



GOOD PRACTICES

Partner: Skill Up

Practice's title: **Philosophical practice in Rebibbia Prison**



Including **Chess As a Re-education Up-Skilling** tool

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1- BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

1.1 Background

Where does the practice come from? What is the context in which the practice was created and experimented first?

The University of Rome 'Tor Vergata' has been involved in the 'University in Prison' project since 2006.

Dr. Fernanda Francesca Aversa, a philosophical consultant, has been involved in group philosophical practice projects at the Rebibbia Prison, Nuovo Complesso Maschile e Femminile.

This is a workshop of philosophical practices with some inmates of the Rebibbia prison. At the beginning of 2014, with the sponsorship of the University of Tor Vergata as part of the Teledidactics in Prison project, the experience was active until March 2020. At the end of the pandemic, the meetings started again in presence.

The project was proposed to high security, to people with long sentences and even life sentences. Then the workshop was requested by the educators of the Rebibbia women's prison, who became aware of it, and it started with ordinary female prisoners.

Prison is a context in which the same emotions, the same feelings, the same thoughts that belong to the outside world are amplified. Philosophical practice allows those emotions, feelings and thoughts to escape, to go outside and find new spaces for action and movement.

1.2 Main subject

What is the main subject at the heart of the practice? What are the themes developed in the practice?

Philosophical practice is not an activity that is part of academic specialism, nor is it a form of psychological practice. There are no references to already defined contexts and fields.

Dialogue and exchange in the relationship are very open. One can start, in the group meeting, from a discomfort, but this is understood in an existential sense and is addressed without reference to psychological or psychopathological categories. The essence of the philosophical practice lies in the idea of taking oneself as an object of knowledge and action in order to transform oneself, correct oneself, purify oneself, and build one's salvation through awareness.

The focus of the practice is not the theoretical presentation of content, but is acting philosophy, putting it into practice, living it and transforming oneself with it.

1.3 Target

What's the intended target group of the practice? Are there primary and secondary beneficiaries? (eg.: other teachers as primary beneficiaries and adult learners as secondary beneficiaries, or viceversa).

The main target of the practice described are trainers, tutors and educators.

2- OUTLINE OF THE PRACTICE

2.1 Description

Please describe the activities contained in the practice. If possible, try to divide them in Learning Units. Also, define how long the training practice will last (1 to 4 hours).

The course can be divided into 6 phases. Each phase lasts approximately two hours.

Step 1. The initial part of the practice starts by exploring together the meaning of emotions through the narration of lived experiences. The narrative approach represents a method, a tool and a formative language capable of interpreting dimensions and knowledge and, above all, of bringing out the emotional components in order to achieve greater self-awareness.

Step 2. Inspirations from literature and art are fundamental; imaginative procedures and creative stimuli, fragments of poetic, literary and aphoristic texts are used. Some excerpts from the book *Shadow Line* by Conrad were particularly evocative and stimulated the desire to recount one's own experiences.

Step 3. After the initial inspirations, the inmates proposed themes on which to reflect, such as boredom, motherhood, dreams, suffering, power, friendship, etc.

Step 4. The trainer again proposes a poem or philosophical text, on which questions are asked and reflections are stimulated. Some of the participants take it in turn to transcribe what happened during the meeting.

Step 5. Sharing with the trainer. The fifth phase was devoted to writing. The inmates began to spontaneously write down their reflections, which they then handed over to the trainer.

Phase 6. Group sharing. In the following days, in the social hour, the inmates shared and continued reflecting on what had been done during the workshop meetings. The inmates' meetings were recorded by the management according to established practices.

Philosophical cafés were also activated.

2.2 Aim/goal

Please describe the aim(s) and goal(s) of the practice: what are the objectives that the practice wants to reach?

The project is based on the concept of transformative and constructive learning, in which learning to learn is a fundamental resource, due to its evolutionary and generative nature, for individual fulfilment and social development.

The objectives are many, the most relevant of which are listed below:

- Self-awareness (arising from self-observation without judging oneself but through philosophical practice)
- Self-care (understood not in the medical sense, but in the sense of caring for oneself in order to care for others)
- Salvation in the laic sense (understood as conscious construction of the day-to-day life and as the ability to imagine the future).
- Relationship building within the prison context (understood as acquiring awareness of how important social and emotional ties are especially in the prison context).
- Ability to observe one's own emotions and govern them.
- More detailed and deeper knowledge of the character, feelings, thoughts and experiences of the people with whom one shares space and time.
- Acquiring greater respect for the weaknesses, shortcomings or mistakes of others.
- Increased cooperation and collaboration.
- Increased learning, reflective and active listening skills.
- Increased empathy and emotional ties.

2.3 Learning Outcomes

What learning outcomes are expected from the practice in order to consider it successful? What will the participant learn? How will the training help their behavioural competences?

In a workshop of philosophical practice, some significant issues concerning the formation and transformation of individuals, community ties, and the way of addressing the world are proposed for collective reflection. The common aim is to take care of the illnesses of the soul in a broad sense. The term 'soul' is to be understood not from a religious perspective, but from a secular spirituality perspective.

Philosophical practices do not solve problems, or cure who knows what, but they enliven, fluidify, set in motion a search for well-being that is aimed not at achieving success, but at feeling a living and active part of this world.

The meetings have produced changes not with respect to the institution but with respect to the relationships within the institution and even between the inmates themselves, between the inmates and the prison officers.

A philosophical practice group provides a posture of greater trust, of less fear of failure. Some inmates, after the meetings, decided to enrol in university and some managed to graduate.

In philosophical practices there is also the component of pleasure, eudamonia, i.e. the pursuit of virtue understood as the pleasure of existing, of entering into a relationship with others.

An important result was the collaboration with prison police officers. A community dimension was created between them and the inmates.

The experiences of the philosophical workshop flowed into the volume "Naufraghi in cerca di una stella", an experiment in philosophical practice in prison. A collection of the inmates' writings in a volume gave visibility to the workshop. Presentations were organised in and outside the prison, attended by university lecturers in criminal law, and the volume was reviewed in various newspapers.

2.4 Training Approach

What kind of training/teaching methodology is implemented in this practice? Is there a literature/bibliography (not mandatory)?

The term 'philosophical practices' includes many possible proposals: Socratic dialogue, individual philosophical counselling, philosophical counselling, research community, community of practice. Aporetic Socratic dialogue is a learning method that has often been used in sessions with female prisoners. Aporia means a dead-end street and in fact this type of dialogue does not arrive at a definition, there is no concluded answer, but it is a journey that one makes together and in the course of which there is a broadening of one's vision. It is a polyphonic dialogue through which one learns to pause in uncertainty, in doubt, in the question that leads to further reflection. It serves to get in touch with one's emotions, one's feelings, one's wounds that become loopholes through which one can reflect, get to know oneself and achieve a more solid and mature awareness of oneself and others.

The aporetic Socratic dialogue, closed and without solutions, provides, paradoxically, the keys to the exit from an aporetic structure such as prison.

The following are some of the many volumes that are useful for the planning and realisation of meetings:

- Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a way of life. Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2017,
- Plato (edited by Ezio Savino), Symposium-Apology of Socrates-Crypton-Fedon. Mondadori, 2016,
- Etienne Wenger, Communities of practice, learning, meaning, identity, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2006,
- Marcus Aurelius, Thoughts, Recollections, Conversations with himself (various publishers).

3- TOOLS

Which tools and materials are necessary for this practice to be implemented/to be successful?

No particular tools or materials are needed, as this practice is based on communication through conversation.

4- OBSERVATIONS

This space can be used for all comments and observations, including what you couldn't fit in the previous sections of the template.

Prison is an extreme place where one can only go from surviving to living through relationship. Relationship with the other than oneself (the other prisoners, the prison guards, the friends and family waiting outside), but also with the other within oneself. With the stranger and the multiplicities that inhabit us, with our perturbing otherness of which it is increasingly urgent to become aware. Only in this way can the space of a cell become a space of freedom.

Emotional competences developed with the practice: Awareness.

