3.4.4 MENTORING

Many of us have experienced in our youth a special encounter with a non-parental adult figure such as an educator, teacher, friend, neighbour, or coach, who provided a point of reference, a role model, and a strong stimulus for personal growth. We speak in this case of 'natural mentoring'. It is from these spontaneous relationships, which voluntarily bring generations together, leading to maturation through the resources present in the community, that Mentoring develops.

Mentoring is therefore a type of formal relationship, which does not arise casually but develops with a purpose of personal growth and improvement. The main tool is the mentor-mentee relationship.

From the 1980s, the discovery of the effectiveness of these relationships and their benefits led to the development of structured mentoring programmes with the main objective of reducing school dropouts. The interesting results of the first experiments and the low costs of the intervention, which was usually delivered by volunteers, allowed it to expand rapidly.

The term mentoring comes from the Greek epic sagas: Mentor was in fact Odysseus' loyal friend and when Odysseus left for the Trojan War, he placed Mentor in charge of his son. Today, in the context of prevention programmes, the term mentoring stands for:

- a special type of one-to-one relationship in which a person with specific skills and competences (the mentor) enables a young person (the mentee) to develop his/her own.
- a close personal relationship (the close relationship) in a process of working together to achieve agreed goals.
- a mutual relationship, an alliance from which both mentor and mentee benefit.

By addressing children and pre-teens whit difficulties, Mentoring seeks to prevent these from stabilising over time and becoming the basis of problems and discomfort in adolescence and adulthood.

Schools are the context in which most mentoring programmes are implemented. In schools, mentoring programmes can be an effective response, becoming a model of creative action and alternative to the traditional modes of intervention.

For Community Psychology, Mentoring is understood as an indicated prevention programme, i.e., it addresses young people who, although they do not have any overt problems, have shown some 'signs' of risk (e.g., behavioural, dropping out of school, isolation, etc.) picked up and interpreted by their parents or teachers.

At the individual level, an attempt is made to work on the individual's competences, skills, and resources, to make a person able to cope appropriately with relationships in different life contexts and to solve problems more effectively.

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