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Developing Emotional Intelligence at School: Experience Report

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Abstract

The emotional intelligence term refers to the ability to recognize one's own emotions, as well as other people's, and to successfully deal with these emotions. In this regard, interventions by means of game-like activities in order to promote reflection and awareness might provide a helping hand in the development of skills related to emotional intelligence at school. This report aims at presenting a set of actions developed during a period of mandatory in-class training for psychology undergraduates, realized at a public school and entitled Learning How to Deal with Emotions, or "Aprendendo a lidar com as emoções". The main objective of the course was to develop and enhance emotional intelligence skills by means of the realization of operative groups. The development of the project has proved the importance of including psychology into the school environment with the possibility of realizing interventions, especially prevention activities in order to contribute to students' emotional development.

Keywords: school psychology; emotions; public schools.

Desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional en la escuela: relato de experiencia

Resumen

El término inteligencia emocional se refiere a la competencia de reconocer las propias emociones y las de otros, además de la habilidad de lidiar con sentimientos. En ese sentido, intervenciones por intermedio de actividades lúdicas, reflexivas y vivenciales pueden ayudar en el desarrollo de las habilidades referentes a la inteligencia emocional en la escuela. En este relato se tiene como objetivo presentar un conjunto de acciones desarrolladas durante el período de pasantía curricular de la graduación en Psicología, realizado en una escuela pública, denominado "Aprendiendo a lidiar con las emociones", el objetivo principal del proyecto fue desarrollar y potencializar habilidades de inteligencia emocional por intermedio de la realización de grupos operativos. El desarrollo del proyecto demostró la importancia de la inclusión de la Psicología en el ambiente escolar con la posibilidad de realizar intervenciones, especialmente de actividades de prevención que ayuden en el desarrollo emocional de los alumnos.

Palabras clave: Psicología escolar; emociones; escuelas públicas.

Desenvolvimento da inteligência emocional na escola: relato de experiência

Resumo

O termo inteligência emocional refere-se à competência de reconhecer as próprias emoções e as dos outros, além da habilidade de lidar com sentimentos. Nesse sentido, intervenções através de atividades lúdicas, reflexivas e vivenciais podem auxiliar no desenvolvimento das habilidades referentes à inteligência emocional na escola. Este relato tem como objetivo apresentar um conjunto de ações desenvolvidas durante o período de estágio curricular da graduação em Psicologia, realizado numa escola pública, denominado "Aprendendo a lidar com as emoções", o objetivo principal do projeto foi desenvolver e potencializar habilidades de inteligência emocional por meio da realização de grupos operativos. O desenvolvimento do projeto demonstrou a importância da inclusão da Psicologia no ambiente escolar com a possibilidade de realizar intervenções, especialmente de atividades de prevenção que auxiliem no desenvolvimento emocional dos alunos.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia escolar; emoções; escolas públicas.

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Introduction

The emotional intelligence term refers to the competence to recognize one's own emotions, as well as other people's, and the ability to successfully handle these emotions. This term has been coined in order to expand the traditional concept of intelligence while amplifying the study of emotions regarding individual and social aspects (Woyciekoski & Hutz, 2009). Alzina et al. (2009) highlight the fact that a considerable improvement in the quality of personal relationships is one of the benefits of emotional intelligence. There are also improvements in learning skills, problem solution and quality of life in general. Thus, interventions by means of game-like activities conducive to reflection and awareness might be very helpful in the development of emotional intelligence skills at school. To that end, the fundamental element for the success of a group must be the strengthening of personal connections. According to Lech (2014), the constitution of positive interpersonal relationships, based on frank dialogue, is of vital importance for the process of recognition and command of one's own emotions.

The work with emotions in the school environment aims at helping children obtain competences and develop behavior patterns that will allow them to become aware of and, as a result, successfully handle their own emotions as well as cultivate empathy. It also can be a preventive action (Rodrigues, 2015; Santos, 2000). In this regard, the inclusion of psychology in the school environment leads to the realization of interventions, especially prevention activities that will contribute to the students' emotional development. This report presents a set of actions developed during a period of mandatory in-class training for psychology graduates, realized at a public school and entitled Learning How to Deal with Emotions, or "Aprendendo a lidar com as emoções".

Experience Report

By means of observing the school environment it was possible to gauge the school's demand and better plan activities. Thus, the main objective of the project was to develop and enhance emotional intelligence skills. In order to do that, activities were developed in operative group format, with weekly meetings for a duration of seven months. Fourteen kids, aged between nine and ten, took part. The developed activities were organized into the following modules: 1) Integration; 2) Emotional awareness; 3) Adequacy and emotional autonomy; 4) Social-emotional skills; 5) Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for emotional well-being.

In the first module, there were presentations and activities for breaking the ice. In an activity named "Presentation Card", in which children filled up a form with information concerning their ages, personal characteristics, preferences, dreams, and leisure time activities. They were also asked to draw their own self-portraits. In module 2, the activities focused on the development of emotional awareness. One of the activities was the making of an "emotional thermome-

ter", in which each facial expression depicted represented an emotion (fear, joy, sadness). This was a tool by means of which the kids had a chance to express how they felt and the reason why they felt that way. Some of the children had difficulty in the recognition of emotions and, sometimes, classmates stepped in and helped them out, which demonstrated the group's commitment to the task.

In module three, one of the activities was the reading and discussion of a short story entitled "The Great Conquering King: Gengis Khan". The activity promoted a reflection on hasty judgments, feelings of anger and their consequences to relationships. This discussion was an opportunity for some children to share their experiences in situations in which they lost control because of anger, acted on it and regretted later. Later on in the module for social-emotional skills, there was an activity entitled "Labels". In the labels there were statements such as: "I am shy. Say hi to me", "I am cranky. Keep off", "I am a very wise person. Look up to me", "I am a liar, don't trust me", and so on. The activity brought out questions concerning the feelings aroused by lack of empathy, and was conducive to plenty of learning as well as a rich exchange of experiences regarding everyday life situations.

In order to help children develop strategies for the overcoming of challenges and generate well-being, the last module presented strategies for self-control. The strategies included relaxation and breathing techniques, soothing scenes, physical exercise, relaxing activities and the self-control traffic light. The traffic light was used as a metaphor and represents three phases: Red Light: stop, no screaming, no insulting, and definitely no fighting. Reflecting for a few seconds; b) Yellow light: breathe deeply until it is possible to think clearly; c) Green light: verbalize the problem and the way you feel so that you will find a proper solution. In addition, students thought out situations in which the self-control traffic light might be employed.

Final Considerations

Emotions and feelings are directly connected to the motivation for learning (Amaral, 2007). According to Pena and Repetto (2008) emotional intelligence is related to a successful performance at school as well as to the presence or absence of disruptive behavior. Therefore, it is known that the development of emotional intelligence, besides influencing psychological and emotional scenarios, also plays a pivotal role in the pedagogical performance of children. The developed project has demonstrated the importance of interventions of preventive nature at school. Dynamic, game-like activities might provide a valuable helping hand in the development of skills referring to emotional intelligence, of ways to approach awareness and strategies for emotional balance. The positive side-effects include considerable improvement in self-esteem and the development of skills for the management of emotions (Cruvinel & Boruchovitch, 2010).

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