A second premise would be

Not everything depends on me, nor does everything depend on others. I have observed that the events and insufficient development of the welfare state have been swallowing up a lot of collective intelligence of the professionals, which is now disseminated and thus lacks ways to rethink situations. The feeling of failure is so great that it has left professionals and intellectuals defeated, not only politically but also speaking of thought. It is as if new options may not be thought. A reality has been imposed, not the reality. (Bleichmar, 2009, p. 30)

Not everything depends on me, nor does everything depend on others, that is the way it is. This attitude refers to initiatives and new forms that one can exercise on oneself and one’s environment to make it more balanced. The idea is that not everything emanates from outside of me. To be able to take good care of others begins with oneself and one’s immediate environment.

6.3. Focusing on subjectivity

Social transformations are so rapid that sometimes it is impossible to assume them; they cannot be perceived in subjective terms nor made ours so quickly. Everything has to be understood and assumed very

swiftly. The problems must be overcome and solved without delay, everything is asked for immediately. It spills over onto colleagues and affects the circle of social relationships.

Maintaining a time for reflection implies that a psychic process of reflection and anticipation in the professional is called upon. To listen carefully to our subjectivity, is not to dance to the tune of urgency or what is trendy. It requires single-mindedness and focus on behalf of the professional in order not to yield to outside pressures.

6.4. Providing a molecular look

Educators need to apply a deeper molecular look, they have to be more attentive to the smallest of changes that occur in the subjective processes of children and young people. They have to concentrate, stop and support the intervention in the minute processes that occur in people. In terms of care, we should pay close attention to relationships, connections, networks that the children and young people have. The main value is to be able to live a human life and there are many kinds of human life.

The culture of care implies discreet skills, emotional adaptability and being able to give a little kindness to make people feel good. That means an intertwined conversation in daily life or in the texture of daily life, as Oury (2007) underlines. Sometimes it is difficult to evaluate this work because it often only makes sense in the long term or in an unexpected way. Time management does not always coincide with the more flexible and erratic time of care.

6.5. Supervision, a form of care and self-care

Supervision is par excellence the professionals¹ method of care. As a place for renewal during the professional practice, supervision is characterized as a field of systematic reflection on the professional action without fulfilling control functions. It is a space to ask questions, expose doubts, to channel the “no solution” and debate conflicts. Group and supervisor listen and allow the subjectivity of the participants to flow.

It is based on experience and professional practice, in order to improve it. Its function is to think about what is done, about the work, in order to benefit those cared for. This is a great training potential. Supervising allows problems and painful experiences suffered at work to be recognized and it has therapeutic effects to the extent that it contains, deals with and makes possible the development of the difficulties in a cooperative way. The supervisor has no control, no coordination, and no management functions. For this reason, it is essential that the supervisor be an independent outsider of the contracting institution.

It is precisely this supervisor position, detached from the task and the institution that becomes an opportunity for the supervisee to discover personal and professional strength.

Cause or effects that institutional situations have on professional intervention, can be dealt with during the supervision meetings. What allows the supervisor to intervene is the participants' agreement to maintain a sphere where listening, the word, participation and confidentiality are guaranteed. For teams, monitoring is very convenient, recommended, sometimes even essential and always useful (Puig, 2014).

¹ Interview with Carmina Puig. “*Los profesionales somos el recurso más valioso del sistema de atención a las personas y debemos cuidarnos para cuidar*”, Abril 4, 2018. In: <http://www.social.cat/entrevistes>

The practice of supervision and team advice are increasingly introduced and appear in various scenarios where help is sought. This is a positive and unequivocal sign of progress in the care of professionals of the social field and helps people concerned.

In Catalonia (Spain) different institutions have adopted this practice. Specifically, there are experiences of professional colleges in conjunction with Councils, of universities in conjunction with local government or regional governments that have contracted external supervision services and in doing so they have supported their professionals, etc.

7. Conclusion

The educator needs to be able to have areas for reflection, such as supervision, which allow him to think of his daily job as being teacher and to be able to deal with the personal and emotional aspects present in his teaching role.

The concept of interdependence, building solutions through the medium of collective intelligence and the necessary focus on his own subjectivity, is shown as being both useful and efficient strategies to transform the psychosocial risk of the group.

The teacher needs to be able to deal with his own subjectivity and thus obtain personal means in order to develop a molecular view which is more in tune with the new psychosocial problems which arise in the education environment.

The care of educators by the institutions is essential in order for them to be able to coherently articulate the educational meanings which are already embedded in their thoughts and actions with the emerging meanings and new social realities.

Supervision as an area for reflection and thought is a tool which, after decades of practice, is extremely useful in order to read into the complex reality of day to day life and in order to build a professional culture of self-care, a road which we are building interdependently.

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