

CHOOSING AGAIN. DEVELOPING PERSONAL PROJECTS WITH YOUNG ADULTS DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM

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Abstract

This paper develops a proposal of guidance for young people between 18 and 25 years old about to be released from the prison units of the city of La Plata.

Using tools derived from the field of psychology together with strategies from other complementary disciplines, the project is aimed at providing tools that will enable these young people to outline a plan of life that will facilitate their social, personal and community re-integration. It aims to help these young people to challenge their detention conditions and can be aware of their social reality in the construction of an alternative life plan before being discharged. Our guidance plan takes into account their relational contexts to help evaluate the feasibility of projects to be developed individually, and it tries to have an impact on minimizing the inmates' socio-criminal vulnerability. We aim at the co-construction of life strategies that break with prejudices which derive from stigmatization. The project will probably contribute to the restoration of socially positive self-esteem, to increased awareness of potentialities that the experience of confinement has debased or distorted and to the redefinition of personal, family and social histories minimizing the chances of being involved in conflict with the law again.

Keywords: Guidance; Jails; Community reinsertion; life project.

Introduction

This paper is grounded on different program proposals, developed under the Vocational Guidance Centre of the Faculty of Psychology (UNLP), and aimed to address the issue of guidance with populations under conditions of high psychosocial vulnerability.

After these numerous programs, a project called "Choosing again: Developing personal projects with young adults deprived of freedom" was created. This project was approved and subsidized by the Center of Attention to the Community of that Fa-

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culty, and developed during the period August 2014 / June 2015. In 2016 it was again approved by the Extension Department of the UNLP, and it is currently in the process of implementation, in jails of the City of La Plata.

This project, like many others, is undergoing modifications. The interventions are adapted to youth reality in permanent modification as well as to changes in the penal institutions in which we work, and evaluations were performed during the first implementation of the project.

The direct beneficiaries of this project have had a history of structural poverty in a broad sense (economic poverty, family, belonging, opportunities, emotional, etc.), showing that there are not many possibilities of transformation without comprehensive and sustained approaches. It is necessary to include Guidance as a strategy to promote health and life projects.

The severity of the problems makes the intervention itself constitute a challenge. It aims to become a process that can be continued after discharge from jail, through follow-up actions and support. It is intended to strengthen inter-institutional relations with government agencies such as the "Patronato de Liberados", as they are requirements for the sustainability of the process as part of an extension project.

In the following pages, the theoretical framework of this project, as well as its objectives, strategies, activities and main results will be developed. Finally some reflections are presented and possible areas for future work in research and extension projects are outlined.

2. Theoretical framework

Guidance has been viewed from different theoretical conceptions throughout the history of its constitution. However, in recent decades an integral and comprehensive perspective behind many of its practices and theories of reference has prevailed.

In this paper, the Theoretical Operative Model in Guidance is our frame of reference (Gavilán, 2006), and we rely on the idea of Guidance as praxis.

In this long journey of revision and redefinition of the practices and theories of Guidance, the idea of complexity gives a strength to this Model, linking three concepts: axes, fields and knowledge, that give power and "increase the capacity of the guiding praxis" (Gavilán, 2006), conceptualizing orientation in a broad, comprehensive and complex way, allowing the opening to new developments and qualifications.

The Theoretical Operative Model in Guidance was built on theoretical and empirical research, and presents three main axes: process, prevention and social imaginary; as well as fields (health, education, employment and social policies) and knowledge (disciplinary, interdisciplinary and trans disciplinary), whose articulation can cope with the complexity of reality, and confirm "that nothing is disconnected from nothing to its resolution" (Gavilán, 2006).

The integration of axes, fields and knowledge suggests novel interventions that respond to the complexity. This is the case of the orientation prison inmates, whose beneficiaries are people in conflict with the law.

The “process” axis, suggests concrete ways in which people develop over time, and the various influences that groups, institutions, etc., have on the ways in which a person makes decisions or chooses a project. Guidance should go on throughout life, but there are special moments where subjects must choose, and because of their importance, they become more present in the individual or collective consciousness. That’s when we can clearly differentiate axis process levels: macro level, micro level and specific level.

On the one hand, the concept “Micro process” as a significant rupture on a continuum, allows us to think the prison exit as a key moment where Guidance can accompany young people in a process of “choosing again”, to opt for a different, healthy life project. For this purpose, we try to build tools that enable young people to trigger processes of reflection, and establish conditions of possibility for the development of life projects which maximize the possibilities of community reintegration after release.

On the other hand, the strength of the concept “prevention” lies in understanding it as the capacity of the human being and his social group to appropriate tools that are vital against the threat of different types of damage, creating and / or strengthening knowledge, attitudes, skills and values that help prevent it or reduce it (Gavilán, 2015). Orientation through its history has always been aware of this notion that makes us anticipate further or more serious difficulties. Prevention is a nodal concept in our reference model and is closely related to the concept of “process”.

Thinking and actions from a comprehensive prevention system which basically includes the field of health and education, will contribute to the implementation of strategies to reach across disciplines and professions to embrace this notion.

“Choosing again. Developing personal projects with young adults deprived of freedom” is aimed at a group of young inmates, many of whom have not been passed a sentence yet. These young people have a high degree of vulnerability (Oñativia & Di Nella, 2008). Psychosocial vulnerability can have multiple forms of expression, and in that sense may appear as weakness or helplessness to cope with changes, as well as internal weakness or insecurity. Prevention is understood, in the context of this proposal, as an asset to create conditions that promote better social reintegration process, after the prison release, resulting in a personal, family and community benefit.

“Social imaginary” is another mainstay of the Theoretical Operative Model. It has a guiding force, proven in our different Orientation programs. Analyzing social imaginary in every circumstance, means assessing what enables or prevents representations of the future, within communities, institutions or individuals with whom we work. In this case, the challenge is to act on these negative imaginary in young prison inmates.

Furthermore, Guidance is related with different “fields” included in the Theoretical Model (Health, Education, Employment and Social Policy). Including these fields is again a challenge for Guidance, its theories and intervention practices. Perhaps this

framework and its appropriation from the identity of counselors, can help to produce fewer fragmentations and decrease the level and intensity of political struggles for handling any of them. Each of concept is crossed by others. Again, the empirical and theoretical construction of this Model allows us to know what happens in each of these fields and apprehending it from different knowledge. The possibility of moving on interdisciplinary knowledge, means override the mechanism of the omnipotence of discipline and address problems in a contextualized and unfractionated way.

Finally, it is expected to address transdiscipline to integrate more systemically disciplines and actors through a common conceptual framework, seeking not only build explanations of reality as a whole, but as true foundations of a comprehensive praxis.

The notion of "fields", can justify a type of guiding intervention that includes addressing education, employment, health, and social policies, opening the possibility for young people to internalize and relate to these fundamental areas of knowledge and practices. Also, given the complexity of the subject, this proposal seeks to establish guidance from an interdisciplinary approach, including contributions from different areas of knowledge, in this case psychology and its specializations, social work and music therapy.

In conclusion, this Theoretical Model brings us closer to a new way of looking Guidance and a new way of being regarded by other disciplines. It gives us a more contextualized view of reality, considering the social, political, economic, cultural, educational and employment factors, from a perspective of the socio historical process.

3. Proposal

3.1. Background

Data from Buenos Aires Penitentiary Service for the year 2014 show that 96% of those detained in jails are male, and 27% of them are young adults between 18 and 24 years old (SNEEP, 2014).

If we focus on educational data, we note that of the total population, only 43% have complete primary level and only 5% have completed secondary school. Likewise, at the time of his arrest 85% were unemployed or did part-time jobs and 51% of the total stated that had no trade or profession at that time.

Also, if we compare these data with the type of crime, it is observed that more than half correspond to property crimes, theft and / or attempted theft.

The analysis of these data shows that the majority of young detainees in jails in Buenos Aires, come from contexts of poverty and marginalization, and that inequalities (social, educational and employment) lead to a circuit limited life chances. There is, in short, what is known as a prison circuit: incarceration is an not isolated event, but can be explained in terms of vulnerable life paths.

Also, most of these young people deprived of their freedom, lack a personal life project at the time of their release. In general, they pass the harsh daily reality guided

by a single desire / need / objective, which is to leave the place of confinement. There is an almost magical and idealized thinking in relation to those who are out of jail, however, the reference context of these young people is crossed by the same conditions and rights violations. In the absence of workspaces to guide reflection on the future it is likely that these young people will continue to travel roads that seem closed to new paths, and return to conflict with law.

The process of socio-community and family reintegration is a difficult process. The reasons are many, from extremely iatrogenic prison system, to the social and material conditions which become almost as destination (Crespi and Mikulic, 2014). They are hopeless with regard to the social imaginary that stigmatizes them and they are urged only by the need to be free again. Not having an adequate space to reflect on what it means to take care of their freedom, this vital circle is in many cases closed on itself.

Following the contributions of Chavez (2005) youth is marked by "the great NO". It has no existence as a total entity (but in transition, incomplete, neither child nor adult), and also their practices are not recognized, being called youth problem, gray youth, young deviant, youth tribe, being rebellious, delinquent, etc.

Some experience to break this circle is needed, opening the possibility of a different life project (that is never just personal) in these subjects, and promoting society to stop repeating the same diagnoses and circuits of exclusion for these young people.

At this point, the contribution of the discipline of Social Work, is invaluable for building institutional and community networks that enable young people to access "YES" areas, that is to say, spaces of possibility, learning, collective creation and recognition of community resources that enable them to approach an upward social mobility with the horizon to transform some of the situations that led to incarceration.

If we just consider it from the individual / personal perspective, although a life project accrues as hope, they can not achieve it alone. The family, the nearest community, friends, others that can be found again, need to be included in this process of thinking about this project of life.

Families and referents of the young have the potential to provide collective responses to these issues. However, it is necessary that professional and institutional support them to resignify meanings of imprisonment and become network of support for the realization of their projects (Greiser, 2012).

According to International Treaties (American Convention on Human Rights, Article 5, paragraph 6, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10, paragraph 3 and article 14 paragraph 4) and the Buenos Aires law (Articles 4, 5, 7 and 8 Law No. 12,256), the primary purpose of punishment is to foster the social reintegration of prisoners. Of course this philosophical-political principle of the law, should be held in a comprehensive manner and it is difficult to resolve because of the conditions in which inmates often live and return to their communities, probably stigmatized and condemned again. The identification process with the images that others have of them, if not addressed in turn, lead them to failure and to respond to requirements of the role.

Guidance has the crucial task in helping young people choose again who, what, how to be. Also, choose how and who to count on for this new election, hoping to regain a role that does not return them to the same place. Guidance as interdisciplinary practice, as a preventive strategy, as broad and comprehensive intervention -not only focused on the subject, but on the context of reference. It is a tool of enormous value that can work with programs and initiatives of similar spirit within the Servicio Penitenciario Bonaerense (SPB).

Precisely this project is carried out under the “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults” of the Headquarters of the SPB, which is implemented in some jails in the Province. This program includes three stages: Admission, Treatment and Citizenship Project, aimed at social inclusion. This program emphasizes life projects for definitive or temporary exit, through the design and plan of realistic and achievable goals and articulating in the case of convicted persons, with the Patronato de Liberados.

“A project for the future” is always a key idea in guiding processes (Müller, 2013). Project is to imagine where to go and also the possible way to do it. When those places to go do not exist in the vision of young people and even their families and community, no project will be possible and everyone’s suffering will persist.

It is in this scenario where the Guiding proposal is inserted, to problematize the individual, family and social identity; move stereotyped aspects that work by reducing the margins of autonomy; review the reality of their context; decide transformation movements. It is a contribution to challenge the reality of a highly vulnerable population sector.

3.2. Purposes

3.2.1. Overall Purposes

- Encourage young adults deprived of freedom, so they can build viable and healthy life projects, reducing their psychosocial vulnerability, expanding access to rights and strengthening autonomy.
- Build guiding strategies that are comprehensive and appropriate for prison inmates, from an interdisciplinary approach.

3.2.2. Specific purposes

- Promote recognition and problematization of personal reality, aiming to build viable alternatives for development and realization of life projects.
- Analyze the factors that can facilitate or hinder the possibility of developing a healthy and viable project after prison exit.
- Encourage the construction of spaces for self-recognition and recognition of others, from an active position.
- Mobilize relational and institutional strategies that result in a reduction in their socio-penal vulnerability.
- Promote awareness of different resources: education, work, sports, community, which can act as a support network for social re-integration.

- Accompany the families of young people in the process of release, to facilitate their constitution as subjects of rights.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. *Group device*: working in groups with young people deprived of their freedom, supposes, on the one hand, the position of not psychologizing a social issue, avoiding to consider the inmates as sick subjects, who suffer from personal problems that they have not been able to solve by themselves. On the other hand, it involves dealing with the logic of isolation and individualization characteristic of jail. The privileged methodology will be workshop, understood as a space and a time of communication, reflection and participatory creativity, where the value is the process and not the product. Workshops will be designed week by week, and will include different techniques and dynamics: music-therapy, games, psychodrama/ role-play, collage, poster making, among other, that contribute to the fulfillment of the purposes. The workshops will be coordinated by two professionals, accompanied by two observers and will be addressed to young inmates and their family referents. With those it is planned to hold a day of exchange, and reflection on personal, family and social variables that affect the construction of educational, work, social and personal projects

3.3.2. *Individual device*: operational clinical interview, conceived as a space for elaboration of the topics addressed in the workshops, and of personalized accompaniment and collaboration in the process of choosing future projects. Like the workshops, the interviews are focused on the Guiding problem, and on everything that contributes to clarifying and solving it. In addition to the material obtained verbally, the interviewer may select auxiliary techniques for psychological exploration, which will allow corroborating and expanding data regarding the personality of the interviewees, fantasies, fears, and perception of themselves and their future occupational project.

3.3.3. *Information gathering*: information will be grouped into four areas: education, employment, health and social policies. The survey will be conducted through interviews and online information sources. The data obtained will be systematized and organized in order to develop a database accessible to the inmates and their families, and to allow them to come into contact with key referents for an effective social re-integration.

3.4. Activities

3.4.1. First stage

Initial Team Training: due to the nature of the experience, it is a fundamental aspect of the project. It contemplates the constitution of two work teams as well as the theoretical reflection on the particularities of the enclosure context, the beneficiaries of the project, the conception of Guidance, and the interdisciplinary contribution. This training will be carried out by the project coordinators.

Dissemination, sensitization and presentation of the Project: experience tells us that it is a permanent process and that the realization and sustainability of the project

depends to a large extent on the collaboration and interaction with the institutional actors of the Penitentiary Service. It includes:

- Interviews with authorities of the “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults” of the Buenos Aires Penitentiary Service.
- Presentation interview with directors of each Penitentiary Units.
- Meeting with the technical and security teams of the “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults” in each of the prison units
- List of possible participants, made in conjunction with technical teams following the proposed selection criteria

3.4.2. Second stage

Training of process and supervision of the work team: they are carried out every fifteen days, with the whole extension team, and are planned by the coordinators of the project. They include:

- Meetings for workshop planning.
- Supervisory meetings, with the aim of accompanying the workshop teams and interviewers throughout the process.

Direct work with the interns participating in the Project:

- Inaugural day of presentation and registration: a workshop where the project is presented to the listed participants and a personal interview for the registration of those interested in participating. Design and implementation of this day is in charge of the entire interdisciplinary team of each of the penitentiary units.
- Educational and Occupational Guidance Workshops: 12 workshops with a weekly frequency. The focus of these workshops will be the reflection on the past, present and future, for the elaboration of personal, social, educational and employment projects. In each prison unit the workshops are coordinated by two Psychology professionals, accompanied by two participating observers (psychologists or social workers), who will be in charge of the chronicle of each meeting.
- Music Therapy Workshop: towards the middle of the process, an experience of music therapy is carried out, understanding that music and its dimensions, are of great importance as ways of access to emotions, feelings and memories in a more spontaneous and direct way than words, allowing the participants to access new material and explore their own resources and transformation potential by getting in touch with aspects of their history. The workshop is planned and executed by a music therapy professional, accompanied by two observers.
- Individual interviews: in charge of the interdisciplinary follow-up team, interviews begin after having created the group conditions of confidence and empathy necessary for them to start. They can be of different types according to the degree of personal and social vulnerability of each participant, starting from the evaluation shared by the members of the extension team and institu-

tional actors responsible for the “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults”. The individual interviews will aim to accompany the young people in a more personalized way throughout the Guiding process, deepening their different aspects and contributing to the clarification of personal projects.

- Closing day: The design and implementation of this day is carried out by the entire interdisciplinary team of each of the penitentiary units. Key references of the institution and family referrals are present on this day.

Work with the family referrals of the participants:

- Group meeting with family referrals: in charge of the interdisciplinary team, a group meeting will be held at the headquarters of the Vocational Guidance Centre of the Faculty of Psychology (UNLP), with relatives / referrals of young people who make a consent.
- Individual interviews with family referrals: Guiding interviews will be conducted with them in cases that are considered necessary.

Articulation with institutions and organizations: it is necessary to build a network of institutional support for the realization of planned life projects. This activity is carried out by the directors and coordinators of the project.

- Articulation with “Patronato de Liberados”: at the end of the workshop process, information will be provided so that the technical team of this institution can monitor the young participants who recover their freedom. Likewise, it will collaborate with information on access to scholarships and other resources for those discharged.
- Survey of social, employment, educational and health resources of the communities of origin of the participants: in charge of extension workers of the faculty of social work.
- Interview and agreements with references of health, education, work, and social policies areas at local, municipal and provincial level.
- Systematization of data and design of a graphic product with accessible information.

3.4.3. Third stage

Evaluation and elaboration of Final Report: carried out by the totality of the extension team with the collaboration of the leaders of the “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults” in each Penitentiary Unit.

3.5. Expected results

3.5.1. Directly:

- The release of prison should be carried out under better conditions, aiming for young people to deepen their knowledge of their own identity, abilities, interests, skills, values and desires. And that they can critically analyze their personal, educational, employment, family / bond and community possibilities, to modify the reality that led to jail.

- Increase the number of young people close to their release, who will be able to outline an alternative life project that will lead to new and different elections and recognize the need for their referrals as key accompanying actors for the viability of this project.
- Improve the level of satisfaction of those responsible for the “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults”
- Meetings with the “Patronato de Liberados”, for the follow-up and accompaniment of the released.

3.5.2. *Indirectly:*

- Increase knowledge about the effectiveness of interdisciplinary guiding strategies for young people in high level of inequity, psychosocial and socio-political vulnerability, with the objective of returning to life in freedom, reducing the possibility of new exclusions.
- Contribute to the training of human resources in extension, research and teaching, by consolidating an interdisciplinary team (Psychology, Social Work and Music Therapy), articulating previous experiences in university extension and promoting inter-learning.
- Motivation for the development of new interdisciplinary investigations, on contexts of confinement and its transit towards the liberation in conditions of greater equity.

3.6. **Strengths and obstacles**

Since the implementation in 2014, where 38 inmates participated, and the current development of the project, with 60 inmates, we can highlight as main strengths:

- From the institutional point of view: the solid relations established with the Penitentiary Units, and their most important institutional references: directors, “Assistance and Treatment program for Young Adults” authorities, and responsible for the care and custody of inmates.
- From the point of view of the extension team: their commitment and clarity regarding the objectives of the project, the involvement in the training process that allowed to reflect and work on each one of the workshops. Always bearing in mind that the workshops are part of an extension project, constituting a bridge between a vulnerable population and the University.
- From the point of view of relations with the inmates: a space was achieved where the word could flow and could make room for the expression of emotions, reflections and memories, in a respectful and cordial atmosphere. The young people were able to make known familiar situations and decisions that took them to jail. They reported shocking life histories, which were flowing as confidence grew between them and the members of the extension team. It was also an opportunity for them to learn about current issues such as information on different health, education, employment and social policies.

In relation to the weaknesses and obstacles from the perspective of the implementation of the project, we could say that they were minor. Acceptance of tasks, commitment to the meetings, disposition of the authorities of the Prison Units, permanent attempt to guarantee the activities as agreed, allowed the planned activities to be carried out.

However, although the intervention was successfully performed, it is still one-off and limited. All the necessary actions to return to a desired course that allows the inmates to be included in the social system, far exceed the possibilities of an extension project. Having lived through this Guiding experience, we cannot help thinking that it is impossible to achieve the desired goals if we do not work with the families and communities of reference of these young people. This is where problems are actually installed and where young people will return, with little or no possibility of modifying them individually. It is necessary to focus on systems of signification, social representations, formation and modification of habits and lifestyles. Many of these young people expressed their desire to “choose again”, “to do things well”, have another chance. However, these desires are decidedly unreachable if there is no articulated and intersectoral work, from a collective perspective, promoting participation, self-determination and health.

4. Final Thoughts

This Guiding intervention seeks to promote the creation of spaces for integral development that favor the educational, employment, personal and social reintegration of young adults deprived of freedom. Through the design and active management of viable and healthy life projects, including family referrals in this process and developing resources and community networks to accompany and sustain these projects. In this sense, the project “**Choosing again**” is the first approach from the Vocational Guidance Centre of the Faculty of Psychology to a population deprived of freedom. The purpose of contributing to the development of life projects for all subjects is necessary and extremely valuable, but it is insufficient if projects of this type are not integrated into other decisions that are sometimes political and also operational, without ignoring the complexity that this implies for the different jurisdictions (University / Penitentiary Service). Beyond this, the project constitutes an important antecedent in the subject of the Guidance in non-habitual contexts. This is an absolutely moving project for young professionals and advanced students interested in the field of Guidance and is an important contribution for young people deprived of freedom to reflect on the past (elections); the present (interests, motivations, desires, abilities, strengths, weaknesses) and the future (options at the time of discharge, including education and work).

Thinking ahead, it is estimated to continue the project, through its review and replication in the same prison units, from an increasingly comprehensive perspective. Likewise, it is estimated that a follow-up of the participants will be made after discharge.

Finally, it is estimated the planning and implementation of a Guiding project with similar characteristics, destined to young people protected by “Patronato de Liberados”, that would allow working with a population of similar characteristics but in freedom.