

PSYCHOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS: AN ACCOUNT OF EXPERIENCE WITH WORKSHOPS FOR ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT. Due to the needed interfaces between Psychology and Human Rights, this study intends to report and analyze, reflectively, an intervention in Human Rights Education with adolescents who took part in a social project of a city located in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre. As the methodological path chosen for the study, an account of experience with Human Rights Education workshops that took place during the months of May and June of 2017. The participants were 15 adolescents of different educational levels, with a mean age of 13.9 years, all of whom participated in a social project. The experience was reported in a Field Journal and analyzed through Minayo's Thematic Analysis methodology. According to the study's, challenges and contributions of Psychology in the development of Human Rights Education workshops with adolescents were reported. The importance of building the Human Rights Education workshops with the group was noticed, which allows the sharing and recognition of the participants' reality. Thus, the importance of addressing this topic along with adolescents, as well as the power in the contribution of Psychology to the articulation with Human Rights are highlighted.

Keywords: Human rights; psychology; adolescents.

PSICOLOGIA E DIREITOS HUMANOS: UM RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA SOBRE OFICINAS COM ADOLESCENTES

RESUMO. Diante das necessárias interfaces entre a psicologia e os direitos humanos, este estudo pretende relatar e analisar, reflexivamente, uma intervenção em educação em direitos humanos com adolescentes participantes de um projeto social de uma cidade situada na região metropolitana de Porto Alegre. O percurso metodológico escolhido para este estudo foi o relato de experiência de oficinas de educação em direitos humanos que ocorreram durante os meses de maio e junho de 2017. Os participantes foram 15 adolescentes de diferentes níveis de escolaridade, com idade média 13,9 anos, todos participantes de um projeto social. A experiência foi relatada em Diário de Campo e analisada pela metodologia da Análise temática de Minayo. Como resultado deste estudo, foram relatados os desafios e as contribuições da psicologia na construção de oficinas de educação em direitos humanos com adolescentes. Verificou-se a importância de construir as oficinas de educação em direitos humanos com o grupo, permitindo o compartilhamento e o reconhecimento da realidade dos participantes. Neste sentido, ressalta-se a importância de trabalhar esta temática com adolescentes, além da potência existente na contribuição da psicologia diante da articulação com os direitos humanos.

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Palavras-chave: Direitos humanos; psicologia; adolescentes.

PSICOLOGÍA Y DERECHOS HUMANOS: UN RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA SOBRE TALLERES CON ADOLESCENTES

RESUMEN. Delante de las necesarias interfaces entre la Psicología y los Derechos Humanos, este estudio pretende relatar y analizar, reflexivamente, una intervención en Educación en Derechos Humanos con adolescentes participantes de um proyecto social de una ciudad situada em la región metropolitana de Porto Alegre. El recorrido metodológico escogido para este estudio fue el relato de experiencia de talleres de Educación en Derechos Humanos que acontecieron durante los meses de mayo y junio de 2017. Los participantes fueron 15 adolescentes de diferentes grados de escolaridad, com edad media 13,9 años, todos participantes de um proyecto social. La experiencia fue relatada em Diario de Campo y analizada a través de la metodología de la Análisis Temática de Minayo. Como resultado de este estudio, fueron relatados los desafíos y las contribuciones de la psicología en la construcción de talleres de Educación en Derechos Humanos con adolescentes. Se verifico la importancia de construir los talleres de Educación en Derechos Humanos com el grupo, permitiendo la compatibilidad y El reconocimiento de la realidad de los participantes. En este sentido, se resalta la importancia de trabajar esta temática con adolescentes, además de la potencia existente em la contribución de la psicología frente de la articulación com los Derechos Humanos.

Palabras clave: Derechos humanos; psicologia; adolescentes.

Introduction

Psychology as a profession needs to pay more and more attention to Brazilian society, so that the economic reality of inequality, violence, social exclusion and rights violations is also the object of study and intervention by psychologists (Conselho Federal de Psicologia [CFP], 2005). According to a report issued by Anistia Internacional (2016), Brazil has experienced a period of setbacks with regard to human rights, going through a moment of loss of important rights conquered. According to the document, there were 60,000 homicides registered this year, the majority of the victims were young black men. This context of human rights violations implies problematizing the role and responsibility of psychology in the face of the reality of prejudice, inequality and violence, in which this portion of the population lives, daily. In view of this, the resolutions of the Psychologist Professional Code of Ethics stand out: "The psychologist will base his/her work on the respect and promotion of freedom, dignity, equality and integrity of the human being, supported by the values that underlie the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (CFP, 2005, p. 7).

Therefore, the resolutions of the code of ethics guide the training of psychologists positioned in defense of human dignity, equal opportunities and fair social relations (Bernardi, 2010). Despite this, when conducting a search for scientific research that relates the descriptors 'Psychology and Human Rights', in the BVSPSI database (Virtual Health

Library - Psychology Brazil) and, later, using the descriptors separately in the Scielo (Scientific Electronic Library Online) and PePsic (Electronic Psychology Journals) databases there was a drastic shortage of published material. In view of the scarcity of studies that relate the exercise of psychology with human rights and the social relevance of this theme, it is necessary to share practices that bring human rights and psychology closer together. Thus, this study was an experience report focusing on an intervention carried out during the professional training of the psychology program, which took place in a social project.

Possible paths to weave practice and theory

The practice this study is responsible for reporting is that of workshops on human rights education, which occurred during the months of May to June 2017, with a total of five weekly meetings. According to Spink, Menegon and Medrado (2014), during the workshops, the material is generated for analysis, at the same time that a space for symbolic exchanges is created, which enhance the group discussion regarding the proposed theme. Workshops were offered in a sports gym located in one of the neighborhoods (centers) of the city, being held in an annex of the gym where the social project classes take place.

The main objective of the social project, in which this professional internship was developed, is to provide social inclusion and promote the citizenship of children and adolescents in public schools, through sports. Social project classes take place twice a week, on alternate days, with each group comprising five classes distributed by age, with an average of 20 students per class. In addition, the aforementioned project is distributed by nuclei, encompassing five peripheral neighborhoods of one of the cities in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre. Thus, participants were 15 adolescents with different levels of school education, aged between 13 and 18 years (average of 13.9), all members of the social project, and the invitation to participate in an activity was extended to adolescents from just one of the chosen nucleus.

As a methodological instrument, we used the field diary to “[...] represent the procedures for analyzing the empirical material, the reflections and decisions in the conduct of the workshops” (Araújo et al., 2013, p. 54). Regarding the ethical aspects, it is noteworthy that the present study underwent the evaluation of the Ethics and Research Committee, Feevale University, receiving the due approval for execution, expressed in the opinion under 2.340.904.

Agreements and disagreements of workshops on human rights education: reports of an experience

On a group self-analysis, Barembritt (1996) describes that interventions in communities and organizations are carried out through joint work, in a horizontal relationship with the group, which must occur in a parallel movement where the understanding of what one wants to change, to speak, or not, is elaborated in the heterogeneous core of the interested group. The study by Barembritt (1996) reveals the initial impasse of my interventions with adolescents, about my anxieties about my role in that group and how it would happen in practice, according to this report: “The first moment of the group was a little

tense, I was afraid of the students not being interested in the subject, or else not participating” (Diário de Campo, 2017).

In the initial moments, uncertainties about the proposal’s adherence became the main concerns. However, we forget that, after all, we really must adhere to the proposal. In order to create a group with teenagers, it is necessary to allow themselves to reinvent themselves, to have some flexibility, to equip themselves with materials, to study various subjects, to master the techniques and, at the same time, to recognize that if everything goes as expected, we will only be the supporting actors and not the main actors. Coordinating a group means oscillating places, it means allowing oneself to be redirected and understanding that the bond is built in this exchange of roles. It is having the feeling of observing that the group that ‘works’ is the one that moves through questions, that does not end with ready answers, but that is always open to new constructions.

However, as Pichón-Riviére (1998) mentions, for a group to exist, a set of people with a common goal is not enough, the participants must be part of a dynamic structure called a bond. Thus, although we have already been inserted in that context for a few months, the bond with the participants was gradually built up. Thus, the first meeting, on May 15, 2017, was, above all, a moment of getting closer to the group, talking about the proposal and deciding on the topics to be worked on. In this first meeting, the participants talked about their expectations and, mainly, about their questions regarding the theme. In this moment of mutual involvement with the theme, we finally started to become a group. The participants told us that they did not really understand what human rights were, I explained that we would build this together.

On May 29, the second group meeting took place. Although we were in a small number of people, due to rain and bad weather, the participants were involved in the proposed tasks. In this meeting, we worked with a video and newspaper and internet reports, as suggested by them, in the previous meeting. Gradually, my role in the group became only to offer subsidies that would enable the participation of those involved in all stages, ensuring the fulfillment of the objectives proposed by them (Toledo & Jacobi, 2013). So, I took a large screen and a projector, with the intention of watching a video on human rights.

The proposed video briefly contextualized the history of human rights and the main rights established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The introduction of the subject, through the video, aroused the curiosity and the approximation of the participants with the theme, besides allowing the group to recognize several types of rights violations. In this way, participants commented on the violations that occur in the world, such as the wars in Syria and on children who are hungry in other countries, such as in Africa. The examples that the participants brought to the debate referred, in most cases, to violations that occurred far from the reality in which they found themselves, as if they could not recognize what was happening in their own context. Martín-Baró (1996) mentions this characteristic that is very common in Latin American populations, defining it as a condition of social alienation. According to the author, this condition keeps the popular majorities dehumanized, alienated in their conscience and blocked from the development of their historical identity, responding to a position of inertia before their realities.

Therefore, I took advantage of the discussion that had been established in the group and delivered some reports and some articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which I had taken to deepen the discussion. The headlines reported violations that were occurring in our region, such as cases of gender violence, violence against refugees and migrants, as well as cases of slave-like work, school-less and malnourished children. They

pasted the reports alongside the articles of the Declaration of Human Rights, in an attempt to recognize which rights were being violated.

In addition, this activity allowed participants to reflect on their own reality and, gradually, the group started to make their own self-analysis, becoming protagonists of their own problems, demands and enunciating their own vocabulary that allowed them to show their knowledge about their own life (Barembritt, 1996). When visualizing the cases that were happening in the region, they recognized situations that occurred with their friends, neighbors and family. At each meeting, I understood a little more about the reality of the group and together we experienced moments of collective learning, generating lessons for everyone involved. In this way, I realized that my main concern should be to guarantee everyone's participation in the decision-making process on the issues that interest them. After all, the groups were not simply a space for popular consultation, but rather, a moment for the subjects' involvement in the process of reflection, analysis of reality, production of knowledge and facing problems (Toledo & Jacobi, 2013).

On June 5, 2017, the third meeting with the group took place, and the participants shared many situations that occurred in the school and family environment, talked about gender and racial prejudice, among others. Furthermore, they wanted to understand why people do not respect them, even though they know that human rights exist. Violations that the participants commented on happened at school and at all hierarchical levels, including among them.

Participants started to understand about the rights they had and to question the way they were treated in their contexts. They commented that, because they understood more about rights, they could say anything they wanted, because they had 'freedom of expression'. I noticed that the group positioned itself as if they were only the violated, and never considered the possibility of also exercising the violation, even if they were disrespecting the other. At this moment, it became necessary to reflect on what duties are, reflecting that every right is linked to a duty and that, while a right is being fulfilled (or violated), a duty is also being fulfilled (or violated).

With this scenario of doubts and annoyances, I tried to propose to the group a dynamic that would allow generating more reflections, which would suggest rethinking the actions of each participant, whether in the context of the group or in the other places where they were inserted. In spite of this, thinking about the activities that would be proposed was not a simple matter, for each meeting that the group lived it was necessary to "[...] foresee a dynamic taking into account the life experience of the subjects involved in the educational process" (Candau, 1999, p. 18).

Therefore, analyzing the moment the group was experiencing, I realized the need to reflect on the guarantee rights of the other and not only the rights in the individualistic scope. In this sense, it was necessary to reflect with the group the following question: recognizing yourself as a citizen of rights also implies recognizing the other as a citizen of rights. And that was how the dynamic that was named by the group emerged as the 'Dynamics of Empathy', which was proposed, due to the frequent appeal of situations of violation (such as prejudice and violence) carried out by the group members themselves, in the school environment, in addition to including each other's responsibility in promoting rights. In this activity, called 'Dynamics of Empathy', we asked everyone to sit in a circle and each member should write, on a piece of paper, something they would like the right-wing colleague to present to everyone in the group (such as singing a song, dancing, imitating something). As

soon as everyone finished their writing, we revealed to the group that, in fact, who should do the action would be the person who wrote it.

At the end, the participants reacted as follows: “It was really cool, it shows that we shouldn’t do for others what we don’t want for ourselves. Like the jokes, if people want to be with girls or boys, what do others have to do with it?” (Diário de Campo, 2017). And another participant added:

Empathy means putting ourselves in the other’s shoes, right! If everyone did that, the world would be so good. Come on! Just take care of your life. Why do you have to be in trouble if the person has another color, or likes boys and girls and such?! (Diário de Campo, 2017).

The environment of trust that was established during the meetings allowed the participants to bring to the groupsituations of violations in the school context, such as violence between teachers and students. The group always ended up becoming a space for sharing situations that occurred at school. Gradually, we realized how important the relationships between colleagues and teachers were for them.

Given this, it is observed that the school has become the main socializing institution for young people, being one of the only places where adolescents have the possibility to interact as equal in rights, that is, a place of continuous collective coexistence (Secretaria de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República, 2013). School became the main scenario brought by the participants, being the place where adolescents spent most of their time and where they formed friendships, also depositing their dreams and frustrations.

So, I was interested in knowing the reality of those young people and, mainly, that the group talked about their reality. However, at the same time that they told their experiences, I wondered what could be done, and how this reality could change. My colleague and I did not have all the answers and solutions as the participants expected and, at times, this left me unhappy. I was confronted with my own reality, I realized how much I learned to walk guided by models, by ‘competent’ speeches/practices as if I could be the holder of all ‘truths’ (Coimbra, 2000), I wanted to provide solutions for each situation revealed. And at that moment, I did not speak in a neutral way, but implied with the strength of the possible intervention that comes from organized social movements, the importance of the collective and student unions in schools.

However, offering a space to build workshops on human rights education is about experiencing constant challenges. The challenges emerge both from the breadth of the theme human rights, which requires knowledge about the various axes of discussions, and from the possibility of those involved to rethink their attitudes and, mainly, because they perceive themselves in situations of violations. For Martín-Baró (1996), this process of raising awareness of reality should be the primary horizon of psychology, as awareness allows people to come to have a new knowledge about their reality and about their social identity. According to the author, it is necessary that people assume their destiny, recognize their own lives and start to “[...] reach critical knowledge about themselves, about their world and their insertion in this world [...]”, as well as discover the potential for transformation that they have about their own reality (Martín-Baró, 1996, p. 17). In this sense, Rêses and Costa (2015) recall that human rights are also a public policy in which the degree of popular participation directly influences the visibility and effectiveness of its enforcement. In this way, the importance of popular participation in the defense of rights is reaffirmed by the prevalence of some paradoxical crossings and a low perception of human rights, which still

directly interferes with the strength that human rights have as an instrument that affirms, guides and expresses desires of the popular sectors (Carbonari, 2012)

It was in this context that our fourth meeting took place, on June 12, 2017. This meeting became a space for the living exercise of citizenship and the promotion of human rights, becoming a space, again, for denunciation and action planning. For Candau (1999), the workshops act as a privileged methodological strategy, as they become a space for the collective construction of knowledge, analysis of reality, confrontation and exchange of experiences and, above all, the actual exercise of human rights. Thus, we started the meeting by asking how the participants were doing and how they had spent the previous week, thus, new demands for working with the group soon emerged:

The participant commented that her teacher was complaining about her salaries and the students' disrespect and, at this moment, she made a suggestion to the teacher: "Teacher, so why don't we occupy the school, we can help teachers in strikes, fighting for rights?" (Diário de Campo, 2017).

The teenager sadly brought to the group, with sadness, the teacher's neglect and disrespect towards her placement. The participant's speech revealed a series of violations that were commented on by the other group participants. In this way, despite having organized two activities for this meeting, this discussion lasted almost the entire time available. This situation points to the importance of having flexibility when working with groups. After all, the activities did not always go as planned and, even so, it did not mean that the meeting had no effect. I realized that it was necessary to follow the demands of the group. It is necessary to observe the group and to feel what the participants want in each meeting, being necessary to plan and, at the same time, to know how to give up closed itineraries. Bottoni and Raupp (2014) mention, in their account of the experience of an intervention in a public mental health service, the importance of maintaining horizontality with the collective, not arriving with a ready knowledge about what the group needs.

So, during the last few minutes, we suggest working with posters. In the dynamics with the poster, we asked the participants to write, on one side, the rights violations that they identified in their daily lives and, on the other side, some actions that could be taken in the face of the violations that they had identified. This activity offered participants a space to place their own creations with regard to actions that could be carried out in the context in which they live.

In this way, workshops contributed so much to the recognition of the reality of the place where they lived, from which they build their worldview, as it stimulated their insertion in society, as agents of transformation. After all, education in human rights aims to form a citizen consciousness, develop participation and collective construction, seeks to strengthen the bonds of subjects so that they can manage actions to promote and defend human rights (Bock, 2014). According to this case that the participants brought:

At school there is a girl who is black and has vitiligo and people make fun of her. I do not understand this. I think she's beautiful, I always tell her. I think people are jealous of her because she is colorful, and they wanted to have two colors as she does. She is so beautiful that she looks like she was painted, she is a doll. I think an action is respect. I think we need to talk to others about prejudice (Diário de Campo, 2017).

Consequently, it was time to finalize the meetings and, on June 19, 2017, the fifth and last meeting with the group took place. For the outcome, we held a brief conversation with students about the emergence of the school, talking about the movements that fought for

public education, about the importance they have in guaranteeing education and we applied the latest questionnaires. "At the end of this group, I left the gym with feelings similar to what I started. I left the gym with the certainty that this work was worth it, but that there is still a lot to be done" (Diário de Campo, 2017).

Thus, I ended this group with many questions and reflections. I realized that although the workshops achieved their purpose of promoting an education in human rights, through the themes discussed, spaces for discussions, reflections, and the exercise of citizenship, there is no formula to make it work. So, I learned to question what a 'group that works' is. I learned to get rid of patterns, and that nobody knows more about their reality than the subject inserted in it. I learned, together with the group, to remain open to the power of the instituting (Baremblytt, 1996).

Final considerations

This study contributed to the reflection of the practices of psychology as a profession socially committed and active in public policies. It was noticed, through this debate, the need to develop the concept of human rights among psychologists, teachers and professionals in other areas, and it is necessary to offer visibility to the work and training experiences that include the interfaces between psychology and human rights (Bock, 2014). It was noted that it is necessary to build a psychology that considers the "[...] importance and power of citizen participation in building democratic conditions of existence" (Silva & Carvalhães, 2016, p. 251). Furthermore, it is necessary to look at the 'doing of psychology', for young people, for communities, for everything that is human, in the sense of experiencing, reaffirming and promoting the rights and the different ways of existing. It is necessary to allow oneself to reinvent oneself, to move wherever there is life, trying to make it, little by little, more dignified.

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