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Education and Aggression

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Abstract

This study develops on existing theoretical premises and uses the results of some research in progress targeted at obtaining a program for the management (detection and control) of the students' aggressive states. Towards this target, the author is using the hypotheses, research and conclusions of ethology regarding the causes, the means of manifestation and the natural and social "tools" usable for aggressiveness inhibition / dissipation.

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1. Conceptual clarifications

In the conception of Konrad Lorenz, human behaviour is the result of *the compromise reached* in the "parliament of instincts", by perpetual *dialogue* between them. The Austrian ethologist believes that there are four major instincts: aggression, instinct of procreation, feeding and escape. A major problem for specialists in the humanities and for specialists in science education is the nature of aggression: is aggression innate or is it social? Despite desperate efforts made by advocates of the view that aggression is a learned behaviour acquired through interaction with the environment and under its decisive influence, it seems that the prevailing viewpoint is that of ethologists, who argue that the aggressive behaviour is innate and has a spontaneous character: "What is really the reason of not accepting the biological determinants of human behaviour? The literature seems to show that the reason is the fear that biological factors are immutable, unshaped and uncontrollable." (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1995, p. 201) Interspecific and/ or intraspecific types of aggression aim to maintain the species; although this is more evident "in all clashes

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between species", one should not forget that "the element that really threatens the immediate animal existence is never "the enemy who eats it", but it is always the competitor." (Lorenz, 1998, p. 35)

2. Aggression functions

The same is true in the case of humans, which means that aggressiveness functions are extremely important; in this regard, we include:

1. Territoriality, i.e. occupying a certain space and establishing a spatial distance to a congener. This means that people "quickly form their space habits" and giving up on them requires some discomfort; in this regard, remember that you attend daily spaces and have certain habits related to them: storing up items in the dresser or on the desk, placing yourself at family meals, the route taken by car, the place in the library, the side of the bed you sleep on etc. Note that these "space habits" appear and manifest in children (since they are two years old), but more importantly, they are manifested in children with mental disabilities: "Territorial behaviour of these intellectually challenged children (IQ below 50) is much stronger than in normal children. Territorial behaviour of these children could not be influenced by verbal reprimand, which has proved effective in other situations. By dividing the space, one creates a social order that gives children a sense of security. Each knows his/ her place and knows that there he/ she is left alone, in other words, knows that he/ she can defend himself/ herself from aggression, because for these mentally challenged people applies the principle, probably inborn, that the first occupant has priority and that his/ her right needs to be respected." (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1995, p.110) Safety distance of a person depends on the signals they transmit to congeners willingly or unwillingly: odour (depending on the perfume used), colour of the clothes worn (spotted or discrete), how they talk (tone of voice, vocabulary, mother tongue or a foreign language) etc. These data have a significant impact on the educational environment, which is why education policy makers should take into account the impact in situations like the architecture of a school, a school size, dimensions of classrooms (and the number of children considered optimal for a classroom), the size and shape of other areas related to the school, classroom furniture, ways of grouping children at solving tasks etc.

2. Structuring a human group by forming a functional hierarchy; this has the effect of reducing battles for supremacy between group members, but also their willingness to comply and cooperate. The need for status finds expression in aggression, i.e. the availability for competition and confrontation in order to achieve a dominant position in the group; dominance is accompanied by access to resources, but also to specific symbolic accessories: apparel, home, car, jewellery, secretaries and assistant managers, frequent appearances on TV (in the media in general) which address the need "to draw the attention of congeners". But the dominant position is not only due to potential or actual aggression, but also to the social abilities of the individual: "The many tasks higher-ranking individuals have to solve require possession of numerous qualities. In addition to physical strength and aggression, for higher-ranking individuals experience and social skills are essential. [...] The highest rank is not occupied by the most aggressive individual in the group but, on the contrary, by the friendliest individual who knows best how to win sympathy." (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1998, p. 96) But since dominant positions in a hierarchy are limited, the need for status pushes people towards two deviant events: mimicking the status, which requires the purchase of external signs of a position that a person does not hold and the interest for configuration of an alternative hierarchy in relatively derisory areas socially, but allowing them to occupy a prestigious position among those interested in the respective domain: stamp collecting, starting up a celebrity fan club, raising pigeons etc. In humans, the need for status occurs simultaneously with availability for obedience and loyalty; the need for submissiveness "is a striking feature of humans and blind obedience, highlighted by Milgram's experiments (1966), raises disturbing issues." (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2008, p. 117) Stanley Milgram conducted several experiments to see how far the human need for obedience may go; to this end, a false learning situation was created, in which, every time someone gave wrong information, the subject of the experiment was administered electric shocks. Despite the cries of the false student (who was not actually subjected to electric shock, but the subjects did not know), the subjects persisted beyond any foreseeable limit: "The subjects do not derive satisfaction from inflicting pain, but they often like the feeling they get from pleasing the experimenter. They are proud of doing a good job, obeying the experimenter under difficult circumstances. While the subjects administered only mild shocks on their own initiative, one experimental variation showed that, under orders, 30 percent of them were willing to deliver 450 volts even when they had to forcibly push the learner' hand down on the electrode." (Milgram, 1973) In this context, Andrei Cornea writes: "Obedience to

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