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Indiscipline at Public School: Teachers' Conceptions on Causes and Intervention

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| <p><i>Article History</i></p> <p>Received: 01 January 2016</p> <p>Accepted: 19 June 2016</p> <hr/> <p><i>Keywords</i></p> <p>Indiscipline Teacher and student relationship Public education</p> | <p>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 cannot 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, applying semi-structured questionnaires and accomplishing content analysis using the program ATLAS.ti 7. The teachers understand indiscipline as aggressiveness, restlessness, inattentiveness, talking, disrespect to peers and teachers, lack of zeal with material, degradation of the heritage school, 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.</p> |

Introduction

This paper aims to verify conceptions that public school teachers have on indiscipline and to investigate behaviour 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 developed by researchers and undergraduates of our research group on school grievance and psychologist actuation in schools.

These research and intervention actions are conducted in the public schools 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. First, research is done on school grievance in the region and, after this, we plan intervention activities in some schools from the outcomes obtained with the general research. The intervention process starts with research activities to deepen the data with regards the specific grievance of each school. In the case of this work, we focused on indiscipline because the outcomes of research previously done on the educational process and school grievances in the above-mentioned region show that it 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). This way, we are basically interested in knowing what the teachers think about the indiscipline at school and what they consider indiscipline, taking into account the necessity to obtain relevant information to plan the intervention activities to manage indiscipline and support the educative process.

Indiscipline at school, more specifically the indiscipline of students in the classroom during the lesson, 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). Although the theoretical perspectives differ, in general, a common point that is considered to be indiscipline at school is refusing to obey the rules, which makes the pedagogical practices and learning of students difficult (Boarini, 2013; Dominguez, Viviane, Gol & Cazetta, 2014; Silva & Matos, 2014).

From different perspectives, the literature points out the relationship between indiscipline in the school context and variables such as gender, age, schooling level, motivation, behaviour, personality and pedagogical practices (Bustillo, Pérez & Martí, 2006; Carvalho & Novo, 2014; Gutiérrez & López, 2012; Granero-Gallegos et al. 2015; Silva & Matos, 2014). Other research uses quantitative or qualitative procedures to approach indiscipline through the teachers' and students' perceptions, violence, bullying, and power relations, as well as the analysis of discourse and narratives from disciplinary events occurring at school (Aquino, 2011; Archakis, 2012; Asare & Adzrolo, 2013; Dominguez, Viviane, Gol & Cazetta, 2014; Moreira & Santos, 2004; Watson, 2005). Considering the relationship among these variables and indiscipline at school, both inside and outside the classroom, in this research, although we expect them to appear in the results in some way, they are not the direct focus of our study.

In this work, we approach indiscipline from a qualitative methodological perspective and a psychological view, more specifically a social historical approach (Davydov & Zinchenko, 1994; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1991a; Vygotsky, 1991b). However, we consider that to understand indiscipline at school from the psychological perspective, we 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 supporting educators.

In this aspect, beyond the moral development stages proposed by the two authors (Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg, 1982; Piaget, 1994), we think that the ideas on the importance of educative actions in promoting moral development and supporting the management of indiscipline by educators are relevant to our work (Biaggio, 1997; Martins & Branco, 2001; Oliveira, 2008). Thus, we understand indiscipline as something beyond the expression of individual developmental processes or behaviour without relation to the elements from the historical and cultural context. Based on this assumption, we think that the actions of students with respect to obeying the rules are influenced by learning and developmental processes, among them the construction of meanings on the issue, as well as feelings and emotional aspects related to their relationships with their teachers and peers. In addition, we consider that educators and students should see the school as a place to develop the superior mental process, as well as a place where ethical values are thought of, discussed and shared. Therefore, the educative practices are situated in the elements of the social and cultural context, and the intervention actions developed at school should consider aspects beyond promoting cognitive development to amplify the representation of the rules, but also in helping children and teens to develop the progressive control of their own actions, as well as supporting the management of emotions in relationships both inside and outside of school.

In accordance with the above-mentioned, 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 that complicate the learning of the students (Coll, 1996; Coll, 2010; Coll, Colomina, Onrubia & Rochera, 1992; Colomina, Onrubia & Rochera, 2001; Mauri & Badia, 2004).

Method

The method of this research is based on the qualitative perspective, taking into account the interest to study the conception of teachers on indiscipline from the content analysis of their responses to the semi-structured questionnaire (Creswell, 2013). In this work, we study the frequency of the categories from the content analysis, and, in addition, we are interested in understanding the theoretical meanings of them, considering the aspects of the educational context of the region.

From this interest, we thought that an intentional and non-probabilistic sampling integrated by public school teachers could offer relevant data to understand the problem of indiscipline at school or, more specifically, in the classroom. Thus, forty-eight public school teachers participated in this study in Parnaíba, Brazil. All of the participants are female, with an average age of approximately 34 years old at the time of the collection of the data and were studying college degrees in education at a Brazilian public university. The participants were contacted at the university where they are studying, invited to collaborate with research and accepted voluntarily.

The participants come from at least eight different public schools and they work in various teaching levels, ranging from pre-school education up to the ninth year of basic education. The schools are located in the northeast of the country, which is recognized as a region with many social and economic contrasts in terms of

the poor distribution of income, a high level of illiteracy among adults, child labor, etc. These social and economic problems of the region reinforce the characteristic difficulties of the Brazilian educational system that we can observe on a general level. In addition, the fact that the schools are located far from metropolitan zones and, therefore, with low urbanization, leads them to get few or no support services and, sometimes, the schools operate with only the basic conditions to accommodate the students, offer study material and develop teaching and learning activities.

Procedures and the Instrument

The instrument of data collection is a semi-structured questionnaire made up of 15 questions covering social demographic data (age, gender, workplace with regard to public or private school, the educational level they teach, college degree), 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. As an example of the first dimension, we mention Question 5: "Think about your daily experience with teaching at school. Describe one or more situations that have happened with the students in which you consider that indiscipline has occurred". This question is particularly relevant because many other questions of the questionnaire are based on it. In this way, we mention Question 10 and Question 15, that integrate the second and third dimensions of analysis, respectively: "Why do you think that these situations of indiscipline happen at school?"; "How do you manage these situations of indiscipline at school?". To reply to each question, the participant should think about the experiences with the situations of indiscipline previously given in Question 5.

First, a thematic analysis was done to identify units of meaning from the data collected, which then proceeded to elaboration and refinement. After that, the themes identified were divided into significant 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 responses of the participants to questions. Three researchers have participated as judges in the categorization process. The process consisted of each researcher carrying out the organization of data in themes, and they made the categorization individually, adopting as criteria the recurrent themes that appear in different moments of the data analysis. In this way, we can study themes that reunite the categories around similar aspects with regard to the subject research, and we study the frequency of categories of analysis, taking into account the three dimensions explained previously.

Thus, with regard to these themes and the categories of analysis, we calculated the agreement index throughout the research. We adopted the agreement index superior to 80% as data analysis criteria to consider the themes and the categories identified by the research. The disagreements were discussed and dissolved together. The equation used for this procedure proposes the division of the sum of the agreements throughout the research by the sum of the disagreements and then multiplying by 100. The analysis of the data was carried out with the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti (v. 7), which is a computer tool that manages data and improves the source to amplify the qualitative analysis process (Muñoz & Sahagún, 2010).

Results and Discussion

In this work, we use categories of analysis that seem to be important in meeting our research goals, studying the conceptions of teachers from the three themes mentioned above on indiscipline, focusing on the three dimensions of analysis: behaviours and/or events occur in the classroom that are considered 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, while taking into account the outcomes of other research on indiscipline in schools (Aquino, 2011; Archakis, 2012; Asare & Adzrolo, 2013; Dominguez, Viviane, Gol & Cazetta, 2014; Moreira & Santos, 2004; Watson, 2005; Rego, 1996).

Behaviours and/or Events Considered Indiscipline

With regard to behaviours and events that the teachers consider indiscipline, the categories were identified from the data collected and show that, in general, they 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 school heritage (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%). These outcomes show that, in general, according to the participants, the indiscipline is linked to difficulties of students in obeying school and basic social rules (Aquino, 2011). From Vygotsky (1991a; 1999), we consider these teachers' conceptions of indiscipline in the classroom to be particularly interesting taking into account that they are important artefacts for mediating relationships between teachers and students, influencing the manner in which they interpret the students' behaviour at school, the teachers' expectations of the students with regard to their family, their social context, economic conditions, etc.

Similar forms of indiscipline were also found in research done in Brazil and other countries (Aquino, 2011; Ametepée, Chitiyo & Abu, 2009; Bustillo, Pérez & Martí, 2006; Maphosa & Mammen, 2011; Dhlamini, 2014). However, there are differences with regard to intensity and the relation with variables such as the grade level, gender, age and socioeconomic level of the students. This shows that the indiscipline is not only a problem that disturbs the educational process in the Brazilian context, although it is important highlight that the forms of indiscipline mentioned by teachers and students in different studies show peculiarities according to the characteristics of the school community and the social and cultural environment. It is important to point out that, in this research, the analysis takes the data as a sample in general and it does not compare outcomes in function of variables such as educational level, gender, etc. The Figure 1 shows the frequency of the categories identified.

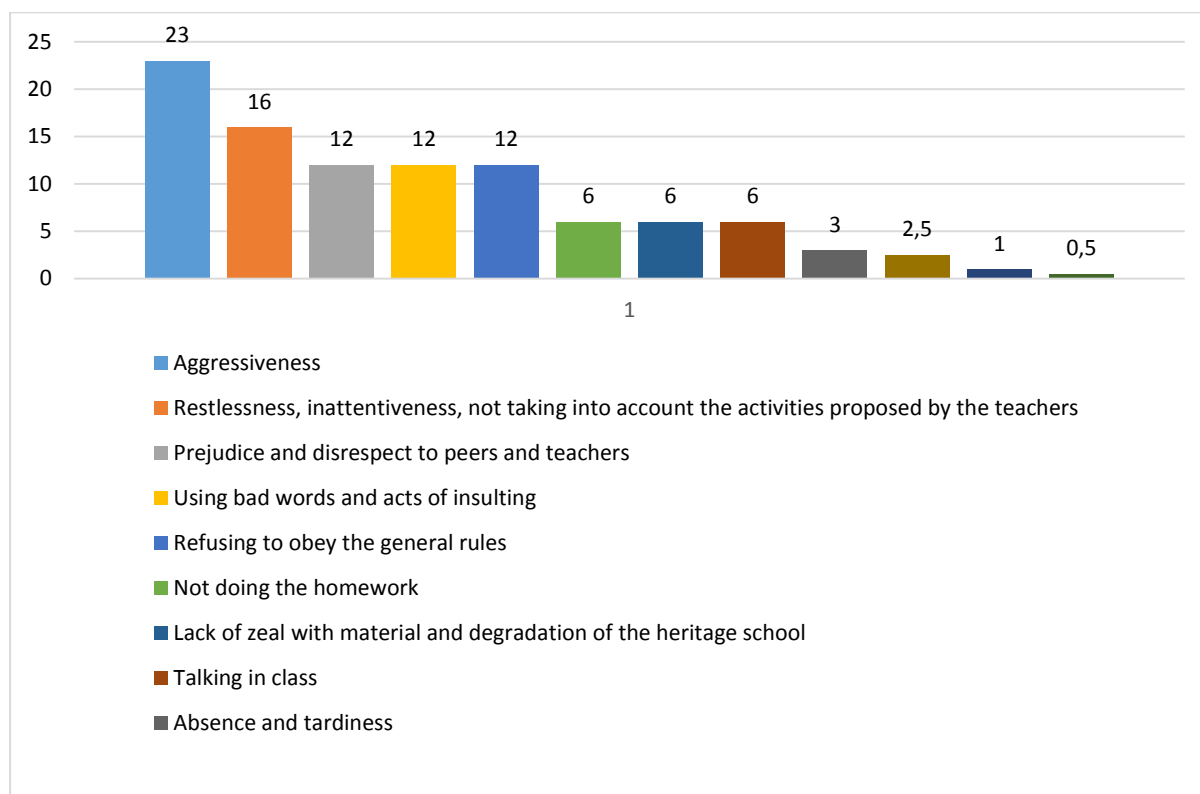


Figure 1. Behaviour and/or Event Considered Indiscipline

Causes Attributed to Indiscipline at School

On the causes that the teachers attribute to indiscipline at school, issues that stand out are “family difficulties” (39%), “individual problems” (27%) and “social problems” (17%). In the “family problems” category are included the teachers' conceptions of causes of indiscipline at school that correspond to: lack of guidance from the family; bad attitudes and behaviours learned at home; absence of clear and stable rules; conflict of roles between parents and children; 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, laziness, not understanding the curricular content, personality characteristics, developmental stage, innate impulse and necessity to defend himself/herself. The relationship between individual aspects such as personality and behaviour at school has been researched and correlates with the adaptation of adolescents in different contexts (Carvalho & Novo, 2014). We agree that the individual characteristics are important in understanding the students' behaviour at school and other contexts with regard to obeying the rules; however, we think that these idiosyncrasies should be seen from the social relationships and the meanings built around them. Thus, from the framework of this study (Vygotsky 1991a; 1999b), indiscipline should be understood as a construct influenced by different elements that integrate the historical and cultural context, beyond the expression of individual characteristics.

On the social factors attributed as causes of indiscipline, the teachers made few specific comments, they merely mentioned expressions such as "social economic problems". So, in this category, we also included conceptions that attributed causes of indiscipline to aspects such as media influence and laws that protect children, excepting punishments that cause psychological troubles or damage. This data is interesting because puts into evidence the difficulties of parents and schools in adopting educational practices that are more democratic and less coercive to discipline children and young people.

Familial and economic factors were also found in other studies on educators' conceptions on learner indiscipline (Ametepee, Chitiyo & Abu, 2009). In addition, these authors also show that teachers point to media as a cause of indiscipline at school, and they mention that, for teachers, participation in access to TV, magazines and other resources influences student behavior and, therefore, the occurrence of indiscipline at school. In the last few decades, there has been an important discussion on the difficulties of parents and educators with regard to the controversial use of corporal punishment in educational practices and their implication on interpersonal relationships and child development.

The categories mentioned above were followed by "difficulties with the school-family partnership" (13%) and, in smaller proportions, "didactic and pedagogical questions" (4%) and "absence of religiousness" (1%), as shown in Figure 2.

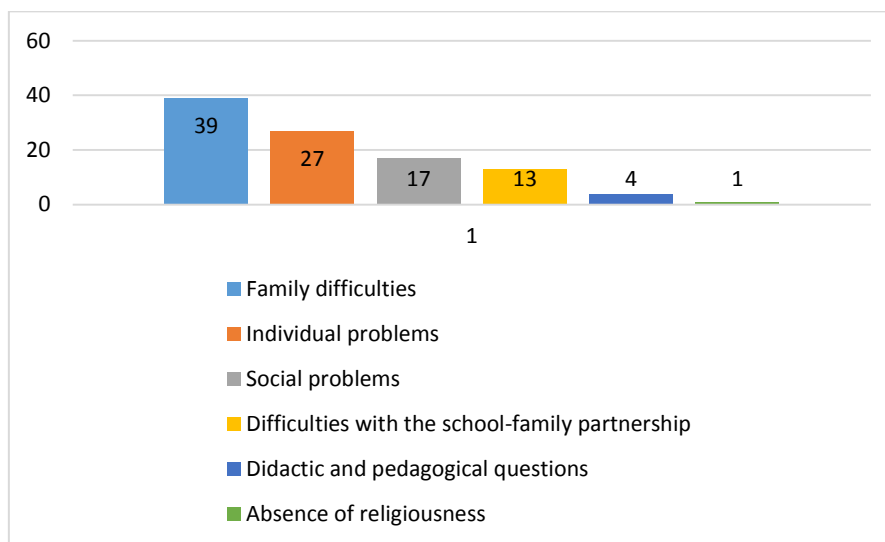


Figure 2. Causes Attributed to Indiscipline at School

The "difficulties with the school-family partnership" include the mention of the teachers of the difficulties in working together and sharing similar values, as well as little family participation and support as to the activities developed by the school. As "didactic and pedagogical questions", we consider the loss of control of the teacher with the students, not having a structured routine in the classroom, students that finish their tasks before the time allotted is up and the distance between the curricular content and the students' reality. Although this category is not very expressive, we consider it of interest that the teachers mention in some way the characteristic aspects of the school context and the pedagogical methods that may generate situations of indiscipline.

In the category corresponding to "absence of religiousness", we included all teachers' conceptions that refer to mystic causes of learner indiscipline such as lack of a god, little spirituality, etc. In this aspect, we remember that the mystic explications of the behaviour of people who deviate from social rules and cultural patterns have

always followed the history of humanity, mainly before the development of psychology as a science and profession.

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 teachers participating in the research believe the causes of indiscipline in the classroom to be largely situated outside of the school. We think that this way of seeing the causes of indiscipline demonstrates the difficulties of teachers in recognizing their own responsibility and that of 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 schools (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 situations of indiscipline daily in school and, from this, we identified the following categories with their respective frequencies: 42% “talk about it with the students”; 24% “talk about it with the family”; 12% “try to improve the methodology of the lessons”; 11% “develop projects”; 8% “try to improve the relationship with the students”; 3% “share the problem with the administration of the school”, as shown in Figure 3. With regard to these strategies of managing situations of learner indiscipline, the teachers mentioned that the conversations with students aim to know the motives in behaving in that manner and to offer support in reconciling with their peers, in addition encouraging reflection on the consequences of indiscipline. The conversations with the families aim to be sensitive to the necessity of a school-family partnership, taking into account not only the management of situations of indiscipline, but making it clear that it is fundamental for educational achievement. The partnership is also established with the directive team of the school with the objective of obtaining support in the management of indiscipline and making decisions on specific cases.

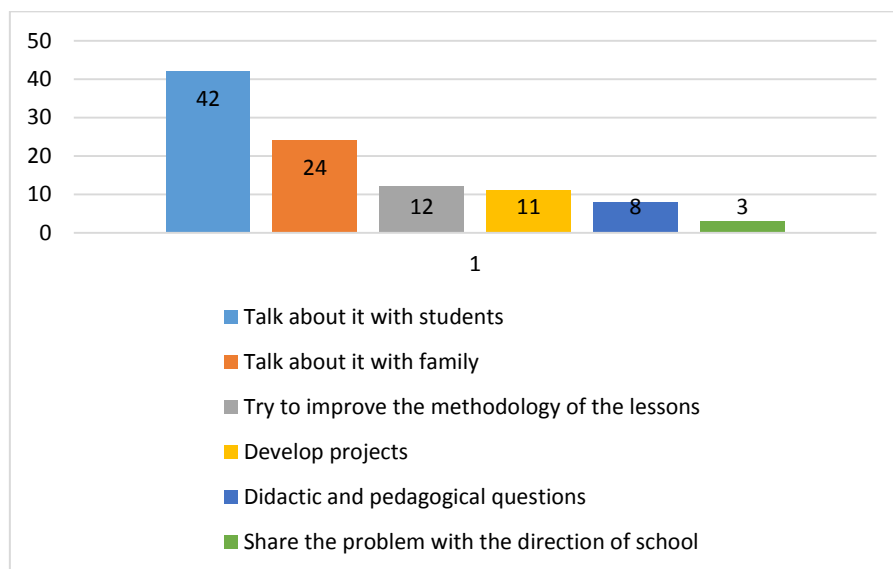


Figure 3. Intervention in situations of indiscipline

The teachers also mentioned seeking to improve the teaching method in the classes, making them more dynamic, proposing tasks in groups and trying to bring the curriculum to meet the reality of the students. In this aspect, they develop projects for teaching human values, rights and obligations in the school and social context, through leisure activities and educational games. In other ways, they mention trying to change the relationship with the students and to become more affectionate, caring and give praise more often.

The strategies employed by the teachers in managing 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). In addition, some authors propose the use of collaborative learning

techniques to manage interpersonal conflicts at school (Pérez-Sánchez, Poveda-Serra & Gilar-Corbí, 2010) and highlight 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).

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, and in what conditions the teachers talk with the students and their parents; how the methodological changes are characterized in the educational proposal, the aims, theoretical and philosophical perspectives on learning and the social goals of education; what exactly is meant by “trying to improve the relationship with the students”, what attitudes, actions, conceptions and specific people are involved; how the administration of the 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 is not 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 education process. Different social groups influence the way people view indiscipline inside and outside 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 on interventive action and help to manage indiscipline.

In observation of the results discussed in this paper, it is possible to identify a coherence with relation to the teachers' conceptions showed in the analysis of the categories. The manner in which the teachers define indiscipline in the classroom shows that, in general, the same is characterized by students' behaviors, like disobeying school rules and norms of living standards with their teachers and peers. We particularly pay attention to the category used with the highest frequency by participants to characterize indiscipline in the classroom, which is aggressiveness (23%). We think that aggressiveness has been mentioned in an isolated way, without mention of the contextual aspects that situate the student's behavior considered to be aggressive.

On the other hand, we think that this result has enough coherence with the teachers' conceptions with regards to the causes attributed to indiscipline in the classroom, taking into account that, for the most part, they are mentioned as “family difficulties” (39%), “individual problems” (27%) and “social problems” (17%). Following this line of thought, we assume that the teachers' conceptions tend to blame the student, the family and their social environment for the manifestation of inappropriate classroom behaviors and, because of this, are considered indiscipline. In this aspect, we emphasize that causes such as “difficulties with the school-family partnership” (13%) and “didactic and pedagogical questions” (4%) appear in smaller proportions. This means that if the teacher thinks that the causes are essentially situated outside of the school, rooted in the environment and institutions over which the teacher has no control, we think it reasonable to understand that, in general terms, the teachers consider indiscipline in the classroom to depend very little on their intervention. This assumption is corroborated by the analysis of the categories in which the teachers describe their actions in dealing with indiscipline in the classroom, pointing out “talk about it with the students” (42%) and “talk about it with the family” (24%) as the main strategies they use. Thus, as we might expect, the interventions in which the teachers need a change of attitude with the students and the teaching and learning process are less expressive, as in the case of the categories “try to improve the methodology of the lessons” (12%), “develop projects” (11%) and “try to improve the relationship with the students” (8%).

In general, the results show the relationship among teachers' conceptions on the different aspects of indiscipline at school, both inside and outside the classroom, taking into account that they consider indiscipline mainly as an expression of individual characteristics and family factors, as well as attributing individual and family causes to indiscipline and, effectively, they manage the situations of indiscipline principally with actions involving the students and their families. In this way, we think that it is very important to develop actions of intervention addressed to teachers with goals to expand their vision on the situations that can generate indiscipline at school,

especially those that refer to school rules construction, as these are required in relationships between students and teachers.

This study did not intend to compare categories in function of variables, rather it was carried out with the goal of offering data to development projects to offer support for educational practices from educational psychology, and, more specifically, from social and constructivist perspectives. So, in that moment, the research did not focus on the influence of variables on possible differences among teachers' conceptions; in contrast, we were interested in the similar aspects that could work together through a larger project. In this point, we emphasize that the project demands other in-depth studies that can be carried out with a larger sample, making it possible to conduct comparative analysis according to the social demographic characteristics of the participants.

Recommendations

In accordance with Brazil's educational context characteristics, we recommend that more research be done from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives in order to identify several factors that influence the behavior of indiscipline presented by students and to describe how situations 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 scholastic community practices on the subject.

In addition to researcher recommendations, we think that some reflections are possible from this study for educational practices developed by teachers as well as students' families. In one way, we consider it fundamental that the teachers and directive staff see the school as a site where rules and values should be understood and discussed by all, in contrast with the practice of only imposing and requiring obedience. With regard to indiscipline in the classroom specifically, the construction of rules jointly with students to define the task participation structures, such as pedagogical aspects, social organization (individual or group work), the use of educational sources and other kinds of materials for developing tasks, etc., can be of great help to the teachers. In addition, we point out that the family is involved in the rules construction process with the students for various reasons and, among them, we would like to highlight the following two: the family is an essential partner in supporting the schooling of children and youth; and the family should not get an exemption of its role and commitment to educate in values and basic rules to prepare the students for social life.

From these recommendations, we ponder that the educational-school psychologist is an important mediator in the relationship among the teachers and students, as well as school and family. However, about this, it is very important make clear that the teachers who participated in the research do not count with this professional in the schools and, in general, they are situated how long distance of the institutions where psychologic services can be offer, as example the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS) and the Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS).

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