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CONCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS ON INDISCIPLINE

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this paper is to verify public school teachers' conceptions about indiscipline and to investigate behaviors and/or events that occur in the classroom and are considered indiscipline, their possible causes and ways of dealing with the problem. The literature points out that several factors help in the configuration of frame of indiscipline in schools, but it can't be ignored as a problem to be resolved fundamentally in the teacher-student relationship, and the educational-school psychologist is therefore an important mediator in this relationship. Forty-eight public school teachers participated in this study in Parnaíba, Brazil, applying semi-structured questionnaires and accomplishing content analysis using the program ATLAS.ti 7. In general, teachers understand indiscipline as aggressiveness, restlessness, inattentiveness, talking, disrespect to peers and teachers, lack of zeal with material, degradation of the heritage school, lateness, delays, emotional problems, etc. About the causes, the analysis shows the categories: "stand out familiar problems" and "personal problems", "social problems", "difficulties in the school-family partnership" and, in a smaller proportion, "didactic and pedagogical questions" and "absence of religiousness". The majority confront the problem by talking with the students and communicates to the family, trying to improve the methodology of the lessons, and just a few teachers share the situation with a director.

Key words: indiscipline, teacher and student relationship, public education.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to verify conceptions that public school teachers have on indiscipline and to investigate behaviours and/or events that occur in the classroom that are considered to be indiscipline, their possible causes and ways of dealing with the problem. This work integrates the larger actions that involve research and intervention activity development by researchers and undergraduates of the "Group of Studies and Research in Educational Psychology and School Grievance" (PSIQUED - "Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisa em Psicologia Educacional e Queixa Escolar"). The research and intervention actions are conducted in the public school of the Piauí, which is located in the Northeast Region of Brazil, known for social and economic problems that complicate the educational process of children and teens.

Indiscipline as a research subject has been understood from an interdisciplinary perspective, considering that several factors are involved, including sociological, historical, pedagogical and psychological aspects (Ronco, Paula, Silva & Gonçalves, 2011). Research on the educational process and school grievances in the above-mentioned region show that indiscipline stands out among the main problems faced by educators at the school (Ferreira et al., 2011; Negreiros & Bezerra, 2007; Negreiros, Oliveira & Silva, 2013; Negreiros, Santos, Costa & Santos, 2013; Negreiros & Silva, 2014; Silva, Oliveira & Fontenele 2012; Silva, Luz & Ferreira, 2012; Silva, Silva & Sousa, 2012).

Thus, we want to be clear that this specific research focuses on indiscipline from its psychological aspects, situated in the elements of the social and cultural context, considering that the way the students manage the rules

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is dependent on socialization processes in groups such as the family (Camino, Camino, & Moraes, 2003), the school community and the society in general (Godoy et al., 2010; Martins & Branco, 2001; Moraes et al., 2007).

Beyond this, we think that the actions of students with respect to obeying the rules are influenced by learning and developmental processes, among them construction of meanings on the issue, as well as feelings and emotional aspects related to their relationships with their teachers and peers.

So, we consider that knowing teachers' conceptions of indiscipline will help us to propose actions of intervention in the public schools in order to bring support to the educators, the families and the students. From the sociohistorical approach (Davydov & Zinchenko, 1994; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1991a; Vygotsky, 1991b), we consider that the school should be seen as a place to develop the superior mental process, as well as a place where ethical values are thought of, discussed and shared by educators and students.

The construction of a view able to understand indiscipline in schools from the psychological perspective should recapitulate the classic studies done on moral development by Piaget (1994) and Kohlberg (1971) that offer important contributions to the development of educational actions.

In addition to the stages proposed by the two authors (Blatt, Kohlberg, 1975; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg, 1982; Piaget, 1994), ideas referring to the importance of educative actions in promoting moral development and supporting the management of indiscipline by educators also seemed relevant to our work (Biaggio, 1994; Martins & Branco, 2001; Oliveira, 2008). In general, educative actions should be conducted considering aspects such as: promoting cognitive development to amplify the representation of the rules; helping children and teens to develop the progressive control of their own actions; supporting the management of emotions in relationships in and out of home.

From the social constructivist perspective (Coll, 1996; Coll, 2010; Coll, Colomina, Onrubia & Rochera, 1992; Colomina, Onrubia & Rochera, 2001), we consider that the educational-school psychologist is an important mediator in the relationships among the various actors that integrate the school community and can support the development of educational projects that aim to improve problems of indiscipline in schools (Mauri & Badia, 2004).

METHODS

Participants

Forty-eight public school teachers participated in this study in Parnaíba, Brazil. The participants work in various teaching levels, ranging from pre-school education up to the ninth year of basic education. All of the participants are women and, at the time of the collection of the data, were studying education degrees at a Brazilian public university.

Instrument

The instrument of data collection is a semi-structured questionnaire made up of 15 questions covering social demographic data and the three dimensions analysed: the description of the students' behaviours or daily situations in the classroom which they consider to be indiscipline; the motives attributed to them in the scholarly context; and the intervention strategies used by the educators in the school to manage the problems.

Data analysis

The analysis of the data was carried out with the qualitative analysis *software* ATLAS.ti (v. 7), that is a computer tool that manages data and improves the source to amplify the qualitative analysis process (Muñoz & Sahagún, 2010).

First, a thematic analysis was done to identify units of meaning from the data collected, and it then proceeded to elaboration and refinement. After that, the themes identified were divided into significative groups composing categories of analysis, considering each case separately and all of the data from all of the participants (Willig, 2013). Each category has been formulated from the narratives from the participants' responses to the questions.

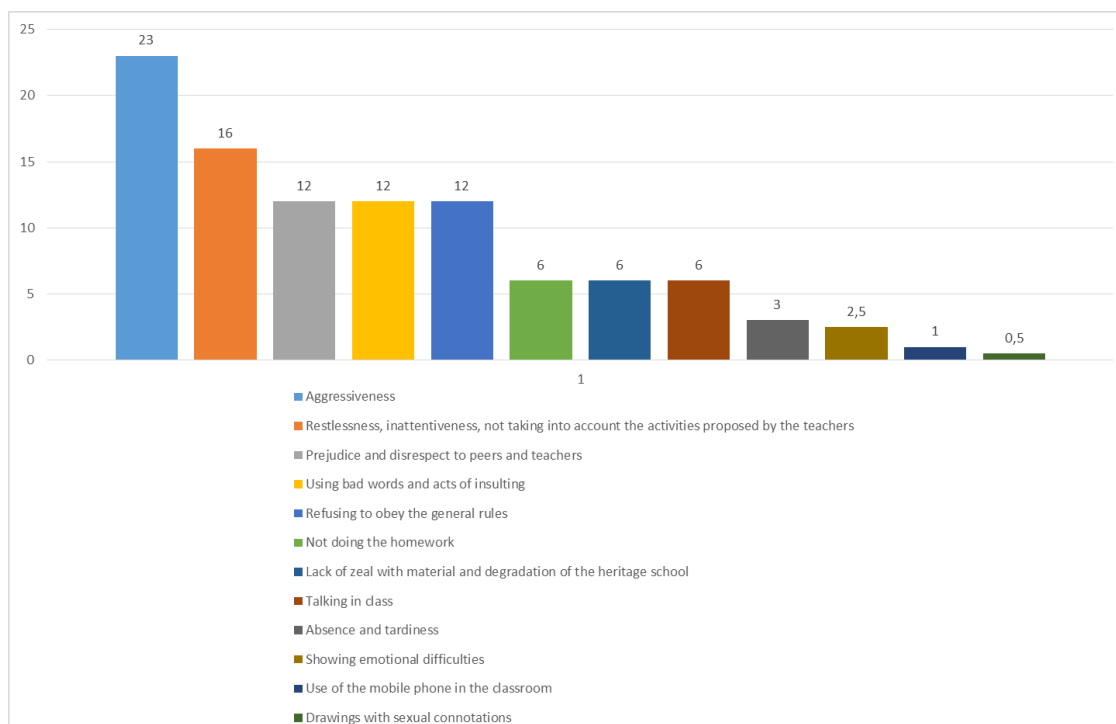
RESULTS and FINDINGS

In this work, we use categories of analysis that seem to be important in meeting our research goals, studying conceptions of teachers on indiscipline focusing on: behaviours and/or events that occurring in the classroom that are considered as indiscipline, the causes attributed to them and the ways of dealing with the problem.

With this in mind, we will present the categories studied and will discuss the data collected through the semi-structured questionnaire. The qualitative analysis has been made considering the relative frequency of the categories which followed the explanations of some elements mentioned by the teachers and that led us to identify them as important points with theoretical meanings (Rego, 1996).

Behaviours and/or events considered as indiscipline

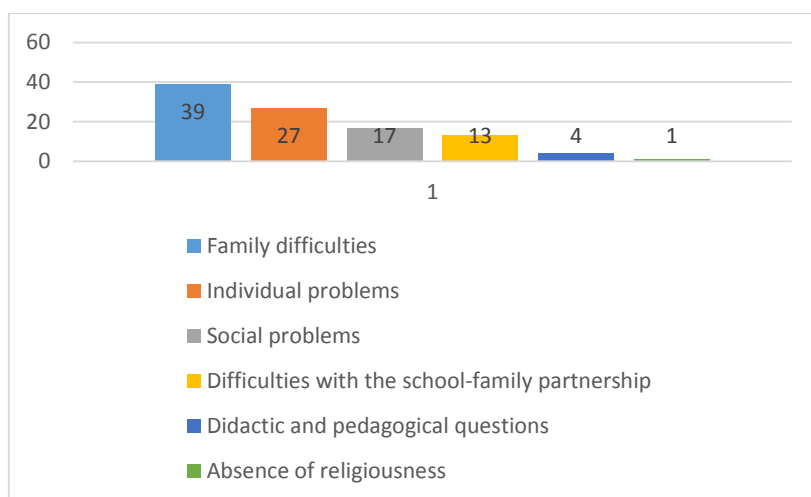
In general, the teachers understand indiscipline as: aggressiveness (23%); restlessness, inattentiveness, not taking into account the activities proposed by the teachers (16%); prejudice and disrespect to peers and teachers (12%); using bad words and acts of insulting (12%); refusing to obey the general rules (12%). In addition, from the data, we can verify other conceptions of the teachers on indiscipline which were identified through less frequent categories: not doing the homework (6%); lack of zeal with material and degradation of the heritage school (6%); talking in class (6%); absence and tardiness (3%); showing emotional difficulties (2,5%); use of the mobile phone in the classroom (1%); drawings with sexual connotations (0,5%). The graph below shows the frequency of the categories identified.



Graph 1 - Behaviour and/or Event Considered as Indiscipline

Causes attributed to indiscipline at school

About the causes attributed to indiscipline at school, in the teacher conceptions, issues that stand out are “family difficulties” (39%) and “individual problems” (27%). These were followed by “social problems” (17%), “difficulties with the school-family partnership” (13%) and, in smaller proportions, “didactic and pedagogical questions” (4%) and “absence of religiousness” (1%).



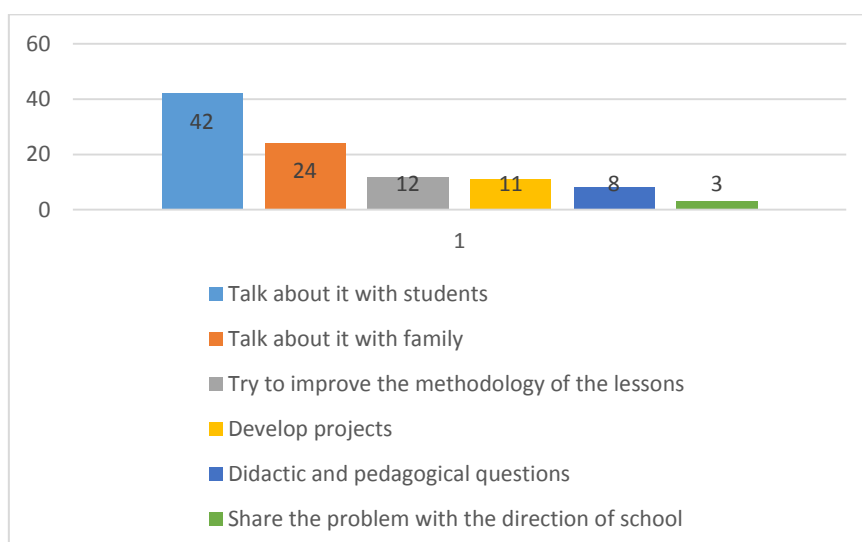
Graph 2 - Causes Attributed to Indiscipline at School

Among the “family problems” mentioned by teachers and attributed as causes of indiscipline at school, the following were mentioned: lack of guidance from the family; bad attitudes and behaviours learned at home; absence of clear and stable rules; conflict of roles; meddling of grandparents and domestic violence. With regard to the “individual problems” mentioned by the participants, the following were among those listed: emotional and affective difficulties presented by the students; lack of attention, concentration, disinterest, sloth, not understanding the curricular content, personality characteristics, development stage, innate impulse and necessity to defend herself. On the social factors attributed as causes of indiscipline, the teachers made few specific comments, they merely mentioned expressions such as “social economic problems”.

From the data analysis, we verified that the categories referred to as “family problems” and “individual problems” together correspond to 66% of the total of the categories computed. In addition, the data analysis showed that around 17% of the categories refer to social factors, making it clear that the participating teachers of the research believe the causes of indiscipline in the classroom to be largely situated outside the school. We think that this way of seeing the causes of indiscipline demonstrates the difficulties of teachers in seeing their responsibility and the other participants of the school community, which leads to the culpability of the student and his/her family with respect to indiscipline as a daily problem in the school (Rego, 1996). This can also point out the difficulties and tensions that characterize relationships between the schools and families (Nunes & Vilarinho, 2001).

Intervention in situations of indiscipline

The teachers described how they manage the situations of indiscipline daily in school. Among the categories mentioned, the following were identified: 42% “talk about it with students”; 24% “talk about it with family”; 12% “try to improve the methodology of the lessons”; 11% “develop projects”; 8% “try to improve the relationship with students”; 3% “share the problem with the direction of school”.



Graph 3 - Intervention in situations of indiscipline

The strategies employed by the teachers to manage situations of indiscipline, as well as the frequency of the categories, are compatible with the results previously presented on the causes attributed to indiscipline. Trying to improve the methodology of the classes and the relationships with the students are strategies recommended in the literature as ways of managing daily problems in the school with regards to learning (Aquino, 1996; Tulesk et al., 2005; Vasconcellos & Valsiner, 1995), and it highlights the educational psychologist as a professional that can offer support to educators in an educational context (Gomes & Meireles 2007). In this way, it is fundamental that the various participants see the school as a setting to construct scientific knowledge, as well as a place where beliefs, ethical and moral values can be discussed (Brasil, 1998; Brasil, 2001).

In general, we think that the way the participants manage the problem seems to be adjusted, but in order to know if the strategies are effective, we need more information regarding the meanings of all of the above-mentioned categories: what, how, where, in what conditions the teachers talk with the students and their parents; how the methodologic changes are characterized in the educational proposal, the aims, the theoretical and philosophical perspectives about learning and the social goals of education; what exactly is meant by "try to improve the relationship with students", what attitudes, actions, conceptions and specific people are involved; how the direction of school reacts to the problems shared by the teachers, how the kind of support given to them is characterized and what real alternatives can help educators at school. The data analysis isn't able to answer all of these questions or to deepen the discussion on what we recommend for further qualitative research, which the interviews use in depth as an instrument to approach the subject of study.

CONCLUSION

The difficulties in managing indiscipline are verified among parents, educators and people in general as problems that follow children and young people throughout the process of scholarization. Different social groups influence the way people view indiscipline inside and out of the school context, their motives and the best way to manage instances of indiscipline. In this research, we have only focused on the conceptions of educators of indiscipline, but we consider that it is also very important to research the beliefs of parents and students as well as to analyse factors of the educational context that can offer more information for interventive action and help to manage indiscipline. We mention again that this research has been done in the context of a project on the development of actions of intervention in public schools focused on the factors that make the teaching and learning process more difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with Brazil's educational context characteristics, we recommend that more research be done from qualitative and quantitative perspectives in order to identify several factors that influence the behavior of indiscipline presented by students and to describe how the situation of indiscipline can affect the various participants in the school community and produce experiences of academic failure. In this way, the ethnography can consist of a potential type of research that can offer relevant data on scholar community practices on the subject.

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