

Adolescence in the perception of primary school teachers

ADOLESCÊNCIA NA PERCEPÇÃO DE PROFESSORES DO ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL

ADOLESCENCIA SEGÚN LA PERCEPCIÓN DE MAESTROS DE ENSEÑANZA PRIMARIA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research was performed with 11 primary school teachers at a state school in the city of Curitiba/ Brazil, with the goal to identify how primary school teachers perceive adolescence. The information was collected by means of a Group Discussion strategy and organized in four theme-categories. The teachers' statements revealed the plurality of the adolescence process, stressing its uniqueness. Adolescence is a unique phenomenon, varying according to culture, social class, race, gender and age, configuring distinctive ways of experiencing it. All this diversity, however, enables to develop relations with teenagers, including attention, nurturing, comfort, patience and sensitiveness, besides getting across curricular contents.

KEY WORDS

Adolescent.
Education.
Education, primary and secondary.
Interpersonal relations.

RESUMO

Pesquisa qualitativa realizada com 11 professores de um colégio estadual de Curitiba, para apreender como os professores do ensino fundamental percebem a adolescência. As informações foram coletadas por meio da estratégia Discussão de Grupo e organizadas em quatro categorias temáticas. Identificou-se nos relatos dos professores a pluralidade de significações atribuídas ao processo de adolecer, com ênfase na singularidade da adolescência. A adolescência se constitui em fenômeno singular, apresenta variações de acordo com a cultura, classe social, raça, gênero e idade, configurando distintas formas de vivenciá-la. Mesmo com essa diversidade, é possível desenvolver relações com adolescente que incluam a atenção, dedicação, conforto, paciência e sensibilidade, além da transmissão dos conteúdos curriculares.

DESCRIPTORIOS

Adolescente.
Educação.
Ensino fundamental e médio.
Relações interpessoais.

RESUMEN

Se trata de una investigación cualitativa realizada con 11 maestros de enseñanza primaria de una escuela estatal del municipio de Curitiba. Este estudio tuvo el objetivo de entender el modo en el que los maestros de enseñanza primaria perciben la adolescencia. Las informaciones fueron recolectadas por medio de la estrategia de Discusión de Grupo y organizadas en cuatro categorías temáticas. Fue posible identificar, de acuerdo a los discursos de los profesores, la pluralidad de significaciones atribuidas al proceso de crecimiento, con énfasis en la singularidad de la adolescencia. La adolescencia presenta variaciones de acuerdo con la cultura, clase social, raza, género y edad, determinando distintas formas de vivirla. Aún ante tal diversidad, es posible desarrollar relaciones con adolescentes que incluyan la atención, dedicación, bienestar, paciencia y sensibilidad, además de la transmisión de los contenidos curriculares.

DESCRIPTORIOS

Adolescente.
Educación.
Educación primaria y secundaria.
Relaciones interpersonales

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INTRODUCTION

Health exists in everyday school life, at work, at home and in the surrounding environments. It is the outcome of the care that a person has with him/herself, with others, and with the environment around them. It is the capacity to make decisions and control one's own life, to participate actively in the process of building an ethical and healthy society. Hence, schools may become a place for promoting health, providing a safe supporting environment, considering physical and psychosocial aspects and the construction of citizenship and the development of the characters comprising the referred universe: adolescent students, educators, family members, community leaders and health workers⁽¹⁾.

Schools have a fundamental role in the development of adolescents, as they contribute with the youths' global education and the development of society. That role extrapolates the act of teaching; rather it involves educating children and youths to develop their identity and subjectivity. It is part of the teachers' everyday job to encourage students towards citizenship, social responsibility and to adopting healthy habits⁽²⁾. The school is the second center in peoples' lives and it is also a place where knowledge construction is performed⁽³⁾. Therefore, improving the interpersonal relationship between adolescent students and teachers would benefit all the other people involved, families and friends. It is possible to perform nursing care at schools, and this action complies with the promotion and maintenance of health and, hence, with the prevention of diseases.

Adolescents are beings living a particular phase of human development, and should be perceived in their context, considering their biopsychological, intellectual and emotional characteristics, dealing with all sorts of misfortunes of a society in a process of rapid transformation⁽⁴⁾. Adolescence is considered the stage of transition between childhood and adult age, and is marked by significant biological, psychological and social changes and transformations⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾. It is a crucial stage of growth and development where the individual's whole biopsychological maturing process culminates. It is a period of contradictions, ambivalences; it is turbulent, filled with passions, painful, characterized by relationship conflicts with the family and society⁽⁴⁾.

Adolescent health is influenced by the changes that occur in adolescence and are extended to other phenomena related with sexuality and their consequences. Adolescents are exposed to risks, such as drugs (alcohol, tobacco and others), early sexual initiation, unwanted pregnancy, suicide, accidents and street conflicts with other adolescents, in addition to social-economical issues and the difficulty to relate with family and teachers. These phenomena in this population require specific care, with actions that extrapolate the biomedical model⁽²⁾.

Studies with adolescents have identified the inefficacy or inadequate delivery of health care service, social promotion and education. That failure is due to factors such as the limited knowledge of many professionals about how to relate with youths, often for not knowing the specific contents and practices of this population. Generally speaking, people are not prepared to provide care to adolescents, and the existing educational institutions do not provide enough knowledge about how to deal with this group of people⁽⁶⁾.

To establish a student-teacher relationship that has positive characteristics, fewer conflicts and provides trust, it is essential that teachers have the knowledge inherent to the phase of adolescence. Considering that the school is a favorable place to have discussions about these and other themes regarding the everyday life of adolescents, which contribute with their healthy development, we proposed the present study with teachers of a public school in Curitiba /Paraná state.

OBJECTIVE

...people are not prepared to provide care to adolescents, and the existing educational institutions do not provide enough knowledge about how to deal with this group of people.

To learn how primary school teachers perceive student adolescence in their everyday school life.

METHOD

This is a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive study. This methodology permits to understand, in depth, the meanings and people's ways of living, and is valid for observing several elements, at the same time, in a small group⁽⁷⁾.

Participants were 11 primary school teachers (5th to 8th grades) of a state school in the municipality of Curitiba. The study complied with Resolution Resolução196/96 and was approved by the Ethics Committee at Federal University of Paraná (CEP/SD 212 SM 087.05.10 FR:74445 CAE 0050.0.091.675-05).

Data collection was performed using the Group Discussion strategy, which permits to *complement information about the particular of a group regarding their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions*⁽⁷⁾. The group discussions were performed in alternate shifts, morning and afternoon, to make it easier for all subjects to participate. The discussions were held in a classroom at the school, with duration of approximately one and a half hours, and were recorded on tape. The purpose of the meetings was to bring teachers to discussing and thinking about the contents related with adolescence. To do this, three questions were presented for the discussion: What do you understand by adolescence? Who is the adolescent person? What are the specific characteristics of adolescents?

Participants were given the liberty to discuss and speak their minds about the questions. The leader of the group discussion, in this case the researcher, would make interventions only when she realized that participants were experiencing some difficulty to elaborate on the ideas. After having fully explored the theme with the teachers, there was a theoretical exposition of the contents: concept of adolescence, the phase of adolescence and its specific characteristics, based on the ideas of authors who composed the literature review topic in this study, and others.

The data obtained with the audio recordings of the discussions were analyzed based on Qualitative Data Interpretation, which includes: ordering the data; categorizing the data and final analysis⁽⁷⁾. After performing floating reading and re-reading the data, four thematic categories were obtained: *adolescence: a transition to the adult world; adolescence: flourishing sexuality; becoming an adolescent: the search for an identity as a human being; adolescence: individuality and group life at the same time.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Adolescence: a transition to the adult world

For the participants, adolescence consists of a stage of human development, one of transition between childhood and adult life. In this process, adolescents experience body changes, due to puberty, the development of genital organs and the capacity of reproducing. This phase represents a rupture through the transformation of the childish relationship to one that is more mature and independent with the purpose of preparing adolescents for adult life:

It is a phase of transition, of changes, from child to adult [...] They are no longer children and become a pre-adult [...].

[...] it is the individual going from the child phase to the adult phase [...] it is a transition phase that involves many transformations that are necessary for the child to become an adult.

Adolescence is a time when the process of separation – individualization is made evident. It is crucial in people's lives and consists of a decisive event of a whole process of detachment that was initiated at birth⁽⁴⁾. Transition is understood as a temporary situation of going from one state or condition to another, and involves several circumstances regarding the adolescent, which can make it easier or more difficult. In general, transitions cause crisis, which emerges as the response to the change-causing events, which dissipate as soon as the adjustment to the new phase is achieved. Transition is extensive and long-lasting; it is a moment when adolescents need to use the many available resources, personal or not, to deal with it and adjust, in their individual, family or social contexts⁽⁸⁾.

The participants stated that it is difficult to tell when this phase begins and ends, because the period concerns the level

of development (maturity) of the mind, responsibility and life experience. They stressed that maturity is more important than chronological age and is directly related with the capacity to take on responsibilities and make more appropriate decisions, because behavior and maturity not always agree with the adolescents' age nor with the size of their body, which often resembles that of an adult.

Adolescence is approximately between 10 and 16 years, but some adolescents start and end adolescence at different ages. Some start earlier and others end much later.

The definition of adolescence has more to do with the psychological limitation, in my opinion. In behaviors, attitudes. I realize that today adolescence happens earlier than in the past, 10 year-old girls don't want to play doll any more.

[...] chronological age does not always agree with mental age [...], because we have students who are only in fifth grade and are very responsible, while others are about to take tests to enter university, and have no responsibility [...].

It is easier to establish the adolescence phase related with puberty, as it is possible to observe sexual maturing, i.e., the development of feminine and masculine traits with the naked eye, and its identification is thus easier. The referred phase occurs around the age of 12 to 15 years, and ends around the age of 18 years⁽⁸⁾. The transformations particular to this phase occur unevenly, because emotional development does not always occur at the same rate as physical development. Therefore, the limits of adolescence are not fixed: rather they range according to constitutional, psychological, social, and geographical factors⁽⁹⁾. A few attributes are necessary to end adolescence: to fulfill the needs of interaction with the opposite sex; the capacity of making professional commitments and keep them; the acquisition of a system of personal values, one's own identity; to break free from family dependence maintaining a relationship of reciprocity⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾.

The physical body assumes significant dimensions in the lives of adolescents. Once the body changes are initiated, the youth begins to experience this process, with no chance of interference, with causes intense anxiety and fantasies.

That is when all the physical changes occur, because their body will change, girls start showing a more rounded shape [...].

It is a phase of body transformations [...] boys start speaking differently, their bear begins to show [...] and strong odors because of hormonal changes [...].

The body changes comprise puberty, which is characterized by physical changes at three fundamental levels. In the first level, there is an activation of gonadotropic hormones in the anterior pituitary gland. In the second level, occurs the secretion of pituitary gonadotropins and growth hormone from the same gland, which stimulates the production of female and male germ cells. In the third level, occurs the development of primary sexual characteristics (such as increase in

the size of the penis, testicles, or of the uterus and vagina) and the development of secondary sexual characteristics, such as the appearance of pubic hair and voice changes⁽⁴⁾.

Physical changes alter the body image of girls and boys causing discomfort and anxiety in some adolescents. Participants, however, commented that come exhibit behaviors of competition and of wanting to show off / exhibit to the world followed by feelings of omnipotence as being particular to the phase of adolescence:

Competition is much more present in this phase, they want attention from their future partner, they want to show off even for teachers [...].

This phase of adolescence is all about showing off [...] he is exposing himself by showing part of his underwear [...].

The psychosocial qualities that are marking during adolescence (energy, sexuality, strength, lack of fear, violence, impulsiveness, prepotency, dare, and others) are particular of the complex process of loss and making new investments regarding their own bodies, self-image and their relationship with their parents in childhood. They experience the conflict between constructing themselves and becoming part of the new identity resulting from the discoveries of their affective, intellectual, social and physical potentialities⁽⁴⁾.

As for the psychological changes that occur in adolescence, the subjects stated not having deep knowledge about the theme, which may mean they have some difficulty to understand the aspects of this stage of human life or lack of knowledge in adults regarding the way adolescents think, perhaps resulting in the main reason for the disagreements between them.

[...] suffer mental, social transformations [...].

[...] go through mental, psychological and social transformations [...].

[...] if mental changes take place, it means he will be more capable.

In adolescents, besides the physical changes, there are moral, cognitive and sexual transformations; which are all connected and demand them to reorganize their new identity. In spite of their being confused with their own feelings during adolescence, there is an outbreak of creativity and intellectual maturity sharpening their intelligence, reasoning, and knowledge of life. Many adolescents search for theoretical solutions to their transcending problems and the need to intellectualize and fantasize happens as one of the typical forms of thinking, considered as defense mechanisms in view of the situations of such painful losses⁽⁴⁾.

Subjects reported feeling concerned about the instability that occurs due to the transition, emotional unbalance, annoyance for the adult world, and have observed that depression is very present among adolescents.

They were extremely aggressive, some were depressive and most were unhappy.

Last year at our school, two of our students attempted suicide [...].

With all these transformations, the emotional aspects in adolescence are very instable, and may result in feelings of powerlessness, insecurity and ambivalence caused by the fast changes to their bodies, the low self-esteem and the lack of definition of a life project, which lead many adolescents to depression and suicide attempts⁽¹⁰⁾. Adolescents have an increased sensitivity about their body image and react with anxiety and frustration regarding their idealized image, which may lead to depressive states, as a factor of devaluation⁽³⁾.

A study performed in a Psychiatric Emergency Unit sought to characterize adolescents who attempt suicide and stress some aspects: most have an immature view of death; attempt suicide to get attention, because they experience come sort of conflict, related with disagreement or a broken romantic or family relationship; problems at school, with friends, or conflicts regarding their sexuality, self-image, which also interfere in their social relationships⁽¹⁰⁾.

Adolescence: flourished sexuality

Sexuality in all its forms of expression has always been a controversial subject and would not be any different in the school context. In adolescence, sexuality appears in the form of physical, psychological and social changes at the same time, because the new conformation of the body and its attitudes imply their establishing a new relationship with the society. This social change may be worsened and strengthened, if together with the natural process of opening to the world through the physical expression of a new body and new attitudes, they experience early pregnancy, which changes the life of adolescents with themselves, with their family, school, and everything else that surrounds them.

It called out attention the fact that sexuality was not a frequently discussed issue, although most literature about adolescence refers to the sexual changes due to the of physical maturity process inherent to human development, regardless of adolescents wanting it or not. Those changes often cause intense psychological distress. While researching on the theme we found several studies developed by health and education professionals in primary and high schools, but most focused on sexuality, early pregnancy and on the prevention of drug use and abuse. During the Group Discussion, sexuality was not a openly discussed theme, perhaps due to the difficulty to accept this issue among adolescents, in an attempt to maintain the false idea of their innocence and purity that is directly connected to the child image⁽¹²⁾. These attitudes contribute with creating prejudice and erroneous views about the issue.

[...]it is also a phase with increased sexuality [...].

[...] intimacy, aggressively create a bond of intimacy with people [referring to the guys who walk around showing their underwear].

Perhaps it is difficult for many people to admit the idea of sexuality in childhood and adolescence, because there is a strong idea of innocence and purity associated to the children who are slowly moving into adult life. It is necessary for teachers to be prepared and have knowledge about this issue. In addition, the role of the school should be that of making room for this discussion, respecting diversity and the differences in opinions⁽¹¹⁾.

Although sexuality was a theme not often approached in the Group Discussion, we observed it was present in the everyday school life, though one of its most evident manifestations that society cannot ignore: its practice, which, sometimes, results in pregnancy in adolescence.

In eight grade, I have a student who just had a baby [...].

I have a student, she wears braces, she just had a baby, she's like a little girl, she doesn't even have the body of a woman [...].

So when the person is pregnant what do we have to do?

We have to try for the best possible solution [...].

The teachers expressed their concerns in view of unexpected pregnancy in adolescents. This occurred because they know the needs and problems of the adolescents, added to the difficulties particular of this phase of development. They try to offer support and the available resources to deal with the situation and to organize the new role that is required by maternity. Unwanted pregnancy in adolescence emerges as a problem, a risk that should be avoided, because it is an inadequate condition at their age, either planned or unplanned. It has unpleasant aspects related with the factors that are unleashed and represents compromising the young pregnant girl's personal, social and professional development, such as losing freedom, interrupting studies and causing disharmony in family relationships⁽⁸⁾.

Becoming an adolescent: the search for an identity as a human being

For the participants, becoming an adolescent is a phase in life in which the person lives a constant process of destruction and restructuring. Adolescents experience several losses and achievements in a transition from a childish to an adult identity. It is the search for him/herself, influenced in the consolidation of the basic structure of personality. This occurs due to the progressive acquisitions of personality. Adolescents test limits, they are question and criticize excessively, they want their ideas to prevail, they believe they have no limits, and are always searching for new challenges, they are impetuous, immature, insecure, and try to stand by reference groups.

[...] sometimes we come in and say good afternoon kids and they are shocked, and answer, we are teenagers[...].

They was to stand as people see, as an individual, to question, not be equal, be different, to get where we are [...].

Adolescents take a position of making their desires, they want to be heard and answered.

Adolescents search their new configuration and meaning while a new being emerges in face of the complexity of so many different feelings and sensations. Forming their identity is a mental process of thinking and observing, which occurs simultaneously and unconsciously and adolescents judges themselves based on what they understand is how others judge them⁽⁸⁾. When seeking their new identity, they have to differentiate themselves from their parents, and therefore have to deny them in order to be themselves, they need that contraposition to achieve their own values and construct their self-image. Hence, the parent-child conflict becomes part of their lives⁽⁴⁾. Another issue often observed in adolescent behavior are the conflicts among friends, resentment, regret and revolt towards their parents [and teachers], through the provocative way that adolescents behave, with disrespect, insubordination and indignation⁽⁸⁾.

They think they already know everything and they come question and want to discuss with use, often for no reason [...].

They are more critical, they are very critical because adolescents today have more information [...].

It is evidenced that, at this moment in life, adolescents have the ability to reason and establish abstract combining relationships, considering that formal intelligence is the summit of intellectual evolution. They are capable of formulating hypothesis and establishing coherent reasoning. They acquire the ability to question many aspects of life and increase their cultural background. It is the beginning of an introspective life and the search for truths⁽¹⁰⁾. In this need to intellectualize and fantasize emerge great philosophical theories, ideas of how to save humanity, choosing political activities, etc. It is also in this phase that adolescents begin writing poems, stories, novels, and dedicate their time to artistic and literary activities⁽⁴⁾. Many adults affirm that adolescents are rebels, unadjusted individuals, who protest against social values, but are unable to present significant alternatives to make positive changes in the society that they criticize⁽⁹⁾.

For an adjustment to take place with the society, family members, and with themselves, adolescents oppose certain values, dogmas, prejudice, and stigmas imposed by the society because their attitude of childish spectator becomes an active and questioning attitude, resulting in a change in their behavior. This moment is essential for their development, and leads them towards experiencing the world in different ways, but they are often misunderstood.

It is a time in life when every doubt and all questions about the future appear [...].

[...] a time of great emotional instability [...] it is a phase of doubts and questioning.

[...] sometimes I tell them, you want to be adults, but you behave as 5th and 6th grade children, because you horse around in the classroom, fight during the break for the futile reasons[...].

Adolescence is not linear, rather it occurs gradually. Adolescents slowly conquer their space and autonomy, experiencing a possible independence that will demand new abilities and changes in their standard behaviors. However, these adolescents wish to be protected and promoted with the same advantages of their childhood. Hence, adolescence consists of movements with fluctuations between maintaining the dependence of a child and assuming the independence of an adult in view of the separation from their parents which occurs gradually. This characteristic causes instability, a disharmony experienced in this phase, as the process of detaching is painful, but necessary for human development^(4,8).

For the participants, when adolescents project themselves in adult life, in a very near future, gradually discovers their places in society, dream about the tomorrow, have desires and ambitions, construct life projects and rehearse their possible occupations. They pointed at adolescence as a phase of expectations towards the future when they search for paths that adjust to their desires of physical, psychological, emotional, social and professional achievements, and fight for developing their knowledge. The participants see all transformations as an itinerary that will eventually culminate in the entrance to the adult world and recognize that for adolescent to achieve maturity, and reach the adult phase and establish themselves professionally, it is important to have a life project.

It is a time of wishes, desires, expectations, and discoveries about themselves and about reality.

Even with all their reality, they have a dream of becoming this or that, it is a phase of adolescent wishing [...].

They are individuals full of dreams, desires, wishes, and expectations towards everything that involves their future [...].

In our culture, to definitely enter the adult world, adolescents must face the vocational problem, and choose a profession. The future is important, because the dream of a new social status, often different from that offered by the adults; is the idealization of professions that are currently valued by the society, a promised or idealized space that sometimes is not so accessible. However, they are unable to analyze that, to achieve those expectations, they need to pursue the various life stages⁽⁸⁾.

When adolescents have a focus, an idealization, a dream to be fulfilled they keep their attention towards achieving that end and, hence, their mind is somehow protected from some distortions that could affect them, such as becoming involved with drugs. Therefore, the school is a place capable of embracing the distress and difficulties of general development, and of strengthening the good and productive aspects of the students, in addition to encouraging them to focus on healthy interests and recover those who became involved in situations of conflict and disastrous consequences.

Teachers, principals and other education and health workers must be sensitive, keep an attentive look, and be eager to expand the array of opportunities of actions that raise the interest of adolescents, as a way of gaining trust. In this sense, it is necessary to maintain conversations with true interest in the adolescent, showing concern towards him or her, thus being capable of making him/her feel as a subject, the center of the relationship between the teacher and the student.

For the participants, the separation of the adolescent from his/her family towards society, in the search for individualization, changes their way of thinking, a moment when they experience greater responsibility, changes in their behaviors, feelings, and also their way of acting.

They think they are capable of everything, that they don't owe obedience to no one, that they are already capable of making decisions about everything. They want independence from everything [...].

Most have the responsibility of cleaning their homes, making lunch, taking care of a younger brother.

When a child enters adolescence and begins having social engagements, go to parties, concerts. Before, the invitation would be made to their parents. Now they are the ones invited and they often exclude their parents.

Taking responsibility is part of adolescent individualization and development, as well as overcoming family dependence, achieving emotional emancipation – an important factor for adolescents to achieve maturity. Social engagements are normal attitudes of people preparing for further responsibilities. They usually acquire this experience by participating in parties, dances, picnics, going to the theater and to the movies. In this circumstance to promote the feeling of independence, adolescents provoke frontal attacks only to differentiate the two generations⁽⁹⁾.

Adolescence: individuality and group life at the same time

Participants pointed out that the tendency for groups is characteristic of this phase. Adolescents identify themselves with other youths, start spending time together and even wear the same clothes, forming a group with specific identification and characteristics, some are easily identified by their use and habits.

And they are using headbands, earrings, those things [...].

The fad now is to dress as if they were dirty, they walk with their legs open, wiggling, their body bent forwards [...].

Did you see the new fad, those boys, the three guys with pink shirts, they sit together in class[...].

The lower the pants, the more comfortable they feel [...] more liberty [...].

We look at this new fad, I don't know, I think they feel comfortable [...] [referring to the baggy pants they wear below the waist].

Sometimes, the adolescents' participation in some groups is not well accepted by some of the teachers, because of the characteristics of that specific group and parent-child conflicts frequently arise.

Whenever I see them wearing those pants so low, I feel like dressing them the right way [...].

[...] sometimes I say: *Do me a favor, pull up those pants a bit, I don't want to see your underwear.* He puts them way down here [the teacher placed her hands under her navel to show what she was saying], it's horrible.

The identification processes are fundamental in adolescence, as adolescents turn to situations that provide security and self-esteem. This is due to uniformity, in which everyone identifies themselves with each one, especially in individuals who represent the possibility of survival. The mass double identification process occurs, which explains, at least in part, the group process in which adolescents participate. It is in this phase that the group begins to have its great modeling function, in view of the transformation of their adult identity, which favors the beginning of feelings of fragility, increasing the suggestibility, a period of great vulnerability and susceptibility to influences from the environment, constructive and destructive. Therefore, whatever the group determines is accepted without much thinking⁽⁴⁾.

In this period, adults are essential figures with whom they identify themselves, and should be a positive and constructive influence on them, while they also make them realize they are in fact different⁽³⁾. Adolescents must recognize there are stronger people than them, who can restrict their impulses to survive, they need someone who can represent them.

Teachers recognize the influence that the groups have on the process of becoming an adolescent, including classmates, family and the society. They walk side-by-side with the biological processes, and can have a positive or negative influence on the development of the adolescents' new identity.

One person they can have as a reference, the same role of a father or mother, another person, an uncle, a grandfather, a figure that is really strong, or even an institution, which are references, that can also serve as a basis as a family, other institutions, like church[...].

In this evolution period, the importance of real parental figures is indispensable. The father has the role of making the rules, they prepare the individual to know the reality, not practice incest, not kill, not steal and accept they cannot do everything they want and suffer no consequences. The mother has the role to mediate, to protect through guiding and advising. The more complex a society becomes, the greater the number of situations in which others may assume the role of education in the lives of adolescents⁽³⁾. When there is no family protection or when there is no support, a close relative, teachers, people from

correctional institutions for minors, and others, can assume the function of educator for adolescents.

Youths, in their search for identification figures, turn to substitute parents. A figure that emerges and should be added to the identification process of these adolescents is *the rescue of the structuring symbolic authority*: the teacher. In addition to getting satisfaction from sharing their knowledge, teachers represent the *symbolic content, the ethical treasure that youths must incorporate*, becoming *heritage of humanity*, an element of reciprocal encouragement of the fundamental affective bond between teachers and students⁽³⁾.

Teachers can use communication to make it effective for their every action, in all circumstances of life, because through communication they increase the possibility of their students to share their experiences. In this action of sharing the experience, the person receives an approval or disapproval, which determines their feeling of security and satisfaction, a consequent adjustment to the environment that surrounds them⁽¹²⁾.

There are different kinds of adolescents. Some are aggressive, some are introspective, and some are cheerful and want to win everybody [...].

Some differ in term of the age they enter and leave adolescence [...] some initiate early and end much later [...] they take long to mature.

While puberty is used as a global parameter, which is similar in all individuals, adolescence is unique and particular for each being. Youths suffer sociocultural influences, which make adolescence be experienced differently even for individuals of a same family. It is important to consider that there is not one adolescence, rather there are adolescences, depending on the moment, the political and social setting in which the adolescence lives. Time is marked differently in the different types of society and, due to that disparity, childhood and adolescence begin to be thought and felt distinctively⁽¹³⁾.

CONCLUSION

In this study, among the many observations made by the participants, it was possible to identify, in the teachers' statements, the plurality attributed to the process of becoming an adolescent, with emphasis on the uniqueness of adolescence. As adolescence is a unique phenomenon, it varies according to culture, social class, ethnicity, gender and age, defining particular forms of experiencing this phase. Hence, it cannot be affirmed that all adolescents are the same, though the characteristics and developmental paths are similar and intense, the way they experience them and the time it will occur is particular to each individual. This understanding requires adults to see each adolescent as a unique being, with their unique history and not use a general, homogenized treatment when addressing them.

The teachers stated that the study gave them the opportunity to think about how they have established their interpersonal relationships, especially with adolescents, which are often filled of conflicts and uncomfortable, but, in spite of that, there are moments when they are able to offer help. They also stated it is possible to develop relationships that include care, dedication, comfort, patience and sensitivity, besides passing on curricular contents, which achieves and extrapolated the objective of this study.

We observed that teachers find it difficult to express their ideas about cognitive development of adolescents, they appear to have insufficient knowledge about drugs and sexuality and feel insecure in view of these situations. These considerations point at the need for nursing care in

the sense of preparing teachers with the necessary skills to deal with the issues addressed in this study.

Nursing can be practiced in different social and health settings, to prevent diseases as well as to promote health. Therefore, we believe this study will contribute by providing support to the development of activities in primary school and high school, as it is a favorable place for developing nursing care with all members of the school community. Furthermore, this study allows for picturing a new field for nursing care practice at schools, because by performing this type of thinking we offer teachers the chance of learning about the particularities of adolescence, improving their interpersonal relationship with those youths and solve their difficulties, thus improving their learning process.

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