The Institutional Psychology in a Prison Unit: A Brief Report

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The study object of this paper is to report an experience of an institutional psychologist inserted into a Brazilian re-socialization system. For this purpose, a group of 20 in-patients were chosen for the analysis of institutional values present in this system. All institutional interventions occurred from the verbalizations of in-patients enrolled in the professional retraining courses. Over the results, this study highlights that the internal pact reinforced the unconscious alliance among the employees and in-patients, denoting the set of forces present in the instituting individuals regarding what was already instituted, making the benefits resulting from these courses a defense of the instituted that imprisoned these in-patients against future changes. This paper concludes that the social benefits supported this pact, revealing the set of forces that could not be verbalized, but which were tacit in the narcissist contract.

Keywords: institutional psychology, instituted, institutional unconscious

Introduction

This paper aims to perform a brief analysis of the institutional psychologist inserted into a prison re-socialization unit, a context in which the supervision of learning groups aimed at the professional training of its in-patients was carried out.

The adopted methodology was the qualitative in which a theoretical-practical articulation is established from the works of Bleger, Baremlitt, Rouchy, Kaes, among others. Therefore, as the analysis field is analyzed, the verbalizations and complaints that occur during the professional qualification courses of a single group with about 20 members, in which the institutional psychologist role came to act as a filter for the in-patients that clamored for a listener, extrapolating the institutional walls.

Results

These groups were formed from a demand diagnosis, in which, theoretically, the students were chosen due to their low professional qualification. In practice, many were chosen from the good behavior in the institution. These groups were pre-formed by the choices from their own internal directors and the institutional psychologist was “contacted” to carry out the proper educational supervisions during its progress.

As the analysis demand emerged from an “analysis device” surrounded by conflicts between what was instituted and the values of some instituting individuals, every visit was pre-scheduled, being the time and duration pre-determined, thus avoiding possible future conflicts. As the analysis field, only one group was
chosen, in which it was possible to find a richness in plurality that enriched the understanding of this institution movements.

Therefore, as the demand is constituted by the offer, this paper analyzes how this institution is molded and adapted to this group of in-patients desires, reinventing some paradigmatic values.

Institutional Psychology

In his article “Institutional psychology”, Bleger (1992) points out that “the institutional psychology... is a recent chapter in the psychology development and nobody can, currently, exhibit or lean on an extensive experience” (p. 32). Psychology still predominates this clinical inheritance, although currently the psychologists are not in only one psychotherapeutic activity, but they are also performing with a clinical-social approach, including its corresponding conceptual model and increasing the scope in which they work. Therefore, the institutional psychology is inserted in the history of social needs, being the empirical research of utmost relevance for its progress.

And it was in this research need that I observed the movement of this training group within the unit under study, emphasizing the interaction sociability levels and the syncretic sociability levels.

At the beginning of this group formation, when the first supervisions were carried out, the syncretic sociability predominated. This means that these people seemed to be in a “fusion or indiscrimination state” (Bleger, 2011, p. 107). Thus, the silence showed the paranoid reactions due to the fear for new experience and the unknown and, as Bleger (2011) says, “It is not only the new that produces fear, but rather the unknown that exists within the known” (p. 110).

During the other visits, I noticed that this group began to develop a syncretic group identity. For Bleger (2011), this identity “lies in its belonging to the group” (p.112). Such observation arises from the interactions that began to emerge from the second week, when many complaints came from the students belonging to this group, as it occurred regarding the quality of the snack offered. That is, during this course, this group would have the right to a snack, but this, sometimes, was not enough for everyone. At this point, the individual barrier was broken and a “primary” collective began to form, claiming the snack improvement during the supervisions.

When listening to these complaints, I understood that they pointed to a greater degree of belonging to the group, in which its members were seeking a greater identity for integration. Therefore, the members of this training group tended to syncretic sociability, where the preverbal behaviors became common. With the teacher, they hardly complained, but when I visited them, some presented complaints of this institution movements. Consequently, many students demonstrated their resistance movements, missing classes, verbally attacking teachers and other colleagues. So, at this moment, the institution showed the latent movements.

But what would be the institution? Bleger (2011) understands the institution as “a set of rules and standards and activities groups around values and social functions” (p.114). The group can be considered as an institution, but if it is stabilized, this can turn into an anti-therapeutic group and, if it is bureaucratized, its means will become the purposes, losing its objectives.

In addition, it is convenient to highlight that the institutional psychology involves the “conceptual models reform and the expansion of the work scope” (Bleger, 1992, p. 34). The institutional psychology would not be a field of applied psychology, but a research field of the social reality phenomena. Within this, Bleger highlights
For Bleger (1992), “the institutional psychology comprises... a set of organisms of concrete physical existence, which have a certain degree of permanence in a field... to study in it all human phenomena” (p. 37). These human phenomena, in the focused unit, despoiled the boycott movements along the laws enforcement. These “boycotts” departed from the macro level (institution) to the meso level (learning group) and vice versa. At this point, many students assumed the role of scapegoat, reinventing and violating some rules.

And when taking care of just one group, I could capture how this occupied an entire singular dynamics. Although the diagnosis was “premolded” by the own director, I observed the singular movements in this group, being my interventions the result of these observations in which the mental models of this unit managers was not always reiterated.

When achieving a unique vision, I sought to analyze the latent contents of the unconscious movements of this institution, in which the instituting individuals manifested that the group identity became a group that not always accomplished what was established, emerging the interest conflicts as a form of latent contents manifestation, being these contents feedback of utmost relevance to this prison unit maturity.

These were the “urgency points” (Bleger, 1992, p. 45), as a result of these conflicts, that I sought to understand and analyze so that, subsequently, the appropriate interventions were carried out. In these interventions, the key point was to understand the resistance movement of both sides: If, on one hand, there were employees who did not accept the public policies for the in-patients and, on the other side, the in-patients did not accept the institution educational impositions. In order to ease these conflicts, I sat with the in-patients in their corresponding classrooms, listened to them, interlacing and understanding their individual historicity with the institutional movement. From this, I listed a diagnosis for each visit, carrying out the necessary interventions “in loco”, with the directors, in a first movement, and with the in-patients of this group, in a second moment.

This investigation enabled the task development and the future classification of each situation itself. For this purpose, the use of the clinical method was of utmost relevance for the task, since, within this, the psychologist is guided “by the classification systematic introduced by the psychoanalytic technique, adapted to the needs of this scope” (Bleger, 1992, p. 46). Thus, the detailed observation of internal movements was of utmost relevance for the task closure, leading to the classification of these conditions through the observation.

In this prison unit, from the classifications, my actuation allowed the understanding of existing problems, being these explicits through the courses operability. It was the operationality, or its lack, which was also evident in this institution conflicts and, consequently, of the group under study.

According to Bleger (1992), the institutional conflict is of utmost importance to its growth. In his wise words, “the best ‘degree of dynamics’ of an institution is not given by the absence of conflicts, but rather by the possibility to explain them, manage them, and solve them within the institutional limit” (Bleger, 1992, p. 52). Throughout the course, many denied the conflicts authorship, demonstrating certain scission of their own personality, thus hindering the task. During my interventions, I always pointed out the importance of assuming these conflicts and verbalizing it to the group, although many did not see the conflict as beneficial. Therefore, all intervention techniques were by and through the group, although the practice demonstrated the lack of group cohesion due to the persecution anxieties of its members.
From the Institutional Psychology to the Institutional Analysis.

As the discussion was highlighted, from the encounter of these “instituting” analysis, many enjoyed the narcissistic benefits of this institution, strengthening the narcissistic contract of each of these members with the group, reiterating the denegation pact. This pact denoted the conflict between the instituted and the instituting individuals, leading them to a sense of alienation and standstill.

If on one hand, we have the instituting individuals moved by the productive forces of institutional logics, on the other, we have the instituted, in which we find a system that cannot re-socialize its in-patient and, in the absence of its ability, heavily invests in educational courses.

For Rouchy and Desroche (2005), “The structures internalized by the establishment members are part of the psychic reality and the values; and they determine... the group organization mode, the usual relations and the interaction networks” (p. 68). It was in these interaction networks that the conflicts emerged, because there was a veiled pact that only the “good” in-patients could participate in these courses. And it was from this maneuver that the complaints present in this institution demand, highlighting how the formal groups—the socio-educational teams—established the informal groups of in-patients, requiring various interventions in the micro level.

And it was from these in-patients narratives encounter that this study highlights some peculiarities for the development of this analysis, such as the “narcissistic benefits” (Kaes, 1988, p. 5). This means that many in-patients enjoyed the benefits and privileges to continue “binding” into his institutional roots, not aspiring anything different for his future and reinforcing, therefore, the narcissistic contract of each of these members with this re-socialization institution.

Kaes (1988) also points out that “when the institution does not support the narcissism of its members..., the institution is attacked” (p. 26). This quote matches with the conflicts demands that emerged due to certain cuts of benefits of some instituting individuals, leading them to feel devaluated by the institution. And in the absence of frustrations elaborations, these went to violence with other in-patients, repeating the possible tension between the filiation and affiliation of his primary group. Therefore, such as the family that has not invested love and attention, they charged the institution for the lack of these, as if it was guilty for their violence and delinquency acts. Consequently, when completing this reeducation course and leaving this unit, many showed a very unusual movement: They took from society what supposedly this deprived them: the love and attention, thus building a vicious circle of several exits and returns to it.

In addition, it was from the instituted that emerged the suffering of these in-patients, leading them to a sense of alienation. About this, Kaes (1988) states: “It is against the emergence of this repressed and against the recognition of this unconscious... that the own defenses of institutional existence are established” ( p. 29). He observed that it was in these defenses that the instituting suffering denoted the precarious operation of this institution.

Still according to Kaes (1988), “The institutions are continually deconsecrated and consecrated” (p. 04). This re-socialization institution, besides bringing narcissistic benefits to the individual unconscious of each in-patient, also featured narcissistic benefits for the society in which it was inserted, fostering the moral judgments for its external, enjoying and feeding its own perverse desire, so denoting the “denegation pact” (Brandt & Oliveira, 2009), in other words, something that could never be exposed. This pact comes to give support to the narcissistic contract, since the training courses were accepted under only one condition: If they were offered for the in-patients benefits, and for the employees, bonuses for the goals reached.
Conclusion

This paper concludes that the learning group studied would require a greater cohesion, being the demand for analysis arising from its internal interactions and not as a result of educational policies that did not aim the internal growth of its members, and the valuation of the instituted, in pursuit of those that did not fit in these rules and reinforcing the in-patients persecutory anxieties, causing the non-cohesion of the group and the boycott movements to institutional rules.

In addition, the denegation pact reinforced the unconscious alliance between the employees and in-patients, denoting the set of forces present in the instituting individuals regarding what was already established, making the benefits resulting from these courses, a defense of the instituted that imprisoned them against future changes. These social benefits supported this pact, revealing the set of forces that could not be verbalized, but which were tacit in the narcissist contract.

References


