

# Coronarino the “Monellino” Virus Telling Stories about yourself Helps the Most Vulnerable During the SARS-COV-19 (“COVID-19”) Virus Pandemic

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## Abstract

The “Coronarino” puppet contributed to creating a free, open and appropriate dialogue for children regarding the “Covid-19” pandemic. Through the use of children's play, a virtuous circuit of transformative reverberations in the intra- and inter-system relational network was activated with a progressive emergence of spaces of freer bonds to mentalize the anguished and angry experiences and to share the experience. The Authors demonstrate that the risk of the onset of mental distress in minors and consequently in their families has been reduced.

**Keywords:** Narrative Medicine, COVID-19.

## Introduction

The Sars-Cov-19 virus pandemic (so-called “Covid”) has significantly influenced our lives since the beginning of 2020 and the long-term effects are still visible.

The restrictive measures implemented by various national governments have led, among other things, to the closure of schools of all levels and the establishment of Distance Learning (DAD). Children and adolescents found themselves managing the psychological impact of the pandemic and at the same time had to readjust their relationships and learning methods.

Consequently, an increase in symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety and suicidal risk was recorded [1, 2]. Children and adolescents experienced a prolonged state of physical isolation from their peers, teachers, extended families, and community networks [3].

Periods without school have been associated with reduced physical activity, more screen time, irregular sleep, and less appropriate diet. There are mutual interactions between brain maturation and the socio-economic environment relationship and the isolation suffered could have an influence on the onset of psychiatric disorders in adolescence [2].

Some authors have underlined that the delicate transition towards adulthood makes adolescents more vulnerable. The first studies on the mental health of adolescents have shown that lockdown and worries related to “Covid” are stressors, as is the increase in intrafamily violence associated with confinement [1]. Sudden deaths due to “Covid” would also be possible factors triggering psychiatric symptoms related to mourning, trauma, and depression for children and especially for adolescents [1].

During the pandemic, children and adolescents experienced anxiety about a health threat and threats to employment/family income [4]. The main risk factors appeared to be previous psychiatric history, female gender and living in a family of low economic status [4].

The literature has underlined that, although the subjects of developmental age were not affected by the infection in a clinically serious way, the psychological impact was intense [5].

## Purpose

Create a free, open, but appropriate dialogue for children regarding the Coronavirus, proposing it in an effective and playful way, allowing children to explore and recognize both the negative emotions and the positive and subjective implications. Structure a project aimed at achieving this objective using the tools of Narrative Medicine.

## Coronarino's Project the Monellino Virus

In the complex pandemic framework mentioned above, to contain the effects that occurred post-pandemic, the “Coronarino il Virus Monellino” project was developed which addressed the effects of the emotional shock wave connected to the “Covid” pandemic, in the system school and in the family system, with reference to the delicate condition of children aged between four and ten.

For the realization of the project, a puppet called "Coronarino" was created, representing the "Covid" virus. This allowed the children participating in the experience, in the relational network of the class group, to interact, experiment and communicate symbolically, through peer play, with the root cause of the dramatic pandemic.

The children talked about themselves, their experiences, their fears, and their personal and family aspects of life directly with the puppet, who responded in rhyme or with the use of a nursery rhyme, resulting in a clear and "child-friendly" dialogue.

### Children Involved

Male	Female	Total
66	77	143

### Breakdown by class (total 10 classes in 2 school complexes – primary school)

I class	30
II class	30
III class	30
IV class	25
V class	28

**Reference area:** Vesuvian area and cities, specifically Santa Maria la Carità (Castellammare), project main “sponsor”.

**Schools involved:** I.C. “Borrelli” and I.C. “De Filippo”.

**Overall duration of the intervention:** from October 2020 to June 2021.

**Number of meetings per class:** 4

The participation of minors in the project was made possible thanks to the release requested and obtained from the families. Participating Facilities;

- ETS – Third sector organization – «Concordia Magna Res Crescente» – non-profit
- organization - medical association - Scafati
- Anima Iris – Center for Integrated Consulting in Clinical Psychology - Pompeii – networked with the ETS and local authorities in the area.
- Local authorities – Municipality of Santa Maria la Carità – Social and Educational Policies Office
- Covid Crisis Unit Office Local Authority of Santa Maria La Carità

The implementation considered the recent narrative orientation present in the epistemology of narrative medicine, organizing intervention procedures with children, in the shared flow of telling and telling oneself and arriving at [3]:

The concrete intervention, which we will describe later, was carried out mainly online, on the DAD platforms, during the "lockdown".

The project was developed consistently with the theoretical framework of reference to narrative medicine, applied to institutional contexts [6]. The authors have identified the class group as an elective terminal for the implementation of preventive procedures, the primary place of regenerative resource for the entire school system.

### Implementation

Using children's play with the "Coronarino" puppet, in the class-group sharing area, a virtuous circuit of transformative reverberations was activated in the intra- and inter-system relational network with a progressive emergence of spaces of freer bonds both to mentalize the intense anguished and angry experiences, and to share the evolutionary experience.

- spontaneous constructions of diversified narratives of the experience connected to the
- lockdown;
- mentalization processes of the experience itself;
- sharing of the same;
- emotional management within the community dimension of the class group.
- The families and school systems involved have acquired:
- greater knowledge;
- more fluid communication methods;
- renewed morphogenetic drives that allowed an effective containment of the disorientation,
- anguish, fear, and anger resulting from the devastating effects of the pandemic condition.

### Phases

The method adopted was to present, mainly online and on the DAD platforms, the "Coronarino" puppet, representing the virus, to primary school students.



**Figure 1:** Coronarino Puppet

The puppet dialogued with the children, explaining the health procedures, using rhyming language and nursery rhymes. In turn, the children were able to tell the virus itself about their fears and anxieties and subsequently produced drawings at the end of each meeting which were commented on at the next appointment with the specialists.

The first meetings of the project involved, remotely, the students of the third classes of the "E. De Filippo" school and of the "Petraro" plexus of the "E. Borrelli" of the territory of Santa Maria La Carità, in the province of Naples.

It was essential to use clear and effective communication to:

- prevent and limit the effects that the virus could generate on a physical, psychological, and social level, both in adults and especially in children;
- help them express their emotions using storytelling and narrative medicine;
- understand what was happening without scaring them;
- underline the importance of respecting "hygiene" measures, without introducing new fears.

## Results

In line with recent theoretical-clinical narrative orientations, in the flow of telling and telling oneself, the spontaneous construction of diversified narratives of the experience connected to the lockdown allowed the protagonists of the project to start mentalization processes of the experience itself, to make it shareable and therefore emotionally manageable within the community dimension of the class group [3].

At the same time, the families and school systems involved have also acquired greater knowledge, more fluid communication methods, a renewed morphogenetic drive, such as to allow them to effectively contain the disorientation, anguish, fear, and anger seen as devastating effects of the condition pandemic.

The project management method was oriented towards bringing the subject together with the family and the school context, beyond the pandemic experience, constituting the necessary intermediary space. As Caillé put it:

"One of the main intermediary spaces to be created is that which allows the coming and going between the individual and the group in the process of being formed..."

This "intermediary space" has given rise to a multi-systemic reorganization, allowing the entire school system and families to face the new evolutionary tasks connected to managing the effects of the pandemic, reorganizing internal relationships, spaces, and the scanning of shared times.

In the work sessions, the class was transported into a new symbolic space-time dimension, built in the intersubjective interweaving of the participants which took on the characteristics of a renewed transitional space, allowing, through the "puppet" as a new object transitional, to preserve the creative potential of children intact, while making them experience the dramatic realities of the pandemic experience, sharing their experiences and therefore preventing its traumatic effects [7].

Providing an empty space in which to express and narrate, so that the future does not become a simple reproduction of the "past" seemed to be able to identify with the cascading effects of the project's work in progress; virtuous relational circuits which, involving schools and families, have unlocked the resilient resources of individuals and school and family systems, reactivating the defensively blocked time line, towards new renegotiations of more fluid relationships capable of taking advantage, in morphogenetic terms, of the sharing experience [7].

In line with Ackerman's thinking, the theoretical fulcrum of the organization of operational practice is identified in the importance given to affective exchanges and mutual influence between child, family, and school context, according to a circular logic of mutual influence, which conditions the ability to adapt to the complex social and psychological transformations that have been violently introduced by the effects of the pandemic [8].

The method of intervention and application of the project coincided with an integrative psychological function in carrying out the intervention itself, monitoring the risk that could be incurred in educational institutions as well as in family ones, of activating, collusively with requests for delegation of institutions, dangerously substitutive psychological functions [9].

## Discussion

The risk of the onset of mental distress in minors and consequently in their families was reduced, the outcome of which would have had different facets: from the suffering of the subject to that of his relational network following the emotional shock wave resulting from the pandemic.

The school system has been identified as "...an institutional field that is a harbinger of relationships and choosing it as an area of intervention is connected to systemic reading grids that cannot ignore the analysis of the relationships that bind its actors and considering it a fundamental relational place of clash and encounter that structures growth" [10].

The intervention in the school system was oriented towards the implementation and support of a renewed effective communication capacity; it allowed each subject to be able to welcome and

ask for help, in the relational network of the schools involved as well as to express their fears and needs.

The objective achieved was to lead towards a sort of literacy in disease prevention practices. The dynamics aimed at supporting the "belonging dimension" were supported, based on the sharing of experience within the relational network of peers. In the peer group, as is known, the interlocutors are more reliable among themselves, particularly in the age groups considered for this project.

In the reflection of the school system, through the intervention and creation of a new specific shared culture on the pandemic, institutional self-agency was revitalized, reactivating the abilities of all the subjects involved to deal with organizational and curricular emergencies, with the restoration of effective communication flows.

The use of play, movement, creative metaphors, storytelling, central operational tools in the prevalence of models applied with narrative medicine, have acquired preventive qualities within the project for the psychological distress of the minors involved. The children have thus become directors of new versions of the disorienting and distressing effects connected to the pandemic, co-authors, in the peer group, of a new shared lexicon, of new meanings (restoring the quality of resources to bonds). Furthermore, the children contributed to a gradual mentalization of emotions. A version of the child as a competent subject reshapes relationships within the school system, restoring dignity to the experiences and thoughts of the children themselves, like adults despite generational differences, as subjects of the same traumatic event.

Finally, it should be reiterated how much this experiential laboratory has contributed to spreading a version of the game, not only as a recreational dimension, but above all as a privileged means of contact and communication between adults and children. The child has acquired a central function of bridge between family and school, enhancing the resilience of both systems by improving communication between the parties and supporting the culture of cooperation as an elective path of evolutionary development areas and at the same time preventing the establishment of conflicting and antagonistic dynamics [11-20].

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