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Perception of the Teaching-Learning Process in students from high-risk schools or contexts

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. The Reform Institution is a reality that our professional practice has done little to analyze. We feel, therefore, that there is no basis to assume penal terms must necessarily eliminate or impede educational practices in these schools. In this study we seek to comprehend processes involved in teaching-learning in reform schools for minors.

Method. The sample was composed of a total of 15 students from a Reform School for Minors. We collected data using scales for the Interactive Evaluation of the Teaching-Learning Process (IETLP), our purpose being to lay the foundation for future intervention programs of a preventive nature.

Results. Students in general have a better perception of the teaching process than of the learning process. They do not carry out any plan in order to improve the learning process, and they show dissatisfaction with its results.

Discussion. Results offer relevant information for understanding how teaching-learning processes are produced, a starting place for making decisions towards preventing absenteeism and school failure in Reform minors.

Keywords: juvenile delinquents, absenteeism, school failure, motivation, special educational needs, sociocultural deprivation

Introduction

In the socio-family framework, multiple employment and women's entry into the workplace have given rise to a lack of communication and of adequate models; additionally, other variables such as drug addiction, unemployment, and delinquency are also found. All this contributes towards producing a type of marginal, alienated youngster who is provoked to frustration and aggressiveness by the school system--a system centered on the teacher, educational content items and their memorization. Eventually the situation leads to school drop-out.

These minors and young adults, who have lacked necessary stability during their growth years, are drawn to living in the immediate present, without the critical capacity or sufficient emotional distance to be able to understand or to assess their own past, or to have more than a sketchy idea of any future. They seem to be more dependent on the immediate situation, trying to get the most gratifications in the least possible time.

Before outlining the profile of a delinquent minor, we must keep in mind that, as adolescents, they show characteristics pertaining to their development stage, a period where needs for independence and rebellion against the established system emerge, where everything is questioned, where rules are interpreted as an imposition and coercion, where some values are being strengthened, and others questioned. One can say that the minor is already in conflict with his own self.

Robert Ross (1988) states that characteristics of the outcast or the delinquent are as follows: impulsivity, externality, concrete and abstract thought, cognitive rigidity, cognitive resolution of interpersonal problems, egocentrism, values, and critical reasoning. His research reveals that many delinquents show developmental delays in acquisition of various skills which are essential for social adaptation. Cognitive deficits are those of social or interpersonal reasoning, putting the individual at an academic, vocational and social disadvantage, and making him more vulnerable to criminological influences.

Cohen's subculture theory (1955) supposes that many adolescents cannot compete with their peers if they follow typical middle class criteria of high achievement. Faced with academic, economic and cultural difficulties, they look for a reference group that offers opposite values to the usual ones, and that allows them to compensate for these differences. The theory of social learning has illustrated how aggressive and deviant behaviors are transmitted via vicarious learning processes.

Among risk factors from problematic social behavior found in the social context, Moraleda (1995) focuses on the school, classmates and television. Studies have been performed regarding the relationship between the classroom social structure, socio-psychological relationships in play between teacher and students, and the students' social behavior. One constant finding has been that the teacher's use of punishment and negative reinforcement as primary control techniques produces similar effects of anxiety, coercion and counter-aggression.

After performing an analysis of the historical evolution of educational treatment or institutional intervention models, we find that generally speaking, intervention has fallen into four models: positivist or correctionalist model, welfare model, justice in responsibility model, and justice in amends models. A bibliography search did not uncover any research on teaching-learning processes in these institutions.

Some aspects characteristic of confinement of delinquent minors in the last decade of the twentieth century are as follows: construction of small schools as compared to previous macro-boarding schools, separating populations needing protection from those needing reform (traditionally housed in the same schools), personalized work with minors, the emergence of new professionals to address this population (delegates for the care of minors, teachers and social workers, etc.), together with a significant effort in re-insertion and mainstreaming. From this historical perspective, we are in initial stages of a series of processes yet to be described and developed with higher quality, of experiences yet to be validated, extended and generalized before their authentic transforming role can be recognized socially.

For all these reasons, in the daily practice of educational duties at Reform schools, there is concern about understanding effective mechanisms and techniques through which learning and

behavioral changes are produced. There is concern about learnings that give access to meanings and to the construction of knowledge. They are aware that, depending on how the teaching-learning process is produced during the short time involved in a judicial sentence, there may be an opportunity, for those minors capable of social integration, to correct the maladjustments that have been produced along the way in their teaching-learning process at school. We feel that generally speaking, the principle of "teaching and learning to learn", promoted by the Educational Reform of 1990¹, has not been taken on by the teachers, or consequently, by the students.

We start from the idea that the learning process can and must be influenced by the teaching process. Thus, the role played by elements making up the educational system must be analyzed: why and for what end do we teach, what is to be learned, how and when to teach and to learn. Evaluating the learning process together with the teaching process at the Reform institution will help us know what essential aspects of the teaching process most decisively influence the learning process. This way changes and adjustments can be made which enhance and promote learning, both during the teaching process, as well as in the students' manner of learning.

We must keep in mind influences that accompany any approach to intervention processes: school failure, socio-family characteristics, the person's own psychological profile, and the context around his or her condition as a law-breaking individual, involved in a criminal path and therefore in social conflict. At the same time, we are aware that for the population addressed in Reform Institutions, it is probably the only moment, when deprived of their freedom, that educational programs can be applied to them, due to their rejection of school and resulting absence from the classroom.

Our aim is to analyze whether the intervention is effective, keeping in mind two sides of minors with a profile of delinquency: (1) the image and assessment that they as subjects form regarding themselves (self-concept), attributional styles they adopt, their psychological profile, expectations and goals they pursue, their sociocultural context--all closely related variables, and (2) all aspects related to the school context, their ideas about what it means to teach and to learn, how

¹ *Translator's Note: LOGSE, the General Law for Ordering the Educational System, is a national educational reform implemented in Spain as of 1990.*

they plan their work, their degree of satisfaction in the design of the teaching-learning process being offered them, how they are being helped to develop cognitively, with what procedures, techniques and strategies.

Currently, no unique general theory has been outlined which would encompass conceptually and theoretically the duties of these institutions and which would give connection and coherency to space and time conditions of daily life there. Schools should foment more social education, promoting a society that educates, and education that helps to prevent, compensate and rechannel the difficulty, exclusion or social conflict of groups and their members.

Objective

Keeping this panorama in mind, we set out to perform an exploratory study of how processes involved in teaching-learning at Reform Schools are unfolding in practice. We analyze variables involved in these processes, thus enabling us to draw out conclusions from which to base future educational intervention programs of a preventive nature.

Method

Subjects

In order to meet our objective, we used a total of 15 students (offending minors) from two Reform Schools, of which one is public, and the other contracted from the private sector.

Materials

We selected scales for the Interactive Evaluation of the Teaching-Learning Process (IETLP) (De la Fuente and Martínez, in press). This set is made up of eight self-reporting instruments, from which we selected the four that address students:

a) *Scale 2. Scale for the student's evaluation of conceptions and planning (design) of the teaching-learning process.* There are two subscales: *B.1. Conceptions* (30 items) and *B.2. Planning* (6 items).

b) *Scale 4. Scale for the student's evaluation of the teaching process in progress.* There are three subscales: *D.1* Teacher's general behavior (33 items); *D.2* Evaluation strategies (23 items) and *D.3* Activities for regulating learning (15 items).

c) *Scale 6. EDP-A. Scale for the student's evaluation of the learning process in progress.* There are six subscales: *F.1* General learning behavior (22 items); *F.2* Cognitive strategies during learning (27 items); *F.3* Learning control strategies (11 items); *F.4* Support strategies for classroom learning (13 items); *F.5* Learning style during study (20 items) and *F.6* Assessment of learning strategies (14 items).

d) *Scale 8. Scale for the student's evaluation of the product of the teaching and learning process.* There are two subscales: *H.1* Satisfaction with the teaching process that your teacher used (4 items) and *H.2* Satisfaction with the learning process I have undertaken (13 items).

Design

The research design used in this study was quasi-experimental, of a descriptive and correlational type. Independent variables were manipulated by selection.

Procedure

The questionnaires described above were applied to the students on two occasions. They were applied to students individually during classtime or scheduled workshops, depending on the predisposition towards completing them. Subject participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality of data were assured at all times.

Statistical analyses

The descriptive analysis was carried out based on results obtained in percentages, as well as in measures of general tendency and of dispersion. Association analysis was performed using

Pearson's Correlation test (two halves). Analyses were done using the statistical software SPSS (1999); version 9.0.

Results

Descriptive

First, we present the most significant percentage results from answers to questionnaire items. In order to facilitate interpretation, values are grouped into categories of strongly disagree/disagree, unsure, and agree/strongly agree, and results are grouped into four sections.

The student's conceptions and planning of the T-L process (n=15 from the Reform School)

A significant result was obtained in 15 of the 36 items (see Table 1). Generally speaking, we find that a majority of students think the idea of teaching corresponds to "creating situations that encourage the student's construction of knowledge". Approximately half the students understand that learning is something more than memorizing content items, and conceive of learning as putting into play strategies; there is a high level of agreement as to the need to develop a plan for work and for joint reflection between teachers and students in the classroom. The students agree more strongly that teaching is doing activities that help the student; they disagree with the statement that learning is saying content items well and performing well on exams. For the most part, they answer that learning is understanding and not memorizing.

Table 1. Sum of percentages pertaining to conceptions and planning (student's perception).

<i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</i>	SD/D	U	A/SA
2. Teaching is doing activities with the students so that they learn the material.	6.7	13.3	80.0
6. Learning is being able to say the material which the teacher has explained.	86.7	6.7	6.7
8. Learning is knowing a lot of things.	0.0	13.3	86.7
9. Learning is understanding what is being studied.	0.0	13.3	86.7
11. Learning is knowing how to use what you have studied in other subjects and in life.	6.7	0.0	93.3

To what extent do you think that the following factors influence the students' learning?

15. When doing activities, they think about how to learn to do them better:	13.3	6.7	80.0
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at the beginning of each activity, during the activity, and after finishing it.			
17. Learning strategies	6.7	13.3	80.0
18. The way the teachers teach	6.7	6.7	86.7

What aspects of teaching do you think most encourage the students' learning?

19. Adapting the teacher's way of teaching to the students' way of learning	6.7	6.7	86.7
22. Improving teacher-student communication	0.0	13.3	86.7

I think that in order to know how to learn by yourself:

26. Before doing a learning activity, the student should be shown how to make a work plan.	14.3	7.1	78.6
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What situations are most effective for learning?

30. Teachers and students should be encouraged to think and reflect together in the classroom.	0.0	6.7	93.3
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PART B. PLANNING ONE'S LEARNING

When I'm going to learn a lesson or a topic, I plan how to do the following:

33. To understand the different types of material that I have to learn.	6.7	6.7	86.7
35. To use different ways of learning in order to learn better.	13.3	6.7	80.0
36. Evaluate my learning.	13.3	0.0	86.0

Students do not seem to associate that procedures should be taught in a general manner and independent from each subject; however, they mark a high level of agreement with the importance of making a work plan, that procedures be taught, and that joint reflection between students and teachers be encouraged.

Student's evaluation of the teaching process in progress (n=15).

Of the 71 items in this scale, only 10 obtained a high percentage in their answers (see Table 2). By way of interpretation, “the what to teach and learn” is focused only on being clear and orderly in explanations. As for “how to teach and learn”, the most agreement was found in the teacher's taking time to clarify students' doubts. Regarding use of strategies to regulate learning, students show clearly that they hardly use regulating strategies, they do not reflect on they way they learn; however, clear, realistic learning goals are helpful to the them. They rate with a high level of

agreement the importance of knowing why and for what purpose the objectives and content items must be learned.

Table 2. Sum of percentages pertaining to the teaching process in progress (student's perception).

1) GENERAL TEACHER BEHAVIOR:

Why / for what purpose do we teach-learn:

	SD/D	U	A/SA
1. At the beginning of each topic or lesson, s/he explains why we are going to learn this material.	6.7	13.3	80.0
4. The teacher explains the objectives of the activities we are going to carry out.	20.0	0.0	80.0

What to teach-learn:

9. The teacher indicates which are the most important content items to be learned in each topic or lesson.	6.7	6.7	86.7
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How to teach-learn:

13. The teacher is concerned that students feel comfortable in class.	6.7	13.3	80.0
14. The teacher is clear and orderly in his/her explanations.	6.7	13.3	80.0
19. The teacher allows us to speak in class about how we are learning.	0.0	6.7	93.3
20. The teacher takes time to clarify our doubts.	0.0	6.7	93.3
21. The teacher helps with correcciones.	6.7	13.3	80.0

3) ACTIVITIES FOR REGULATING LEARNING:

When we are learning, the teacher ...

61. Helps us set clear, realistic learning goals.	6.7	13.3	80.0
62. Works with us on skills that enable us to review and modify our learning goals.	6.7	13.3	80.0

Student's evaluation of the learning process in progress (n=15).

Of the 108 items in this scale, only 6 receive a high score (see Table 3). As for general classroom learning behavior addressing *why / for what purpose do we learn*, results underscore the

students' interest in knowing the importance of what is to be learned. They do not give relevant scores for why an activity is going to be carried out, nor to objectives for better learning. In the *when to learn*, we note little agreement in carrying out a work plan for each topic or lesson. In referring to evaluation of learning, there is not a high level of agreement for any item; most notable is evaluation of what has been learned after finishing the topics.

Cognitive strategies during classroom learning are not used in any habitual or systematic way. Control strategies for learning are used, to a greater degree in the students than in the teachers. An assessment of learning strategies highlights for the most part underlining, and with lesser agreement, making summaries and reading a topic several times. Students give higher ratings to the importance of learning specific content items; it would seem they have a more practical view of learning. They want to know the importance and the why of learning specific material. In control strategies for learning, students admit that they do not look for problem solutions by themselves. As for support strategies for classroom learning, students recognize that they find it difficult to sit down and carry out an activity, they are easily distracted, they do not make much effort, and do not feel satisfied when they learn something new.

Table 3. Sum of percentages pertaining to the learning process in progress (student's perception).

1) GENERAL BEHAVIOR IN CLASSROOM LEARNING

Why / for what purpose do we learn:

	SD/D	U	A/SA
13. I ask for help from the teacher when I don't know what to do.	6.7	93.3	0.0
14. I realize when I have learning problems and ask for help to solve them.	6.7	13.3	80.0

2) COGNITIVE STRATEGIES DURING CLASSROOM LEARNING

In general, I do the following when learning this subject:

31. I usually underline ideas or words that I want to stand out in the text.	13.3	6.7	80.0
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4) SUPPORT STRATEGIES FOR CLASSROOM LEARNING

66. I think that if I make an effort, generally speaking, I can learn what I want to.	20.0	80.0	0.0
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5) LEARNING STYLE DURING STUDY

93. I like to consider different ideas from those presented in the book or by the teacher.	6.7	13.3	80.0
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6) ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING STRATEGIES

How important to you are the following study techniques?

95. Underlining.	13.3	86.7	0.0
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Student's satisfaction with the product of teaching and learning (n=15)

Out of 17 items in the scale, only one was significant (see Table 4). Results show a high degree of satisfaction with the learning process that the teacher has developed, with high ratings for teacher's motivation and interest in teaching. A significant 80% are satisfied with how the learning process is being carried out.

From results we gather that the students are more satisfied with the teaching process than with the learning process. The most highly valued aspects are that the students develop their learning as persons, they feel satisfaction with how they have learned and have interest in learning. Students report that the teachers convey enthusiasm and interest in what they are teaching.

Table 4. Scale for the evaluation of the product of teaching and learning (student's perception)

PART B. SATISFACTION WITH THE LEARNING PROCESS I HAVE UNDERTAKEN

5. I am satisfied with how I have learned.	13.3	6.7	80.0
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Correlational results from the total scales

Results from the data confirm our proposed hypothesis that "the conception of the TL process will be associated with the teaching process in progress"; this is fulfilled with a significant correlation ($r=.62$, $p<.02$). The second hypothesis is not fulfilled, having proposed that "the students' perception of the teaching process will be directly associated with their perception of the learning process". The third hypothesis, stating that "the degree of satisfaction with the learning process will be associated with satisfaction in the teaching-learning process" is fulfilled significantly

($r=.64$, $p<.01$). Also significant was that satisfaction with the learning process is directly related to the student's manner of learning.

Table 5. Correlations between the four scales (n=15)

	Scale 2. TOTAL	Scale 4. TOTAL	Scale 6. TOTAL	Scale 8. TOTAL
Scale 2. TOTAL Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral) N				
Scale 4. TOTAL Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral) N	.628* .022 15			
Scale 6. TOTAL Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral) N	.093 .761 15	.215 .442 15		
Scale 8. TOTAL Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral) N	.014 .885 15	.290 .294 15	.643** .010 15	

Scale 2.Total: Conceptions about the teaching-learning process

Scale 4.Total: Teaching process in progress

Scale 6.Total: Learning process in progress

Scale 8.Total: Satisfaction with the teaching-learning process

Correlational results of the subscales

Results from the subscales contribute more specific data, not reflected in the total scales; they yield significant indices and corroborate our first hypothesis. That is, the higher the score for the teacher's general behavior, the higher the scores for conceptions and planning of the teaching-learning process.

Table 6. Correlations between the different subscales

		B1TOT	B2TOT	D1TOT	D2TOT	D3TOT	F1TOT	F2TOT	F3TOT	F4TOT	F5TOT	F6TOT	H1TOT	H2TOT
B1TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N													
B2TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.532 .061 15												
D1TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.599* .030 15	.590* .021 15											
D2TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	-.322 .284 15	-.136 .629 15	.350 .201 15										
D3TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.542 .056 13	.549* .034 15	.560* .030 15	.098 .729 15									
F1TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.564* .045 15	-.032 .909 15	.191 .496 15	-.256 .357 15	.361 .186 15								
F2TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.279 .356 13	-.116 .681 15	.063 .823 15	-.025 .929 15	.285 .303 15	.295 .286 15							
F3TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.026 .933 15	-.336 .221 15	.265 .339 15	.544* .036 15	.008 .977 15	.109 .699 15	.548* .035 15						
F4TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.341 .254 15	-.359 .189 15	.015 .957 15	.085 .764 15	.175 .532 15	.648** .009 15	.532* .041 15	.436 .105 15					
F5TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	.496 .085 15	-.065 .819 15	.491 .063 15	.419 .120 15	.300 .277 15	.434 .106 15	.279 .313 15	.452 .091 15	.549* .020 15				
F6TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	-.126 .683 15	-.465 .081 15	-.171 .541 15	.220 .430 15	-.362 .185 15	.274 .322 15	.231 .407 15	.421 .119 15	.614* .015 15	.479 .071 15			
H1TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	-.026 .934 15	-.060 .832 15	-.197 .481 15	.124 .660 15	.401 .139 15	-.047 .869 15	.141 .616 15	.130 .644 15	.073 .795 15	-.013 .963 15	-.113 .687 15		
H2TOT	Pearson Cor. Sig. (bilateral) N	-.259 .392 15	-.112 .691 15	-.329 .231 15	.081 .774 15	-.128 .649 15	.295 .286 15	.074 .793 15	.040 .888 15	.358 .190 15	-.112 .690 15	.539* .038 15	.130 .645 15	

* p<.05

** p<.01

***p< .001

****p<.0000

There is an interesting significance between learning-regulation activities undertaken and conception of the T-L process, as well as between learning-regulation activities undertaken and the teacher's general behavior. General learning behavior is related to the conception of the TL process. The same occurs with learning style in relation to the teacher's general behavior in the teaching process. Where there are more support strategies for classroom learning, there is more learning behavior and more cognitive strategies. Where there are more control strategies, there are

more cognitive learning strategies in the classroom. Learning style is directly related to support strategies. In the students' assessment, learning strategies are related to learning support strategies. Likewise, where there is greater satisfaction with the way a subject is learned, there is a higher assessment of learning strategies.

Discussion

In general terms, we can state that as a whole, students have a low perception and assessment of teaching-learning processes. As for *conceptions*, students report that learning is something more than teaching; they perceive that the teachers do not carry out specific strategies, although they consider that the way the teacher develops the process is adequate.

Regarding the *teaching-learning process*, we note that it does not incorporate teaching behaviors that encourage learning regulation, nor strategies for use during learning, nor strategies for use during evaluation of what has been learned--tests and memory are what are most encouraged. Thus teachers perceive that students lack behaviors, technical strategies and learning style. As for *perception of the product of the teaching-learning process*, data show a dissatisfaction with the result of the teaching-learning process, although we initially expected these data to be lower.

In light of these results we can ask what is the ultimate objective of this type of institution: what type of educational intervention is right, what programs and what professionals should carry them out. If this is not established by regulation, if it is left to the good will of the Schools, we run the risk of simply replaying inertia and traditional educational schemes, where these minors have failed, perpetuating more failure and not taking advantage of the opportunity presented by this period at a school where they could be offered education adapted to their deficits. We have already reported the scarcity of papers and research on this problem.

Future research should include studies addressing a wider population of those completing judicial terms at Reform Schools. The purpose would be to discover and to better understand where the educational system is failing, how educational intervention is being carried out in practice, and to what measure educational practices tend toward or predict failure in these students.

Intervention with minors who have special educational needs due to socio-cultural deprivation, specifically those who have entered into social conflict (who have committed acts typified as penal offenses), should be approached in terms of specialized education. This way, educational, socio-educational or psychopedagogical action should be centered in a practice that integrates aspects and factors including social competence. Treatment should be more educational than punitive, strategies should stay away from punishment or penalties, and move toward a conception more in agreement with the advances of Psychology, Pedagogy, and Psychopedagogy. This would mean a collaboration centered on shaping and developing a specialized social discipline that contextualizes, describes and conceptualizes practice.

We concur with Rivas (1997), understanding that the single purpose of education, as promoting the development of human beings, inspires unanimity. The discrepancies arise in defining what this development consists of, and above all, what are the most suitable pedagogical actions to promote it.

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