Abstract

Parents and educators alike are concerned as a result of a significant increase in aggressive behaviors in school. Disruptive behaviors in children, which can go from making fun and bullying a classmate to real criminal behavior, make academic learning processes more difficult (Marín Sanchez, 2002). Apparently, it seems more difficult for children to control their impulses and regain calmness after an event of frustration or offense. This paper suggests an intervention model that includes both cognitive and behavioral procedures, so as to prevent aggressive behavior and foster calmness in a group of 6 to 7-year old school children. In order to assess the effectiveness of the model proposed, a pilot study was applied to the totality (N = 40) of children attending grades first and second of a elementary school included in the Federal Plan for 1,000 Schools in poverty level, in the Province of Entre Ríos (República Argentina). Personal interviews were carried out before and after the intervention so as to assess whether before a stressful event children had developed the ability of relaxing through their use of an adaptive strategy or, on the contrary, showed hasty reactions, as evidence of lack of control in their impulses and emotions. The intervention strategies were implemented within the classroom. Their teachers acted as overseers and qualified professionals acted as observers, writing down the students difficulties and achievements, so as to make adjustments in the program according to the needs of every group. Both professionals had been previously trained in both the theoretical and practical aspects of intervention. The program included six 45-minute sessions. Both cognitive and behavioral procedures were used. Strategies of intervention included, among others, modelling, positive reinforcing, mental and physical relaxation techniques, breathing training, behavioral practice, cost-benefits analysis, search for alternatives, self-referential techniques, narrations, and planned games. Every session was closed with a generalization assignment, in order to transfer what had been learnt to other significant contexts (home, neighborhood, etc.). A content analysis was made to analyze the discourse findings collected at the time of the interviews and quantitative tests were applied in order to find out whether changes in behavior had been produced after the intervention. Results show a significant reduction in disruptive behaviors after applying the relaxation model and a progressive acquisition of more adapted answers in interpersonal stress events (V = .37; p = .002). The first assessment showed near 20 percent of clearly violent reactions as a means of solving problems or relieving tensions (I punch him, I hit the wall, I kick him back, etc.); in the second assessment, however, it went down to 11 percent. On the other hand, in the first assessment not a single child mentioned specific attempts of relaxing or calming down before answering to an insult or an aggression episode, but in the second one, 43 percent of answers
included this category (I breathe deeply, I count up to three first, etc.). Moreover, it was encouraging to find that some children not only made good use of the techniques suggested by the team, but also developed the ability of thinking in new ways of relaxing, which were applied according to their own needs and preferences.

**Keywords**

Aggression - Children - Poverty - Relaxation - Intervention.