

TEACHER DISCUSSION GROUPS RESULTS

Objectives

- 1.- Gather information about their difficulties with adolescents
- 2.- Understand the way that they relate with their students' families
- 3.- Identify conflictive situations in the teacher-family-student relationship.
- 4.- Define the characteristics of the Educational Centre system

Methodology

Discussion Group: methodology by consensus and representativeness of the group.

Open meetings with the teachers from the Timoneda Association.

Duration: 11 months.

Frequency: monthly.

Length of the sessions: 2-3 hours.

Description of the components

1.- The difficulties that the teachers say they have, do not fall in the specific subject areas that they teach. They manage this terrain well and define perfectly their objectives, the material they want to teach, the way in which they will present the material, etc.

It is rather in the field of relations where they often find themselves overwhelmed by situations, and confused, where they are not able to define the best action in order to solve those conflicts which are of a relational nature.

If this reflection is considered from a systemic point of view, it becomes evident that there is not one sole cause that produces these effects. The "cause" is multidimensional, and the effects transcend into the global context, invading all the groups which are in interaction.

On the other hand, the different cultures which teachers are working with today complicate the situation since they must not only relate with adolescents as a group but also understand and know the cultural codes which control the behaviours of young people belonging to other ethnic groups.

This situation places the teacher in the paradox of having been prepared to transmit knowledge but not having the necessary "knowledge" (relations) to achieve their objective. This "dead-end street" increases the feeling of frustration, and anguish is constant because they cannot avoid the daily obligation of going to class.

The high rate of sick leaves among teachers can be explained by the fact that “getting sick” is one possible response to solve this paradoxical situation.

2.- When teachers feel defenceless in the face of conflictive situations with their students, and they cannot see a way to resolve them in the context of their own educational centre, they usually call the parents to tell them about the problems their child is causing, on the one hand, and to bring them into the educational process to share it, on the other.

After observing simulated interviews, carried out by teachers (role-plays), it is fit to point out some of the tacit aspects as well as certain mind-sets common among teachers, which do not allow them to achieve the objectives the interview was meant to attain.

Concerning the tacit mind-set of the interview, all too often, the problem is that the father “cannot come.” The teacher, facing the urgency of solving the problem, holds the interview with only the mother present. This type of interview deprives the teacher of an important point of view for the task of education, that of the father, which often is distinct of that of the mother. On the other hand, it presumes a homeostatic move, in the sense that it reinforces the position of the “peripheral father” in tasks where he should participate just as much as the mother.

Another relevant circumstance in the interviews with parents and teachers is when the teachers find themselves involved in issues which are normally thought to be “family problems.” When they feel like this is happening, they think that they should not interfere, and they direct the contents of the interview toward the atmosphere in which the student studies at home: desk, adequate light, anatomical seats, etc. They abandon relational content and leave the parents in the comfortable situation of resolving the conflict by purchasing more suitable furniture. By doing so, the teacher only increases his degree of frustration and once again feels that he is facing the problem alone.

3.- In the interaction among teachers, between teachers and their students, and the families with both groups, dysfunction is produced concerning the content and the relation of the communication (message and behaviour do not correspond) and concerning the symmetry or complementariness of the relational positions (equal to equal or on top-on bottom). At the same time, the sense of identity and belonging to a group, whether it is a family or with reference to the educational centre, seems to dissolve in some cases, with the resulting consequence in the adolescent: because of his stage in the life-cycle, he finds himself at a juncture where he must decide and configure his own identity and sense of belonging.

4.- The group of teachers agreed that the educational centres fulfilled the characteristics of the Unlinked or Broken up systems, and they can be summed up in the following statements:

- a.- The elements of the group function with a great degree of independence, but

- b.- their organisation tends to be anarchic.
- c.- The activities which encourage union and a sense of belonging to the group are scarce.
- d.- The boundary which separates the group from the context is very permeable.
- e.- Dysfunctional elements are not usually detected until their effects are very alarming.