

Human relations in prisons and its implications for Youth and Adult Education

As relações humanas nas prisões e suas implicações para a Educação de Jovens e Adultos

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest losses that people in deprivation of liberty suffer is the restrictions in human relationships. What implications does the way in which human relations are organized in prison for the execution of Basic Education have? Are collaborative relationships possible between teachers and students in Basic Education offered in prisons? Through the study of empirical research, we found that students value teachers, but that they come to the classroom with a great need for human relationships with people outside the prison environment. Teachers are divided between offering conversations that can meet this need and, at the same time, teaching the proposed content. Based on the Historical-Cultural Theory, we consider that teachers can improve collaborative relationships with students in deprivation of liberty by encouraging self-worth, developing a cognitive interest in the study, having internal availability to treat the student as a dignified human being, and offering you sincere, affectionate and firm relationships.

Keywords: Human relations. Youth and Adult Education. Prisons.

RESUMO

Uma das maiores perdas que as pessoas em situação de privação de liberdade sofrem são as restrições nas relações humanas. Que implicações tem a forma como se organizam as relações humanas na prisão para a execução da educação da Educação Básica? São possíveis relações colaborativas entre professoras ou professores e alunas e alunos na Educação Básica ofertada nas prisões? Por meio de estudo de pesquisas empíricas constatamos que alunas e alunos valorizam as professoras e professores, mas que chegam para a sala de aula com necessidade de relações humanas com pessoas de fora do ambiente carcerário. As professoras ou os professores dividem-se entre oferecer conversas que possam atender a essa necessidade e, ao mesmo tempo, ensinar o conteúdo proposto. Com base na Teoria Histórico-Cultural consideramos que os docentes podem aprimorar as relações colaborativas com as alunas e os alunos em privação de liberdade, por meio do incentivo à autovalorização, do desenvolvimento do interesse cognoscitivo pelo estudo, da disponibilidade interna de tratar a aluna e o aluno como um ser humano digno, oferecendo-lhe relações sinceras, afetuosas e firmes.

Palavras-chave: Relações Humanas. Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Prisões.

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Introduction

Today, we live in a world where superficial relationships and the objectification of others are increasingly common (Freire, 1987). In many social contexts, we see ourselves as service providers, offering only a "service" without acknowledging or caring about the person behind it. Perhaps this business relationship is tolerable in some commercial contexts. However, in environments where people are developing, we consider this objective, standardized approach to be a mistake because it does not concern itself with the quality of human relationships in the social context in which knowledge is learned.

Based on Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1982, 1995, 2000, 2015), we consider human relationships fundamental to education. It is through these social relationships that we can teach scientific knowledge and study methods that humanity has already developed. Any distortion in verbal or nonverbal language can hinder teaching and learning. Thus, when we seek mediators for education, we also seek to create an environment conducive to collaborative relationships between professors and students.

We believe that collaborative relationships yield better results than individualistic and competitive ones. These relationships are based on authentic expressions directed toward shared goals.

In the field of youth and adult education, we have found that adults value teachers who believe in their potential and support them in overcoming the barrier of a lack of formal education to achieve their adult life goals, such as finding work and participating more broadly in society. An example of this can be found in the São Paulo Forum on Adult and Youth Education (AYE)'s virtual meeting, entitled "Hope that Transforms," which was broadcast on August 20, 2020. (FORUM PAULISTA OF AYE, 2020). However, prisons are very specific social contexts in which AYE takes place. The organization of human relationships in this context also influences the implementation of AYE.

This article discusses aspects of human relationships in prison from the perspective of inmates based on field research data analyzed for this article on the relationship between professors and students.

Rocha (1994), Portugues (2001), Vieira (2008), De Maeyer (2013), Carvalho (2014), Souza (2017), Mendes (2018), and Campos (2019). We analyze how these relationships influence the implementation of AYE in the context of deprivation of liberty. Based on concepts from Historical-Cultural Theory, we propose ways to strengthen the relationship between teachers and students in this educational setting.

Human Relations from the Perspective of Individuals Deprived of Liberty in Brazilian Prisons

In addition to the loss of freedom of movement, imprisonment is one of the greatest losses in the area of human relations suffered by individuals deprived of liberty (BRAZIL, 1940/2020). Inmates live in an environment where the same people circulate (other inmates and staff), and family relationships are restricted to correspondence and weekend visits. They lose the social interaction that comes with walking the streets, going to shops, and visiting public squares without constant observation and control.

The loss of spontaneity and living in an environment of constant tension can damage a person's psychological integrity. Due to society's lack of knowledge about prison life, it is difficult to imagine that small, everyday joys can become rewards when they are completely removed from prison life.

Português (2001) describes these daily losses and quantifies the psychological suffering that goes unnoticed by more superficial analyses of daily life in prisons.

Prisoners gradually gain access to certain goods or privileges in prison by adapting their conduct and behavior to the institution's norms and standards. Needs, procedures, and desires that were commonplace outside of prison become privileges inside of it. Examples include drinking hot coffee, going somewhere for no apparent reason, missing work or class, going out with one group or another, and sleeping or waking up at different times. (PORTUGUES, 2001, p. 89).

In addition to these restrictions, people deprived of their liberty must keep their arms behind their backs while moving around the prison and must maintain this posture when speaking with staff. Being practically prohibited from expressing themselves with their arms and hands—using the body language we use every day to emphasize what we say—is another form of psychological mutilation.

The prison's daily routine also requires new ways of organizing private and public spheres in human relations. For example, inmates are stripped of their intimate space and the ability to form spontaneous relationships. They live with several people of their choosing and must adhere to pre-established mealtimes and restricted clothing options. They also have to get short haircuts and be available to talk to staff at any time, i.e., situations that require a new psychological organization.

In addition to behaving according to institutional rules, those deprived of liberty must also adhere to the population's rules of coexistence. Any slip-up indicating favoritism toward staff can be punished by fellow inmates. Likewise, any act resulting in cooperation between people deprived of their liberty in defiance of institutional rules can lead to disciplinary offenses that make it impossible to obtain benefits, such as a reduced sentence.

Due to all these restrictions and tensions in coexistence, we could conclude that professors receive “human fragments” in their classrooms, broken people, in whom pain and sadness predominate. Rocha's research (1994) reflects data on the psychological integrity of people in situations of deprivation of liberty, which leads us to analyze these relationships from new perspectives. In his observations in prison environments, the researcher analyzed that there is resistance among people serving sentences, who, mainly collectively, through the culture that is formed in collective coexistence, create strategies to survive and preserve themselves.

We will analyze some forms of resistance reflected by Rocha (1994), one of which is to do not what one wants, but exactly what one is expected to do,

regardless of whether this reflects one's true self. In this regard, Rocha (1994) analyzes this strategy in an interview situation:

When we conducted the first preliminary interviews to gather life stories from prisoners, [...] the female prisoners agreed to participate in the interviews, and the content of their statements was enough to keep any verbose researcher from the 1970s awake at night. The life stories they told were remarkably consistent with the stereotypical and reductionist formulations found in the worst criminology textbooks, and they were very similar to each other. Like the most typical criminal biographies in almanacs, their stories began with the carelessness and irresponsibility of dysfunctional families, developed with the bad influences of work-averse people, passed through the predisposing use of drugs, and ended in crimes that always resulted in prison and shame. All the statements emphasized regret. To our despair and disbelief, the statements ranged from an explicit acknowledgment of deserved punishment to disconcerting promises to abandon bad company and seek any job, no matter how little one earns, as long as it is honest work. [...]

According to Rocha (1994), “in prisons, no one shares truths except with someone with whom they can recognize—at least in part—something of their condition.” (ROCHA, 1994, p. 15).

Rocha (1994) analyzes that communication is another important mechanism of resistance:

There are many forms of clandestine communication in prisons, and we learned about several of them. It became increasingly difficult to doubt that the ignorance of the prison institution and its literature is essential for these communication methods to function and support prisoners' resistance to control. (Rocha, 1994, pp. 35–36).

Thus, prisoner resistance exists. The author states, "In fact, prisoners are much more intact than we tend to assume, and they are much more balanced and structured than the prisoners our imagination creates based on our superficial knowledge of their lives and conditions" (Rocha, 1994, p. 27).

We agree with Rocha (1994) that prisoner resistance is an important factor in the psychological well-being of people deprived of their liberty. Education can also promote psychological well-being because, even in prison, relationships tend to be less tense (DONEGÁ, 2006). In addition to teaching scientific concepts, education provides an environment where people can express themselves more freely.

Vygotsky (2015) argues that overcompensation may occur when faced with a deficiency. In agreement with Stern's statement, "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger" (Stern, 1923)², when humans are faced with difficulties, they can develop ways of reacting that help them overcome these challenges.

Furthermore, in agreement with Adler³, Vigotsky (2015) explains that personality development is directed toward the future. Thus, learning that occurred in a given social situation becomes insufficient when relating to the current reality. This implies learning in our behavior and ability to resolve the present situation.

We consider prisoner resistance to be a form of overcompensation, that is, a way in which a person strives beyond what they would do in everyday life to effectively and creatively resolve a situation.

Furthermore, Vigotsky's (2015) work indicates another conclusion: human development is future-oriented. Thus, when human beings use past learning, they do not become stuck in strategies that are no longer sufficient for the present situation.

Next, we will analyze how this tension influences the relationships between professors and students.

² In volume V, there is no reference to the work from which Vigotsky extracted the quote from STERN; only the following note appears: W. Stern, 1923, p. 145.

³ Volume V also does not include the complete reference for author Alfred Adler, only the following citation in the text itself: A. Adler, 1927.

The Influence of the Prison Context on Relations between Professors and Students in Youth and Adult Education

According to Scarfò, Cuellar, and Mendoza (2016), prison is a hidden curriculum that influences the organization of schools within prisons.

The hidden curriculum manifests itself in various ways: the limited time students have to study, the restricted access to didactic materials, and the relationships between professors and students.

According to Schúkina (1978), in the classroom, the personalities of students and professors interact through didactic strategies that aim to help students learn scientific concepts. Thus, students' and teachers' emotional balance, expectations, and abilities interfere with the teaching and learning processes. Each social context requires teachers to receive specific training to create didactic strategies that consider the social context in which these students participate and contribute to the formation of their personalities.

Psychological tensions experienced by people deprived of their liberty interfere with teaching and learning processes. Teachers cannot ignore the fact that these students have less opportunity to express their true selves. Therefore, collaborative work and authentic relationships between teachers and students can only occur in an environment that mitigates existing relationship tensions.

In interviews with professors who work in a school within a penal establishment in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Vieira (2008) analyzes how the need for human relations competes with the time allotted for teaching subjects. This competition occurs due to the need to talk and solve practical, everyday problems, such as calculating sentences (e.g., time served or sentence progression). It also occurs on days when the unit experiences a lot of tension and the students are not psychologically available to discuss issues apart from what they are experiencing at that moment. This competition for space occurs when professors must calculate sentences (time served, for example), or on days when the unit experiences a lot of tension and students are not

psychologically available to talk and think about issues besides what they are experiencing at that moment.

According to Vieira, the professors suggested solutions to these situations. One solution is to make time for conversation and dialogue, even if it causes the professor distress because they are not fully complying with the program.

Even though I know the specific characteristics of this clientele and that, the work is different, I feel torn and a little distressed when we are unable to continue with a project. This is especially true in my subject area, Portuguese Language, given the responsibility I have and the difficulties students have with writing and reading. So, I feel very distressed. As a professional, I know I am giving this group what they are looking for: attention and a space to talk and express their fears and problems. However, I expect a little more from myself in terms of the program. What I give is the bare minimum because if I give them space to talk, we have minimal time to work with the language. (Professor Simone, Portuguese Language) (Vieira, 2008, p. 95).

Another proposal is to transform the daily needs of students into lessons:

It's an unusual job here in prison; we adapt according to the situation. Generally, content creation is not functional because they often aren't ready for it, or it doesn't meet their immediate needs. They have many problems that they feel they can't overcome. They're in prison, they have many problems, they miss their families, and they can't focus on content-based learning. Eventually, they ask about something that interests them. Yesterday, for example, I spent an hour and a half calculating how long they would remain in prison. They were talking about it in class. I had work to do, so... They demanded too much of me. "Professor, teach us so we can see how long we're going to be here," they said. We spent the whole class practicing. I called each one to the chart to calculate their sentence based on my guidance. That's how we developed the theme of the day. (Professor Valdevino, Mathematics) (Vieira, 2008, p. 99).

The professors also indicated that to work as a teacher in a prison unit, it is necessary to maintain emotional balance: "I think that teachers who work

here have to be emotionally balanced; they have to be people who are comfortable with themselves because they deal with people who are not well, who are emotionally unstable.” (Professor Simone, Portuguese Language) (VIEIRA, 2008, p. 95). In addition, to shed prejudices and develop respect for human beings:

I think you need a lot of love to participate in certain activities. In prison schools, this love must be fundamental. It involves respect, affection, and overcoming the prejudices that society has. When you come here, it's more important to come with an open heart than with knowledge of your subject (Professor Valdevino, Mathematics) (Vieira, 2008, p. 92).

Due to circumstances that damage the psychological balance of students, professors have higher psychological expectations. To maintain relationships conducive to study that are collaborative, respectful, and trusting, professors must accommodate students' human relationship needs to earn their respect and be worthy of their trust.

Freire (1987) addresses the objectification of human relationships that occurs when we fail to engage in dialogue, treating others as objects — beings who only receive and are not considered people who think, understand their reality, and act on it. According to Freire, dialogic action consists of collaboration, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis.

Education based on dialogic action is aimed at learning in which human beings organize themselves to achieve a common goal. There is great respect for the learner's culture. In this way, dialogue takes place in horizontal relationships, where educators and learners recognize that they have knowledge and that no one knows everything. The opposite of this is anti-dialogical action, which divides to dominate and impose the demands of a group or a dominant individual.

What possibilities exist for developing collaborative relationships between students and professors in prison? Could prison schools be the antithesis of relationships based on mistrust, stereotyping, and annulling the

self? Could they foster human relationships that are more conducive to learning scientific knowledge?

Based on Rocha's (1994) concept of prisoner resistance, we can say that the prison population organizes collectively to protect against the fragmentation of the self. They also seek forms of communication that maintain their culture in prison life. However, depending on the rules of conduct imposed by prison leaders, the rules of coexistence among people in situations of freedom can also become tense, and even more so than the formal rules imposed by the institution. Thus, leaders' conduct among people deprived of their liberty can deviate from collaborative, genuine, and authentic relationships.

The strategies suggested by the professors interviewed by Vieira (2008) to promote psychological balance among teachers, such as facilitating conversations and addressing the daily challenges faced by students in the classroom, are undoubtedly effective in fostering a less tense and more collaborative learning environment.

In a study by Stecanela (2018) analyzing empirical studies of everyday life in basic education, the author found that a culture of complaint predominates, with professors and students complaining about each other. Furthermore, the democratic school present in the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (Brazil, 1996) has yet to be implemented.

The phenomenon of complaining observed by Stecanela (2018) does not occur in the same way in relationships between professors and students in prison contexts. Several studies, including those by Carvalho (2014), Mendes (2018), José (2019), Campos (2019), and Souza (2017), argue that the relationship between students and teachers should be based on respect and professional appreciation. Teachers report feeling more respected in the prison environment than in traditional schools, as evidenced by the following statement in one of the reports: "There is an advantage here: students in the prison system are calmer, a quality that is often lacking outside. They are more attentive here; they respect us much more." I find it strange to say this, but it's true" (Professor Rosane, History) (Vieira, 2008, p. 93).

Based on Leontiev (1978), personality develops through good educational systems, good conditions for human relations, and good material conditions. In prisons, we will not find good conditions in educational systems, nor adequate material conditions, but as human relations depend more on the people themselves, these can be improved to provide better conditions for human development.

Another aspect elucidated by Bozhovich (1972, 1985) for the proper development of personality is self-esteem. Thus, supporting students in completing school activities and valuing their efforts and learning are actions that contribute to a sense of self-esteem. Above all, it helps them believe that they can play other social roles besides committing crimes.

In the school environment, students should not be there just to obtain remission of their sentences through study, or to get out of their cells and have a different experience, talking to different people. One factor that can contribute to the development of collaborative relationships is the development of cognitive interest in studying. In other words, students should have a legitimate motivation to go to school to learn.

According to Schúkiná (1978), cognitive interest is related to the intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects of personality. In terms of the professor, it is important to note that enthusiasm for scientific knowledge, happiness in the profession, joy in students' learning, and didactic competence are all factors that contribute to students' cognitive development.

It is essential to help students find meaning in their studies in relation to their lives, professional development and community, and even while serving their sentence. Students who do not develop cognitive interest may be kind and have positive feelings about school, but if they are not personally engaged in school activities, they will not collaborate in their studies.

In summary, collaborative relationships can be developed when the study activity itself requires student collaboration. Vieira's research (2008) lucidly demonstrated the reality of teaching in prison, showing that students will not always be in the right psychological state for learning and that

professors will need to address latent issues that are not directly related to lesson content. Knowing how to handle these situations while maintaining didactic and scientific competence and encouraging student engagement through cognitive development can make education in prisons more meaningful for students.

In an environment where mistrust prevails, professors who act with sincerity and fairness can foster respect and encourage students to form more collaborative relationships. Sincerity in such an environment must be firm yet compassionate, so that students feel capable of learning and engaging with the world.

In his analysis of human development, Elkomin (1987) concluded that it occurs in terms of both human relationships and socially elaborate procedures. While there may be moments of greater development in one area or the other during adulthood, both aspects coexist and are involved in human development.

Therefore, concern for human relations must underpin all activities in prisons, particularly in schools and study programs. We cannot assume that people can be treated like robots or objects or that learning in school is developed in an objective, standardized way without involving emotional and volitional aspects.

Final Considerations

In this theoretical summary, we address studies that elucidate how human relationships occur in prisons from the perspective of individuals deprived of their liberty. We analyze the influence of how these relationships are organized on the implementation of youth and adult education in contexts of deprivation of liberty.

In this theoretical summary, we examine studies that shed light on how human relationships develop in prisons from the perspective of individuals deprived of their liberty. We also analyze how the organization of these relationships influences the implementation of youth and adult education in contexts of deprivation of liberty.

Therefore, when selecting topics for discussion, we leave other aspects aside. In this article, we have deliberately avoided addressing the concepts of the zone of proximal development and the development of higher mental functions to shed light on a topic that is less frequently addressed in scientific articles on Youth and Adult Education in contexts of deprivation of liberty: human relations. We encourage our readers to consider this alternative analytical focus.

Prisons are complex institutions that respond to equally complex social problems. This article does not claim that human relations are the only relevant issue for the implementation of youth and adult education in situations of deprivation of liberty. However, it is important to reflect on and encourage authentic, genuine, and cooperative human relations.

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