

# Working with what precedes mentalization in group therapy with ASD children

## Sensation - emotion - thought connection in reciprocal social interaction

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### Introduction

- Autistic children show a prior failure of mentalization processes, present difficulties in multimodal integration and deficiencies in the sensation-emotion-thought connection that makes it difficult for them to understand themselves and others (Coromines, 1998; Viloca, 2012).
- There is a lack of studies on the application of group psychoanalytic psychotherapy in children with ASD, the systematization of its technique and the benefits that provides in their difficulties of social interaction and communication.

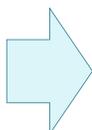
### Objectives

- To develop Coromines' Psycho-pedagogical model and its extension to be used in group therapy.
- To systematize an observational instrument in order to investigate the psychoanalytic technique.

### Model presentation

#### PSYCHOTHERAPY STYLE (HOW) - categories

- Question (Q)
- Offer help (OH)
- Anticipation (AN)
- Reinforcement (RF)
- Repetition (RE)
- Exclamative elocution (EE)
- Get the attention (GA)
- Lead the behaviour (LB)
- Limit (LI)
- Describe (DE)



**0. Significant imitation (Farrés, 2014):** To describe without the gaze, like a mirror. To imitate the child's gestures and emotions. In a concrete manner, the child sees outside what he feels inside.

#### COROMINES PSYCHO-PEDAGOGIC SCHEME (1988)

- 1. Descriptive level: Verbalize what he does. The child feels contained by words.**
- 2. Suggest the sensation "what he might be feeling". Verbalize opposed feelings (ex. your hands are wet, and now they are dry)**
- 3. Connect sensory experience with the recognition of the feeling, pleasure or displeasure? Always verbalize feelings with the same words.**
- 4. Stimulate memory using questions Anticipate new situations and changes with visual support, if needed.**

Dramatization (Viloca, 2012)

**5. Narrate intersubject relationship (Farrés, 2020):** To connect the action of a child to the other, the action with the mental state and both mental states

- 1. Action – action:** verbalize the relationship between the action of a/some child/ren with the action that another or others do. "Daniel was watching what you were doing and now he is doing the same!"
- 2. Action – mental state:** verbalize the relationship between the action of a child with the mental state of another. "Jack, I think that Victor is angry because you have gone to play with Mathew"
- 3. Mental state – Mental state:** verbalize the relationship between a mental state of a child/some children and the mental state of another or others. "You want to communicate so many things that nobody can understand you"

#### PSYCHOTHERAPY CONTENT (WHAT) - categories

- Imitate (IM)
- Verbalize describe things (VT)
- Verbalize describe action of the thing (VAT)
- Verbalize describe object (VO)
- Verbalize describe action of the object (VAO)
- Verbalize sensation (VS)
- Verbalize emotion or mental state (VE)
- Stimulate memory (SM)
- Relate action – mental state, mental state – action (RAE)
- Relate mental state – mental state (REE)
- Dramatization (DR)

EXTENSION

### Preliminary mixed methods research

#### 4th SESSION. Therapists intervention examples



"What are you playing with?" (Q) - therapist moves close to them and touches their back  
"Think, Hector, think" (LI)  
"Tell him, Hector don't touch it" (LB)  
"A birthday party, a candle" (DE VT)

GROUPING - non-mentalised action predominates, the therapeutic function is verbal and non-verbal containment and to descriptively verbalize the actions, sensations. It seeks to establish a link between the participants and direct the gaze to the action of the other.

#### 16th SESSION. Therapists intervention examples



"Edu takes the buildings bricks and you scream" (RAE)  
"You take the can strongly, like this: aaaah" (DR)  
"What happened the other day?" (YE)  
"Saba is angry but because he feels sorry for it, it seems like the story of the sticky king from the other day" (VE - SM)

GROUP AWARENESS- participants can be content with words, participate in an exchange with each other sometimes and are capable of joint attention. The therapeutic function is to mentalize the link between sensations, emotions and behaviors in reciprocal social interaction.

#### Participants:

- 6 autistic children, 7 to 9 years old, fluent language, complex phrases, IQ limit to normal, some interest in others and ability to connect with their own emotions.
- Psychologist and teacher of CEE Carrilet as a co-therapists.

#### Intervention:

- Weekly sessions during 2 years (videotaped)

### Conclusions

- Described categories of the therapist's style, Coromines psycho-pedagogic scheme and its extension are shown as a valid model for group technique and for a future study of the participants' process.
- This psycho-pedagogical approach in group with ASD children allows us to work on what precedes mentalization: connecting the child with their own actions and sensations and their impact on others.

### References

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