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YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES (NI-NI'S): SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

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Abstract

This investigation revises the impact of the EFIS Program of socio-educational intervention during the transit of young people with social difficulties to the adult life. Using a causal-correlational *ex post facto* methodology, a test battery has been applied to a sample of 36 educators and 87 young people, now adults, who took part on the Program. The outcomes show a good result of the Program on the social and labor insertion of young people, on an improvement of the degree of existential satisfaction reached and on different basic competences to enjoy a responsible and independent adult life.

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1. Introduction

Different researches in the European Union have recently treated about social politics and the characteristics of socio-educational intervention with young people with social difficulties (Walther y Pohl, 2007; Inglés et al. 2005; Du Bois-Reymond y López Blasco, 2004; Rahona y Vaquero 2003; Bendit y Stokes, 2004), also called “status zero youths” or, here in Spain “Ni-Nis”.¹ The last OECD’s report (2012) points that status zero youths are a 25% of young Spanish population, over an average of the 15% in the European Union. Spain is among the countries of the UE with more young people in this situation, with Bulgaria, Ireland and Italy. Many of them have problems to find a job because they lack an adequate formation, what jeopardizes their working life and turn them inevitably into the already called by the media “lost generation”: a generation which suffers a worrying lack of vital projects.

There is also a good number of researches making reference to the good practice on socio-educational intervention with this young collective, so much internationally (Yergeau, Puzé y Toupin, 2007; Goyette, 2007; Lenz-Rashid 2006; Stein 2006; Reilly 2003; Rees et al. 2010) as in Spain (Inglés, 2005; Fernández del Valle, 1998;

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García Barriocanal, Imaña y De la Herrán, 2007; Casas y Monserrat, 2009; Melendro, 2007). Because of their contribution to this research have been particularly significant the works of the Canadians Martin Goyette (Projet Qualifications des Jeunes; Projet EVA d'évaluation du niveau de l'autonomie), Michel Parazelli (2000) and Jacinthe Rivard (2004), and the North Americans Catalano, Haggerty, Harachi y Abbott (1998,2005, 2009, 2010), all of them about socio-educational intervention with excluded youth, as well as socio-educational approaches of two theorists of complex thought as Edgar Morin (2001) y Abraham Moles (1977).

Our research, directly related to the ones mentioned before, provides information about the results obtained with a methodology which has been experimented for fourteen years with more than four thousand adolescents and youths with social difficulties, and which is based on the development of “flexible strategies” of socio-educational intervention. This methodology focuses on the elaboration of eco-social action plans, which require a precise knowledge of the youth's relational scenario, and which consider the real possibilities of intervention and the uncertainty which comes with the situations dealt with. The research was developed between the years 2008 and 2011, through a battery of instruments applied to different population groups -youths, businessmen and educators-, with the goal of delving into the knowledge of the situation of the youth with social difficulties once they have passed to the adult life and have got further from the social protection systems which looked after them during their childhood and adolescence.

Here are included the results of the application of two instruments of research: a semi-structured interview with youths and a test with professionals. Both offer an elevated rank of internal consistence (Cronbach's Alpha of 0,859 in the test; sincerity level of 98,7% in the interview)

2. Findings

The information gathered with the two instruments was analyzed through SPSS, by statistical and inferential descriptions. The most relevant results are described below.

2.1. . Semi-structured interview

Nearly all the youths interviewed (96,5%) consider the existence of resources like the EFIS Program. As for the aspects the most positively valued by the youths, we must emphasize those which become the three Program's “topics”: the excellent valuation of the socio-educational teams working on it (55,6%), the support and formation received for the research of employment (44,4%) and the environment of comradeship and respect existent (44,4%). The value of the socio-educational teams (75%) is also remarkable, as they are well valued even by those youths who do not have a good opinion about the Program. The youths felt, indeed, specially cared and supported from the Program (punctuations of 9 and 8,6 out of 10, with a low standard deviation), and value the educators with high and homogeneous qualifications (8,97, sd 1,37), relating directly and intensively their memory of the educators with the learnings related to autonomy, independence and personal maturing.

As aspects to improve are mentioned the situations of tension attributed essentially to the relations between equals, and specifically to the presence of certain persons or groups which interfered with the relationship making it unattractive or unpleasant (21%) and the difficulty of finding a job and the impatience during the wait to find an adequate job (between 9% and 4%).

Finally, making reference to the contributions from the institutional context, we have contrasted the youth's perception of their current situation (now enjoying an adult independent life) and during their stay at the Program. As conclusion, we found that the youths feel that not only their current life is good, but they also consider in a generalized way that it is better than it was before, when they were users of the Program and the Social Services: that is how it is shown by the important relation between two of the variables of the interview, J35 (how is my life now) and J34 (I am better now), for the coefficient beta=,315 (absolute) and $F(1)= 7,730$ $p \leq 0,007$.

2.2. Test to professionals

The perception of reality by the Program's socio-educational teams helps us to know their expectations and motivations related to the work they do, about what feeds their intervention and provides certain scenarios of transit to the adult life to the population they work with.

Among the personal characteristics that make working with youths with social difficulties easier, the professionals mention, in this order: empathy, sensibility, proximity and closeness with the youth; social and communicative abilities; flexible, tolerant and respectful attitudes towards the youths. The most restrictive approaches such as the ones referred to control and discipline remain clearly out of their answers.

Promoting independence abilities (22,2%) and the relationship between educator and pupil (16,7%) are the aspects the most valued by the professionals as indicators of an effective intervention. The contrast between the effectiveness of the intervention (E14) and the results of the intervention (E15), through statistics of variable correlation, show us that professionals clearly relate both when we talk about the youth's capacity of initiative for an active research of employment and the acquisition of the knowledge necessary for it. That is not the case of the relation between the youth's capacity to keep their job and their capacity to adapt to its requirements, aspect that the professionals do not consider achieved by the socio-educational intervention. Actually, for $r = ,458$ $p \leq 0,005$ between E14 y E15a, for $r = ,422$ $p \leq 0,010$ between E14 y E15b, what shows a relation with a high significance level and an average high relation between the variables.

With the importance of having previous experience in socio-educational intervention with adolescents and/or youths with social difficulties and professional/labor orientation, the educators consider their own formation a basic aspect for a good socio-educational intervention. In this sense, they agree that the election of one or another theoretical framework has a direct and significant impact on the effectiveness of the socio-educational developed intervention (80%). The complex-systemic-ecological and the cognitive-behavioral models are the ones holding more support. They also consider how they have very limited resources, strategies and enough flexibility to deal with unexpected or uncertain situations, an important amount of the situations found daily. The flexibility on the design of itineraries is, besides, related to the interest of the youths on taking part on the decision-making about their personal, social and labor future, with the educators and other professionals who work with them ($R^2 = ,456$ $p \leq 0,000$; R Pearson $\geq ,500$).

As for the socio-educational intervention, the professionals mainly consider that it is effective and favors the transit of the youths with social difficulties to a responsible and independent adult life (punctuations of 8,5 out of 10, sd 1,699). They agree that, when a socio-educational intervention finishes with them, the youths with social difficulties have the knowledge necessary for an active research of employment, although, generally they have not acquired an adequate training level to keep the job and adapt to its requirements. They also mainly agree on appreciating that the socio-educational intervention produces significant changes on the youth's social responsible behavior and their acquisition and consolidation of stronger ethic values. However, around one third of them believe that the youths with social difficulties will not finally have an adequate transit to the adult life, or else will succumb to the social exclusion risks a few years after leaving de programs caring them.

A relevant and original work line about socio-educational intervention treated on the EFIS Program has to do with *the flexibility and dealing with the uncertainty*. On the test to professionals a series of variables related to this work were included; the study of relations between a series of variables (E25: the professionals design flexible itineraries; E24a-e: the professionals know the youth's social and family environment, their institutional situation, and their educational and labor itinerary; E35: the educators have resources and strategies to deal with the uncertain) will offer some clues about it.

Table 1. Correlations between flexible strategies

		E25. Educators design flexible itineraries	E35. Educators with resources and strategies facing the uncertain	E24a. Educators know their social environment	E24b. Educators know their family environment	E24c. Educators know their institutional situation	E24d. Educators know their labour itinerary	E24e. Educators know their labour itinerary
Correlation of Pearson	E25. Educators design flexible itineraries	1,000	,680	,449	,232	,355	,401	,752
	E35. Educators with resources and strategies facing the	,680	1,000	,318	,295	,365	,239	,531

	uncertain							
	E24a. Educators know their social environment	,449	,318	1,000	,583	,357	,318	,449
	E24b. Educators know their family environment	,232	,295	,583	1,000	,622	,640	,520
	E24c. Educators know their institutional situation	,355	,365	,357	,622	1,000	,808	,674
	E24d. Educators know their educational itinerary	,401	,239	,318	,640	,808	1,000	,693
	E24e. Educators know their labour itinerary	,752	,531	,449	,520	,674	,693	1,000
Sig. (unilateral)	E25. Educators design flexible itineraries	.	,000	,003	,087	,017	,008	,000
	E35. Educators with resources and strategies facing the uncertain	,000	.	,029	,041	,014	,080	,000
	E24a. Educators know their social environment	,003	,029	.	,000	,016	,030	,003
	E24b. Educators know their family environment	,087	,041	,000	.	,000	,000	,001
	E24c. Educators know their institutional situation	,017	,014	,016	,000	.	,000	,000
	E24d. Educators know their educational itinerary	,008	,080	,030	,000	,000	.	,000
	E24e. Educators know their labour itinerary	,000	,000	,003	,001	,000	,000	.

That is how we find a strong association between the professional's knowledge of the environment –in its different aspects-, their capacity to have resources and strategies facing the unexpected and the uncertain, and their disposition to *design flexible strategies and itineraries*, adapted to de needs and possibilities of each youth. The relation between the group of explanatory variables and the main variable direct and statistically significant, for $F(6)=17,295$, $R^2=.782$ $p\leq 0,000$. So much the significance level as the value of R^2 is really high.

The design of flexible strategies and itineraries seems to perfectly fit in the socio-educational intervention of the professionals who work with youths with social difficulties, considering that we can appreciate on the results of the research how, between practically all the variables there is high correlation (Bilateral significance of the Pearson's R inferior to 0,005 and 0,01, with enough high values of this statistic). Two variables are the only ones which are not directly related with the criterion variable E25 (Professionals design flexible itineraries). Those are the ones making reference to the professional's knowledge of the youth's family and educational environment, two fields which seem to escape from the possibility of handling flexible strategies and reacting face to uncertain situations, in great measure because of the low knowledge the professionals have about them.

3. Discussion and conclusion

The results obtained on the research reinforce some of the conclusions of similar studies Yergeau, Puzé, Toupin, 2007; Goyette et al. 2007, 2011; García Barriocanal, Imaña, De la Herrán, 2007), which propose as central elements of the socio-educational intervention Programs for the transit to an adult life the need to go further than the improvement of the youth's employability and the incorporation of emotional support before and during the transition, the support for the establishment of affective and social relationships beyond the family ones, along with complementary interventions focused on the reduction of the stress linked to the early independence in which some of them are forced.

Some conclusions of our study, agreeing with the ones from the researches mentioned before, point how the intervention must be based on the construction of a strong relationship between the socio-educational teams and the youths, in a way that the educator becomes a significant person for them (Melendro, 2007; Goyette et al., 2011) The importance of knowing how to construct from the cohabitation of the intervention paradigms through

networking and interdisciplinary working is also remarkable. It is defended, at the same time, the need of sustaining processes of competence and essential social experiences acquisition for the transition to the adult life (Rees et al., 2010; Reilly, 2003), along with interceding in a “sustainable”–lasting on time and with certain intensity- and flexible way. All this with two essential prerequisites: the availability of jobs of the best possible quality and adequate accommodations.

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