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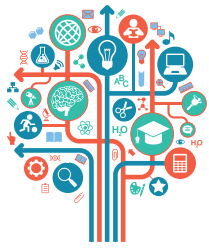
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**EPALE**  
Electronic Platform  
for Adult Learning  
in Europe

**N. 2 December 2017**

# Epale Journal

on Adult Learning and Continuing Education



**Education and learning in prison.  
Stories, Projects, Good Practices**

edited by Vanna Boffo and Mauro Palumbo

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# Editorial

**T**he second issue of the Epale Journal is a collective text on educational challenge. In fact, it focuses the attention of educators, teachers, social workers, but also prison staff, on the central themes of learning in a place of detention and the role that training/education can have in reintegrating those who have served a sentence into society. We discover a human situation that is dense, deep, lucid, and intense. A situation featuring many people who work in the prison universe, from the teacher to the volunteer, the educator, the researcher, and the scholar who takes care to introduce, develop and ensure good practices.

The reason for compiling this issue of the Epale Journal to debate these issues lies precisely in the educational value that a human condition of marginality brings out and places at the centre of a new way of teaching, doing education, rethinking the human training of people, building paths of support and mentoring. The knowing, the learning, the opening up of narrow inner horizons can give birth to a desire for change and transformation.

The most important objective to achieve this would be to hope for a change in that human condition which has committed acts against itself or against others. The articles that follow bring to the reader's attention the tension to subvert a given situation, possibilities to transform one's behaviour through a path of inner growth, through expertise and knowledge, but also through the many subjects that animate such learning and become bearers of novelty.

From the school which, through formal curricula, has succeeded in entering prison, knocking down the walls of indifference and whose aim is to raise the skill level of adults to good practices to mentor inmates in university education. As important as it was to introduce the possibility of subscribing to courses to attain Italian Certification at middle and junior high school levels, even more significant is the fact of letting universities enter prisons. Some interesting projects are described which implement good practices of introduction, encouragement, and support in educational activities for inmates.

The wealth of contributions compels us to say that it is precisely from minority status that the processes of education and training draw courage and value to be disseminated, implemented, shared, and understood. We are all in this together. A society that does not commit to considering and working for the weakest and the last in line will be one that fails to think of its future.

Tackling the subject of prisons is a matter of citizenship and civilization.

*Vanna Boffo and Mauro Palumbo*

# Formal education in prison

Ada Maurizio <sup>1</sup>

## Keywords

School In Prison, Teachers, Provincial Adult Education Centres, Ministry Of Justice

### Abstract

*The Memorandum of Understanding of 23 May 2016, between the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and the Ministry of Justice, defined a regulatory framework and organizational structure which committed both administrations to producing a series of initiatives for specific areas of intervention for a period of three years.*

*The MIUR earmarked approximately one hundred and seventy-seven thousand Euro to realize a nationwide project on the themes of the Protocol and entrusted the Provincial Adult Education Centre 3 of Rome (CPIA 3 Roma) with managing the special programme for education and training in prisons and Juvenile Justice Services. The plan included the organization of five interregional seminars during which local experiences were valorized through multi-regional collaboration between the CPIA and regional school offices.*

*In the course of the five seminars a survey was carried out of the specific legislation, activities and interventions made following the entry into force of the adult education system reform, with the aim of producing guidelines containing criteria and procedures to define the tools and actions of the reform with appropriate adaptations to the prison context.*

## 1. Introduction

On 23 May 2016, in Palermo, on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of the massacre of Capaci, the Ministers of Education and Justice signed a Memorandum of Understanding to create a special programme for training and education in prison and in Juvenile Justice Services.

The Protocol outlined a framework of rules and organization that would be binding both for prison administrations and those of education, and committed both for a period of three years to producing a series of initiatives for specific areas of intervention using innovative methods and tools, along with an approach that considered the expressed and unexpressed educational needs, motivations, and interests of both adults and minors.

## 2. Education in prison in Italy: historical-legislative notes

The regulation of education in prison in Italy began in the late nineteenth century. The General Regulation of Prisons and Government Reformers (1891) stated for the first time the principle that prison was also a place of rehabilitation. Article 123 envisaged that school courses would be set up in prisons and that inmates could buy books as a prize for impeccable behaviour.

During Fascism, the process of humanizing imprisonment was interrupted: education was a privilege only for people who were free. The management of prison administration passed from the Ministry of the Interior to that of Justice. With the New Regulation for Institutes of Prevention and Punishment (1931), education was once again considered one of the activities of rehabilitation, and Article 27 of the Constitution brought attention to the retraining of convicted persons. The debate on the merging of the rules regulating the operation of prisons



with the values and principles of the Constitution found space in a Ministerial Commission and subsequently in a Committee that drew up a project focused on the three pillars of prison treatment: work, religion, and education. It is worth noting that in the Fifties, the phenomenon of illiteracy was widespread, and education in prison, as well as the presence of libraries, radio, and cinema, all constituted a way of combating it.

Law no. 503 of 3 April 1958 established the official birth of school in prison. A few years later, Law no. 72 of 3 February 1963, was to establish for teachers the special role of teaching in prison primary schools. Although Article 135 of the Consolidated Text of the laws in force in the field of education, relating to the schools of every order and degree (Legislative Decree no. 297 of 16 April 1994) included the provision of specialist training to be carried out under an understanding between the MIUR and the Ministry of Justice, 1987 saw the last specialization course for teachers in the prison sector take place.

At the same time, there was a reform of the penal law that included education and cultural and professional training in the organizing of institutes. Law no. 354 of 26 July 1975, which introduced substantial changes to the Prison System, dealt with education in Article 19:

In the prisons, cultural and professional education was offered by organizing conventional state school courses along with vocational training, according to the guidelines in force, and with the aid of methods appropriate to the condition of the subjects.

(...) With the procedures envisaged by the education system, senior secondary schools may be set up in prisons. The completion of university courses has been simplified and standardized, while attending school courses via correspondence, and the use of radio and television has been encouraged. Access to publications contained in the library has been facilitated, with full freedom of choice in readings.

Law no. 663 of 10 October 1986, and Law no. 193 of 22 June 2000 introduced nothing particularly new in the organization of education in prison.

The need to revise Law 354/1975 coupled with changes in social scenarios lay behind the Rules on the prison system and on the enforcement of the measures depriving and limiting freedom (Presidential Decree no. 230 of 30 June 2000).

Articles 41 to 45 define the organization of educational courses. The organization of primary and secondary school courses for prisons arranged in 2000 is still in force. Paragraph 6 of Article 41, in particular, introduces the instrument of the Education Commission, with advisory and proactive tasks, whose members include the director of the institute, who chairs it, the person responsible for treatment, and the teachers. The Commission is convened by the director and formulates a draft annual or multiannual education project.

More recently, the need to reform the penal law led to the issuing of Law no. 103 of 23 June 2017, Amendments to the criminal code, the code of criminal procedure and the prison system, which delegates the government to adopting provisions to reform the prison system, based on principles and criteria that include:

- rules aimed at respecting human dignity through empowerment of inmates, full compliance of prison life with the outside world, dynamic monitoring,
- adaptation of prison system rules to the educational needs of under-age inmates,
- strengthening of education and vocational training, which are key elements in treating inmates who are minors.

Finally, the Recommendation 2006/2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules dedicates paragraph 28 to education.

### 3. The Provincial Adult Education Centres (CPIA) and education in prison

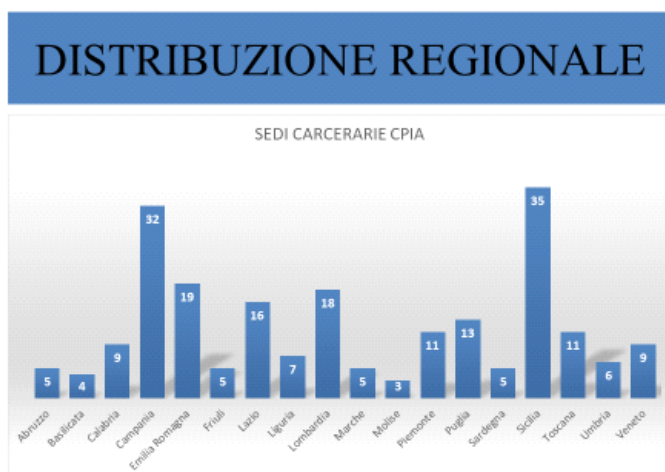
The previous Protocol was signed on 23 October 2012, before initiating and implementing the adult education system reform referred to in the Regulation issued by Presidential Decree no. 263 of 29 October 2012, which



brought education in prison into line with the national educational system.

The impact of the adult education system reform on the subsystem of education in prison has produced some modifications of an organizational kind, and also introduced the obligation to adopt a specific mechanism adapted to the context.

Table 1 shows the regional distribution in the school year 2016/17 of sections active in prisons and the associated CPIA branches, as a result of implementing the adult education system reform starting from the school year 2015/16.



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To implement the Memorandum of Understanding of 23 May 2016, the MIUR issued a public notice addressed to the CPIA (Notice 11350 dated 12/10/2016).

After completion of this procedure, the project budget was allocated to the CPIA 3 of Rome which signed an agreement with the Directorate General for Education Systems and the Evaluation of the National Education System of the MIUR.

Five interregional seminars were held, involving over three hundred participants between teachers, headteachers, prison administration staff, representatives of Regional School Offices and INDIRE, who took part in the seminars and shared good practices and experiences with the aim of compiling guidelines containing criteria and procedures to define interventions for each macro area indicated by the Protocol in its programmatic actions.

The seminars were spread over three days for a total of sixteen hours' work to address the following issues:

- distance learning and the matching of education courses with vocational training;
- the rehabilitation, integration and support of minors and adults after leaving detention facilities and the insertion of minors subjected to measures in external criminal areas in education courses;
- the individual Education Pact on behalf of the Commission for the Education Pact (Art. 5, paragraph 2 of Presidential Decree no. 263/2012) and a teaching booklet with the skills acquired in order to facilitate entering the labour market;
- workshops of Italian as L2 and the upgrading of libraries.

The working groups highlighted the importance of education as a pillar of the treatment to distinguish and separate it from entertainment and actions and interventions necessary to implement the operations of the Protocol, including joint education involving school staff and Prison Administration staff, the design of an





educational initiative with a workshop setting, the surmounting of a certain rigidity that hinders access to information and culture (internet, times and places for study, technological resources), the centrality of the Education Commission envisaged by the Prison System (art. 41 of Presidential Decree 230/2000), matching outside education facilities.

#### 4. Conclusions

The experiences and skills developed by teachers who work in prison constitute a cultural and professional heritage of great value which, as such, needs to be reorganized and rationalized, relieving it from being a downgraded operation not supported by conscious choices of a pedagogical and didactic kind.

The reality of school in prison, which arises as a final goal in raising the standard of competence of adults and minors with the outcome of a growing number of qualifications and certifications of knowledge of Italian at A2 level, deserves particular attention on the part of the two ministries involved. The signing of the Protocol constitutes a point to resume close collaboration, made even more necessary than in the past by the need to strengthen the role of formal education in prison as a tool for treatment and rehabilitation.

The training of the staff of the two administrations, through a series of effective actions programmed on the basis of the detection of training needs, appears an essential condition to ensure the raising of quality in exercising the right to study of an extremely fragile target. Finally, we must avoid:

the risk of embellishment: this covers any cultural initiative within the prisons. School, theatre, concerts, readings, photography courses (...), are always in danger of giving a positive idea of prison life outside and thus of contributing to a sham, a convenient hypocrisy. Here is the paradox: every time something is organized to make the life of inmates less seedy and useless, to a certain extent it contributes to leaving structural problems outstanding, almost masking them, with some results which invariably the institution will make beautiful, to demonstrate that 'everything is going well'.

Ultimately, priority should be given to collaborative procedures to develop an integrated model with a strong pedagogical and educational inspiration in the management of the courses.



## Notes

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# Educational values in the serving of a sentence

Francesca Torlone <sup>1</sup>

## Keywords

Prison Andragogy, Educational Action, Adult Education, Training

### Abstract

*The moment of serving a sentence still remains, at a distance of many years since the approval of the Prison System (1975) – currently the subject of reform – far from the constitutional precept (art. 27, co. 3 Const.), save for occasional exceptions. The innovative effort of the “reform” is substantiated in two objectives: surpassing the prison-centric logic of the penalty system and providing a solution to the long-standing problem of the sense of a punishment in relation to the individual offender and society. This means rethinking the system and the entire prison context in all its complexity (also in reference to territorial services outside prisons) and its potential to be a source of learning and unlearning, both for inmates to be “re-educated” and for all the staff who gravitate around the prison institute responsible for re-education, and ultimately for the entire community. We are all called to question the sustainability of a system that continues to introduce new types of offence (while sometimes depenalizing others) and continues to speak (on paper) of individualizing treatments, without making any changes, also of a cultural nature, to promote the new sense of punishment, genuinely conforming to the constitutional provisions.*

*In the face of the refractory nature and inadequacy of penal and social systems, we question the tasks that education is called to accomplish to help build an inclusive human prison, with educational components of a special-preventive content. This means questioning the educational dimension, which must be seen not only in the individual elements of the treatment programme but in every single component of the context and the devices utilized for “re-education”. A sweeping reform of the penalty system, in intra and extra-mural atonement procedures, cannot fail to consider the educational and anti-educational significance of each context in which the inmate is inserted in the path of rehabilitation.*

## 1. Introduction

In this article we question the educational dimension of prison mechanisms, also in view of the recent enabling law (Orlando Law, 2017). We depart from awareness of the pervasive education in every manifestation of existence, wherever it is lived, and of the need to intercept and study the educational quid pro quo (De Sanctis, cited by Federighi in Cambi et al., 2016: 66-67) at their various levels (macro- ministerial, meso- of individual institutes, micro- of individuals in prison). Observing the special features of individual contexts and experiences must not make us lose sight of the institutional and strategic dimensions influencing the micro one. The educational practices of individual institutions are in fact linked to the educational sense of everyday prison life, in that each institute – in the person of the Director and the operators being managed – live in conformity with the rules of the Ministry. The educational sense is linked to the cognitive processes through which the flow of experiences is assigned specific meanings. If the sense of life experiences in prison contexts



continues to be inspired by a purely retributive logic, the consequent educational actions, if not adequately designed and managed, are likely to be a faithful reproduction of it. Prison andragogy can intervene to fill regulatory gaps and support the management of an unfinished cultural process, strongly rooted (already from the name of the institutes, also called of punishment and custody) and permeated by the conviction that being remanded in custody is the only normal, obligatory response to deviance.

The subject of our reflection concerns the effectiveness of re-education in the light of the devices included by law in the “treatment”. The sense of re-education which we wish to question, also in the light of the ongoing reform, is new, and refers to the opportunity to identify a new interpretative key for every moment of the criminal sentence to fully understand the “treatment” phenomenon, which we consider the set of actions that take place every moment of the day, both inside and outside the walls of prisons, actions which have all, always and anyway, an educational purpose (be it positive or negative). If this is the case, then it is the task of all those who study, work, and believe in this institution (decision-makers, scholars, operators, professionals) to ensure that there is consistency between what is stated in articles, judgements, and professional profiles, and the actions put into practice to promote and support the processes of “educational compensation” (Torlone, 2016), and the re-integration of people who have previously been excluded from social contexts (through their own fault or judicial shortcomings or errors). What are required are regulatory devices that support the implementation of these actions in a context that is heavily regulated and features strong voluntary instances that grasp the educational dimension of the institute and guide its organization and working conditions. This was also the gist of our proposal developed for the Minister, Hon. Orlando, on the occasion of the States General consultation on criminal sentences (March 2016).

The article is divided into two paragraphs, one which aims to understand the educational dimension underpinning the assumption of social behaviour, and the other the importance of including educational dimensions in the daily life of the institutes, as well as a paragraph summarizing some concluding remarks.

## 2. The educational values that guide social behaviour

That the potentialities of education have been in the past and still are seldom used to overcome regulatory and social contradictions is a fact that we come across in various sectors, especially those related to the phenomena of social, educational, and labour exclusion. The hiatus between heavily-regulated inclusive models and the application contexts is certified by aberrant practices and reports, beyond sentences of condemnation and reprimand. Questioning the (dis)education processes which act in these contexts and that lead to such failures helps us study how to rebuild them. To this end two clarifications are needed, which we mention here, in order to understand how the law, before being a norm, is a value and behaviour acted out in contexts of social life.

The first clarification concerns the still widespread tradition that schools, universities, and training bodies exhaust the much wider-ranging offering that pedagogical and andragogical disciplines are able to implement to follow individuals in processes of awareness-building, empowerment, and the construction of a social, individual, and professional identity.

The second clarification is connected to the increase in social complexity that leads to the assumption of standards, rules, and behaviours that are often free from social structures such as consensus, values, and assumptions. The pedagogical challenge (even before being cultural, political, or legal) is meaningful: it restores concrete visibility and implementation to the challenge of Art. 27, para. 3 of the Constitution through timely and appropriate educational processes, an unlocking of values, rules, and ethics which are the foundation of the rule of law. In their absence, the punishment of the guilty would not give the desired effect and we would be forced to admit that some people are likely to remain without a way out.

We question in particular why, at a distance of 69 years from the Constitution and 42 years from the law on the



Prison System, the “rules” prescribed and binding therein remain disregarded by the behaviour of many (who know the contents, prescriptive measures, sanctioning system following a lack of compliance), while evolving the system of values underpinning this corpus iuris (equality between those who are free and those who are detained is at the base of many proclamations on so-called personal and highly personal rights, unlike past ages). That the inmate is no longer identifiable as a subject to punish, but as the holder of rights and resources to be used to construct educational and growth processes aimed at reintegration, has been accepted for some time in the common feelings of national and international policy-makers. However, not always are the processes of policy making accompanied by processes of social learning that allow an internalization of the laws even before they are launched and promulgated. Educational processes and changes in regulations often do not affect one another adequately, nor are they promoted in such a way that associates can recognize the desired, matured, wanted, required result in the regulation.

Adherence to the rules requires training, both inside and outside the walls of prisons, aimed at activating changes and transformations in individuals and social groups: to adhere to certain social values you must know them, analyse them, decide independently if you want them, ask for them, practise them, as an expression of a manifest desire. Training can be a support in the construction of proximity between formal and living law to guarantee informed and consistent practices in social relations.

The educational dimension of the theme being analysed leads us to reflect on the need to activate transformative processes (i.e. “social and organized learning”, De Sanctis, 1975) acting on the contexts in which inmates live. The culture of lawlessness is difficult to change by attending a course of civic education or the like; it is rooted in the habits of life cultivated for years by the individual. Education and training in legality depart from changing contexts which have little to do with transmissive phenomena of knowledge on the meaning of standards and values. Nobody is guilty from birth. Those who are guilty have become so due to the effect of the rules and contexts in which they found themselves and of educational actions (in a negative sense) lived unconsciously, that forged the human being who became guilty. The informality of educational processes, not managed or controlled, produces an amnesia, also of values to the detriment of civil coexistence and respect for the rules, including legal ones, that govern it.

### 3. Rehabilitation action and re-socializing punishment from reform to a real model

All the spells lived in the prison context have a formative dimension to be intercepted and included in the design of mechanisms. This dimension refers to concepts of natural, accidental, informal education, unlike the moments of education lived at the school bench or in a music, painting, theatre, or creative writing workshop; this is a separate education even from the moments of vocational training activities that bring inmates closer to the world of work and prepare them for it through the transmission of knowledge of a more technical-professional nature. In addition to the school, courses, and workshops there is a massive presence of educational activities, of “training”, which it is appropriate to manage, control, organize, evaluate, and evolve through new awarenesses, roles, educational responsibilities which in some ways feature little that is new (cf. art. 5, para. 2, Law no. 395 of 15 December 1990). It is therefore necessary to strengthen the paradigm of educational activity.

Its micro-pedagogical dimension has the ability to embrace any type of intervention and action. In this respect, what is undeniable is the wealth of educational experiences (formal and non-formal) that prisons implement, evidently also to overcome the negative effects of informal education, considerably more difficult and demanding in terms of the educational objects to manage.

The meso-pedagogical dimension of action prompts us to question what the objectives and functions are that “training” is called upon to fulfil in the prison context, and how this context appropriates it as its



own institutional objectives and functions. In this regard, the sentences inflicted by Italy, in part awaiting implementation, in addition to being a burden on the State budget, provide clear evidence of the need to establish “educating to educate”.

Training must therefore keep in step with the times and intercept or interpret the historical needs to then define tasks and methods suitable for the new challenges that the evolution of social relationships imposes (De Sanctis, 1975). The theme of overcrowding, for example, had no importance in a society where prison was lived as a deserved evil and the inherent conditions reproduced a social feeling that no alarm, no body of power could arouse (Goffman, 2001). With the change in the very functions of the institutions (social institutions, including prison, are a tool to create individuals: Dewey, 1920: 190) and social values (formalized in current legislation and in the interpretation this provides to the courts) pedagogy is called to examine the various methods to manage educational activities as part of the daily life of institutes. Even the management of space passes through educational processes. Every gesture, behaviour, action, experience lived inside and outside the institute has an “educational quid pro quo” that acts on the transformations (positive and negative) of those who live the whole of these experiences. The quality of transformations is closely linked to the quality of educational values (De Sanctis, 1975). The “re-education” referred to in the Constitution cannot ignore the consequences produced by the set of educational values of the contexts of the inmates’ life. The re-educational objective, which breaks the immutability of the convicted person and affects the end/punishment can only be achieved if we consider the education incorporated in each component of the penalty system (spaces, relationships, allocations, etc.). In this regard, it is useful to consider also the consistency and usefulness of “awards” not only in terms of the trial but also of education.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, for the delegated legislator the question remains open on how to activate and manage transformative processes within an institution occasionally asked to educate. It will be necessary to provide clear indications on the normative nature of the “forms” required to ensure re-educative transformation (Sentence no. 204 of the Constitutional Court, 1974). Being pervasive and recurrent, they assume particular importance in relation to other educational dimensions. The elements of the “treatment” – a term to abolish in the wording of subsequent reforms – in this perspective should be recognized as an integral part of an institute’s life and managed deliberately, at least by the “educator” staff. For some time, the right to education has been conceded to all, in its pervasiveness inside and outside prison, as well as its ability to produce transformation (*reformatio in peius* or *in melius*). Its management in a pedagogical light requires adequate professionalism and andragogical practices that become interpreters or forerunners of regulatory and legal innovations in order to strengthen the sense of educational activities, called to tackle problems that are always unique, different, new, and cannot always be solved with pre-packaged recipes.



## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> The enabling law will also have to deal with – among other things – some aspects of intramural detention to protect the inmates' human dignity and fundamental rights.

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# Education and learning in prison. Stories, Projects, Good Practices

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## Keywords

Everyday Life, Freedom, Respect, Education, Training

### Abstract

*Everyday life punctuates life in prison as it does outside. In the everyday life of a prison the degree of freedom people enjoy is measured. Freedom and respect go hand-in-hand: there is no respect without freedom and vice versa. Education is a sham in the absence of a dignified life, of a positively accepted freedom, of a deeply rooted respect.*

## 1. Introduction

I was asked for a contribution on my work experience in prison, which began in 2000-2001 in Prato, then linked to the Universities of Pisa and Siena on a regional scale. Thus was born the Prison University Centre of Tuscany. My perspective is limited, and I will concentrate on certain aspects related especially to everyday life.

Education and learning in prison are distinct but interrelated processes which are now undergoing major transformations, above all in prison where the computer and communication tools that have replaced other methods are prohibited. There is a need for ongoing updates, otherwise studying will become impossible.

My point of view is closely bound up with the experience of university studies in prison as the practice of a constitutionally protected right to study. I shall make a few considerations on education and learning and then condense references to stories, projects, and good practices into one short paragraph, for space reasons.

## 2. Education and Learning

With an eye on reintegration into society, education can be a tool to raise awareness of the offence committed in the inmate: education draws on transmitted knowledge and experience to which is linked learning that arises from consolidated knowledge as well as from the unexpected, from reflection on the possible, from having an open mind, both in daily life and in special occasions or events. Education and learning are the backdrop to a daily life enclosed in the mind and in concreteness, needful of positive relations that gaze outwards, adhering to the activities provided for in legislation (work, study, family relationships, religion, recreational activities/sports). Prison work, badly paid despite recent increases, engages less than 30% of inmates who may access it both inside and outside, and this is the inmates' main need, especially for those who, with no family ties or a needy family, live a daily life that is difficult also from a psychological point of view.

Education today is the butt of radical criticism. Until the middle of the nineteenth century it had a predominantly transmissive nature, but in recent decades there has been searching discussion on an education in which innovation, openness, creativity, and tradition can and must live together in the formative processes. From my point of observation, education in prison today is still reusing proven strategies, applies rules without a reliable foundation, divided as they are between laws, regulations, decrees, jurisdictions, service circulars, and orders, customs and traditions, interpretations, tolerated abuses, informal rules, all criss-crossed by conflicts within the organization. Perhaps for this reason education in prison is often dubbed "administrative pedagogy".





These activities also see the participation of volunteers who carry out measures of support, reception, and mentoring, invaluable precisely in relation to the topics listed in the title: stories, projects, good practices, which in fact are almost always realized by volunteers.

Paul Federighi, in questioning the problem of criminal behaviour, has noted that:

criminal behaviour does not have one single explanation. The general theories produced in reality explain some geneses, and therefore, some factors. The educational perspective has not yet been sufficiently investigated, perhaps because the world of the prison system has seen education as only one of the components, one of the ingredients, of the treatment (Federighi, 2016: 12).

The emphasis is on “adverse educational actions”, i.e. on the negative actions suffered both in the classroom experience and in the experience of detention. However, Federighi continued, “it is the events that characterize daily life in prison that pervasively and continually exercise an educational impact on the present and future prospects of social reintegration,” (Federighi, 2016: 14). And later a strong statement is made:

Perhaps the educational approach has constantly been impeded by the impossibility of arranging the levers necessary for its implementation. Our hypothesis is that it has been oriented to add educational activities, without the possibility of operating on the educational quality of everyday life (Federighi, 2016: 17).

One final observation concerns our learning, of we who entered prison to promote instruction, education, and reintegration. This is what we have in mind.

### 3. The “non-places of education”

Paolo Di Natale chose this title for his volume of a few years ago, placing the “non-places” (an expression coined by Marc Augé) within the ambiguity of the haven between the rehabilitation of inmates and the control of deviance. This is an antiquated theme that leads us to the multiple perspectives that were expressed in the past about the strategies adopted on the basis of ethical, philosophical, religious, and utilitarian assumptions, etc. It is instead possible, noted Di Natale (Di Natale, 2005), to bring about a unity among the various metaphors of modernity, following, among others, the considerations of Weber (rationalization), Foucault (the disciplinary society), Goffman (violation of the self), and Durkheim (moral education).

Francesca Torlone draws attention to the set of educational activities that take place in the context “inside and outside prison and that intercept the educational values of every moment of life in prison.” (Torlone, 2016: xiv). The problem remains that of daily life, during the day and during the night, something that is often “forgotten”. Being in a cell, not having time for oneself, having the blocks under lock and key, being subjected to actions that no one would wish to see any more (the written request, mentoring or, worse, violence), having before our eyes a cell where we are forced to remain, the fact of not having books, a computer, painful thoughts of the family and children, counting the days, waiting anxiously for an order from the superintending magistrate for an authorization, the night thoughts. The daily life of the prison constitutes the main indefinite part of legal punishment. It is said that the regulations must be followed, regulations mostly written by/at individual institutes. Alessandro Margara strongly advises against making institute regulations or at least making one very short one, since in total institutions the regulations give power to anyone who takes them, not from the law but from cultural trends and from the power of those who manage everyday life.

It was in this type of situation that the programme of university studies in prison began in 2000, busying young adults and adults of various origins in terms of language and culture, in paths of their choice, even better



if crowned by an academic qualification, even if this was not the main objective, considering the inmates' movements between prisons, from transfers, leave for legal reasons, individual psychological conditions, to punishments in moments of great difficulty.

The objective was participation in the study of those chosen, the relationship with the teachers (who did not know what crimes they had committed) and how much that was personal could be born. The relationship between a teacher and one or more inmates was established in line with a multi-faceted tutorial model. In 2014, the inmates who took this step numbered more than 200 units: there were those who gave up almost immediately, those who began later, those who completed most of the course without taking a degree and those who graduated.

In the summer of 2000, we found ourselves with staff (Director, Commander, Head of Educational Area) who welcomed this activity, despite the resistance of a significant part of the Penitentiary Police, towards whom, to tell the truth, there was an error on our part, due to lack of communication. We had regular meetings with the Administration and the Board of Education every quarter, and frequent discussions that sometimes turned surly, but without ever questioning the programme: there was attention to particular needs related to the study, which in the meetings always led to some positive outcomes. There were (and something remains) examples of peer support to overcome problems of study.

The organization consisted of small but important corrective measures. Alessandro Margara, the Superintending Magistrate, delegated the Administration to bring in academic staff. The teachers came on demand of the Administration which simplified the work. Admission requests numbered more than a hundred every year. The prison had launched a service order that lasted until the student block was closed (today the future is extremely uncertain...). The cells open all day with defined times, the use of an adjacent large study room, two spaces for interviews with teachers and exams, authorization to stay in the prison for the entire day from 9am until 4pm (those already inside could remain until 6pm) were important strong points, together with the custom of socializing in the evening. Every year a student was elected as a representative in meetings at the Superintendency. Regular meetings were held to resolve any problems that emerged, and all of this lasted until the end of the administrative staff's mandate (2006). In some way, the attempt was made to bring an element of freedom into a situation of coercion. The guards changed regularly because the philosophy was to distribute the staff in a way that let them get to know all aspects of the work. However the guard duty at the Prison University Centre was considered a sort of rest with respect to what happened in the blocks.

In recent years, some hundreds of university professors have seen inside a prison for the first time, aware that education requires people who are committed and willing to learn. We never had any major problems with students, even if they often judged us openly. The implementation of the university programme involved, in addition to the University, also the Superintendency of the Prison Administration and the Tuscany Region. There were further difficulties, because although the institutions certainly signed some Protocols, these were only respected for the first six years. The activities of study were "covered" by a general resolution of the Academic Senate to avoid what often happens in prison, namely the suppression of scheduled activities, a risk that we could not afford but which we have been running recently. Times have changed...

Our intervention considered and still considers university study as a right to a treatment similar to that adopted for free students, which had to be developed as an individual and collective formative process resulting from free choice. In the life of an inmate, the possibility to make a choice of this kind is a goal that brings strength, something agreed upon by both the university and the Administration. Of the more than 200 students who enrolled and who completed at least some part of the university course, 32 graduated, many gave up shortly after registering, a part are still following the path, welcoming, year after year, those who wish to try their hand at the various study courses. Personally, I hope that the time is not too distant when we will abandon not only



life imprisonment, but also reduce the number of prisons, following the good practices of certain northern Europe countries, offering an education that is developed “within the freedom of detention”.

Those judged guilty lose the freedom to act, not to achieve, as Amartya Sen was wont to say (Sen, 2000). Instead what happens is that a condemned person loses everything, even the prerogatives and rights that the law formally recognizes (forbidden participation in elections, dysfunctions of the health system in prison, up to difficulties with pension plans, relationships with local and regional authorities etc.): the real punishment is the one that begins the day after the sentencing, when we realize that the stay in prison looks back at what the person has done, while it should always be looking to the future.

One last observation: what have we learned from this set of relationships with the inmates? What learning has enriched our training of teachers? What learning has taken place among the staff who have been able to observe these inmates much more than we have?

#### **4. Stories, projects, good practices. In conclusion**

What has been written up to this point already contains situations where attention has been paid to stories, projects, and good practices. From a general point of view, in early 2000, the prison at Prato also saw numerous initiatives, including writing tasks: autobiographical, theatrical, artistic, with workshops managed by volunteers from the university and various associations. These activities were accompanied by group outings to monuments and museums, experiences that still occur, prepared and followed by the competence of volunteer teachers who are still dedicated today to students from university or otherwise. Stories, projects, and good practices have always been a focus of attention, because education in the full sense of the term can do no less than bring together all the energies of the students. At the beginning of our programme a third of the inmates attended the various levels of schooling, from primary to university: therefore, there was great attention.

Today, the situation has become more precarious for reasons that would take a long time to describe.



## Notes

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# Motor development activities and sports as a form of mediation to bring a new re-socializing and re-educative meaning to punishment

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Flaminia Bolzan Mariotti Posocco<sup>2</sup>

## Keywords

Sports, Motor Activity, Inclusion, Pedagogical Research, Prison, Deviance

### Abstract

*The present work constitutes a reflection of a pedagogical nature on representation and on the meaning of the prison sentence today and lays the foundations for the development and structuring of research hypotheses that aim to highlight the potential inclusive value of motor development activities and sports as tools capable of producing meanings and reflections of an educational nature in subjects who have "deviated", violating the rule of law.*

*In an era and in a situation where the only function we expect from prison is retribution, the challenge is therefore to bring the community to a wider re-educational awareness of the punishment, investing in the potential and development of the pro-social skills of those who work and live in contexts of marginalization.*

## 1. Introduction.

The present work is the result of careful reflection on the pedagogical representation of the prison situation in compliance with that provided by our System regarding the functions that the custodial sentence should in fact fulfil. In fact, Article 27 of the Constitution states that "punishments (...) must aim at rehabilitating the convicted person", thereby enshrining the principle of punishment's rehabilitative goal, whose ethical justification, obviously, cannot fail to refer to the pro-social potential of any person, including offenders.

In this sense, the function of the punishment should be to eliminate or reduce the risk that the subject falls into crime in the future, leveraging the value of the educational relationship and of the person as a relational subject, a self who, if developed thanks to a meeting with others, requests the reintegration of the person-offender into the community from which he or she was expelled, helping him or her to re-weave a meaningful relational and social network.

It is true, however, that the social fabric has doubts that imprisonment can in fact mean rehabilitation and resocialization and therefore considers it must deny it. This occurs due to the effect of perpetrating platitudes and media urging which feed the conviction that those who make mistakes should be excluded.

Which is why, as pedagogists, it is considered necessary to investigate the representation of prison life and how it could be improved thanks to the mediation of motor development activities and sports.

In a particular way, the intent is to seize the challenging nature of a pedagogy with an inclusive orientation that uses expressive-mobility activities in general and sports practice in particular, as experiences that can facilitate the process to re-educate subjects present in the criminal circuit, in particular minors.

The pragmatic dimension expected should be that of offering a contribution to the systematization, commissioning, and verification of the validity of educational paths inside prisons, in which inclusion represents the end and, at the same time, the means of giving value to every person, helping them to recognize their own weaknesses and potentialities in the construction of the common good.



The pedagogical objective, the “challenge”, becomes that of restoring sense to the detention experience and to what takes place during it through a path aimed at the future, since even the deviant minor must enter adult society through the re-construction of a “life project”. In pursuing this objective it is necessary to think about the life of the minors also in the perspective of their adulthood, steering educational objectives and pedagogical choices with a view to developing their autonomy and responsibility; this is undoubtedly a complex path that needs to be thought out and enacted intentionally, in which we must not surrender in the face of difficulties that not only the prison situation but also society impose, and that constitute further challenges and educational opportunities.

The purpose of the inclusive approach is in fact to enable reactivation of educational processes of personal reconstruction within experiential contexts that breathe new meaning and importance into personal and social life, in an inclusive and humanizing dimension.

## 2. Operative research hypotheses

With reference to the pedagogical paradigm opened around the middle of the last century by Bertolini, which opposed a positivist perspective that saw in the rehabilitative treatment of the deviant minor the need to avail itself of interventions inspired by procedural methodologies with the purpose of exclusion and control, the intention is to present the key points of the inclusive approach, defining how to exploit the experience of the subjects involved through the proposal of motor development activities and sports of an educational and inclusive nature.

The macro context is that of the juvenile criminal justice system which since 1988 has made criminal proceedings involving subjects between 14 and 18 a delicate point in which the minor has the ability to launch paths to reinterpret their growth and personal development in order to limit as far as possible the harmful effects that contact with the justice system might cause.

Above all, the reflection was born from the need to diversify a response that aims to identify and assess the positive effects of narrative and mobility pedagogical activity in the production of positive responses in group dynamics, adapting the educational project to the needs and personalities of the juvenile inmates.

In fact, by exploiting the high potential of motor activity, learning would become cooperative and collaborative, principles substantiated precisely in the achievement of a positive interdependence linked to the concept of individual-collective success through direct constructive interaction based on the sharing of problems and knowledge, circumstances configured in turn through the acquisition of social skills (indispensable in interpersonal relations within a group) promoted precisely through expressive and motor activities (Moliterno, 2013).

The specific contexts in which the most relevant analytical dimensions are found can be identified in the spaces intended to carry out the custodial measure; which is where juvenile prison can present the risk of stigmatization and the labelling of the young person who has committed a crime a delinquent, consolidating the criminal culture and disenchanting them with respect to their future prospects with a consequent high risk of recurrence of deviant behaviour. This research arose in the context of detecting and analysing the changes or modifications related to the type of relationship the subject establishes with the world through the introduction of activities that allow a reprocessing of meanings through movement and sport, seeking also “good practices”, namely, forms of organization that take better account of the complexity, the plurality of the subjects, and their diversity (Canevaro, 2002).

Detention, as a situation that causes a break with the outside world, may represent an “experience” other than itself, an experience which tends not to be lived as a “value”, but on the contrary might not be recognized and therefore be dismissed, with the inevitable consequence that whatever happens there would be meaningless.



This “lack of sense” matches one phase of a minor’s life that is particularly delicate and complex, i.e. adolescence, where one’s own role and identity are not yet defined, and as a result, the experience of imprisonment might constitute a strongly dysfunctional element causing the risk of adaptation in the sense of deviance.

The penal system, especially detention, carries the risk of branding a minor a “delinquent”, or in some way strengthening the role. Therefore, the initial lines of development of the pedagogy of deviance envisaged an explanation which resulted in interventions to establish norms and values around which to prescribe the correct conduct, endowing marginalization with certain behaviours and the social risk of differences; in more recent times, on the contrary, it has gone from a pedagogy of correction to an orientation whose centrality is precisely the subject to be re-educated, therefore, in a pedagogical reading of a phenomenological mould, where the origin of deviant behaviour is identified in the interaction between the subjects, their motives, and the incorrect meanings that they attach to their act, the dominion over reflection about juvenile delinquency is attributable to the subjects’ capacity to invest reality with sense, to orient themselves and act appropriately. In the theoretical view of certain scholars, the educational outcomes should occur in an educational and social space, the reason why the need for interaction and relationship became an essential foundation of education. Therefore, it is within this framework that the hypothesis of the formulation of a paradigm is triggered, in which motor development activities and sports, considered in an educational key, become opportunities to restructure meanings and activate processes of a pro-social nature.

Until 1974, education of the body took on a cultural dimension divorced from the mind and incapable of producing reflection in a conception of centring on essential parameters of objectivity. Subsequently, instead, the body began to be considered a constitutive aspect of the personality, so that today, play and the bodily-expressive modes through which a person discovers a personal and social world, are of great importance in education: these activities allow higher levels of integration since they point to the enhancement of the person within the context of the relational situation (Moliterno, 2013).

The basic assumption is that the deviant minor manifests problems in attributing meaning to reality and the relational sphere and that forms of mediation such as play, sport and narration may contribute to the development of personal autonomy as well as promoting the possibility of expressing feelings and emotions in different ways through the acquisition of self-confidence and trust in others.

Several studies have recognized that sports practice can have a considerable influence on the development of the young, in promoting their physical, psychic, social and moral formation; sport therefore represents a means to develop positive characteristics such as the capacity to confront and overcome difficulties, awareness of one’s own possibilities, autonomy, self-esteem, the ability to collaborate with others, and the practice of all of this can offer an educational context that facilitates the growth path of adolescents, promoting a state of psychophysical wellbeing and acting as an antagonistic factor to discomfort, deviance, and drug addiction.

Other studies have shown that about 20% of the youngsters brought to trial are liable to a relapse in adulthood (Aos & Bornoski, 1996: 3).

The re-definition of the life project, in this sense, sees motor activities and sports as possible channels of values and precious opportunities for human and social growth.

The conviction that participation imparts desirable educational, social, and personal values has represented until today the premise for the inclusion of sport at an amateur level in rehabilitation programs for young deviants.

It has also been documented that adolescents who break the law comprise a heterogeneous population characterized by a group of risk factors, including conditions of disability and psychopathology, with a prevalence of depression and low self-esteem far above those of the general population (Sports Medicine June 1990: 344-351).



### 3. Conclusions

From consideration of these aspects a need emerges that manifests in the heuristic basis, i.e. a deeper look to identify the paths to take in the proper pedagogical approach to the deviant minor, through the use of motor activity and sport as a part of dismantling the beliefs that lead to labelling in order to facilitate integration in society with a consequent decrease in the structuring of future deviant behaviour.

In this regard, educability and inclusion are a process, a passage, that can only be achieved through an action which contains elements linked to the possibility of better knowledge of the subjects, to better tools, a scientific picture accessible to all.

If it is indeed true that motor activity represents an occasion for reflection on the changes in the body, on the possibility of expressing emotions and checking moods through experimentation with positive attitudes that develop self-esteem, it follows that, through the use of specific tools in individual educational planning and in the coordination of interventions that include traditional and alternative sporting activities, the openness to diversity is sufficient to allow a transformation by activating a process of change on all subjects involved in the community.

The research hypotheses relate therefore to two main strands: the first concerning the recognition and evaluation of existing practices to document their results with respect to the processes and inclusive contexts, the second concerning the need to explore and describe, through the use of tools such as questionnaires and interviews, society's attitudes with respect to the issue, in order to promote greater competence among those who will deal with the educational mode in these contexts.





## Notes

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# The Prison University Centre of the University of Genoa: a tool to develop citizenship skills

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## Keywords

Key Competencies For Lifelong Learning, Active Citizenship, Andragogy, Service Arrangement

### Abstract

*The model of the Prison University Centre of the University of Genoa, in keeping with the classic principles of andragogy, accompanies traditional administrative and mentoring services with others aimed at strengthening capacity and motivation to learn, so that inmates can effectively use the opportunity offered by the university in prison, well beyond their compulsory stay, as an instrument of growth and active reintegration into society.*

## 1. Introduction.

On 6 April 2016, with the signing of the Agreement between the University of Genoa and the Regional Superintendency of the Penitentiary Administration for Piedmont, Liguria and Valle d'Aosta, a Prison University Centre project was officially born in Genoa, with the aim of promoting university studies in prison and supporting the inmates who participated.

The agreement stipulates that the University and the Prison Administration promote the right to study of the inmates at Genoa's two District Prisons (Marassi and Pontedecimo) which house a total of around 800 people. Specifically, the agreement provides that the University cooperates in promoting educational and guidance opportunities for inmates through exclusively voluntary contributions by University lecturers and, wherever possible, identifying student tutors and qualified figures to serve as tutors; it favours the university enrolment of inmates, also by identifying administrative procedures which specifically take into account the deprivation of freedom of the latter; it also helps inmate students by exempting them from paying university fees and contributions; it manages all administrative procedures relating to the students' career and the syllabus, in addition to creating a dedicated IT department usable by all interested parties; it organizes teaching activities that involve both lectures and e-learning.

The spirit and content of the agreement made therefore respond to the provision of art. 34 of the Constitution and to the provisions of the Implementing Regulations of 1976 and 2000, while the first organizational structure and the services offered were inspired by the positive experiences of other universities that had taken this road before us.

Thus, in the first year of implementation, with the coordination of three teachers delegated by the Rector and with the objective of "launching" the Prison University project, 24 seminars were held in the prison by university lecturers, on themes requested by the inmates themselves.

One year on from the launch of the project, 17 inmates are today enrolled at the University, 6 of them foreigners. The study courses with the largest number of participants are Communication Sciences, Political Science, and History. The university supports them through the free supply of texts, online lessons, exam sessions in prison, ad hoc administrative procedures, exemption from fees.

The numbers are still few but comforting enough to establish a Genoese Prison University Centre model that can best respond to the characteristics of the demand, offering the project the experience gained by the



University on the theme of lifelong learning.

From an analysis of the demand at the Marassi and Pontedecimo prisons in Genoa, home to the Prison University Centre, an endemic overcrowding emerged, on average of 35%; the presence of foreigners – above all Moroccans, Albanians, and Tunisians – to the tune of 51% (against a national average of 34%); over 50% of the inmates were awaiting trial, while the education level was medium-low. There have been recurrent episodes of tension, aggression, and self-harming, in view of a significant shortage of staff in the Penitentiary Police (Ministry of Justice, 2017; Associazione Antigone, 2017).

Therefore, an ever-more alien prison, people often lacking in resources and external references with major differences in language, culture, and religion. Many of the people stay for short periods, needing therefore to work on an imminent social integration or reintegration project; needing to rediscover and develop their potential and skills to become active subjects for the community.

In this situation, a university education project must in our opinion be framed within the context of a more general intervention in which the university, naturally together with the Prison Administration and other local and national resources operating in prisons, must first of all offer its skills to fill prison time with contents of a significantly formative/resocialization value, and above all to provide inmates with all the tools to enhance their active citizenship skills.

The premise is that only through strengthening of the key competencies for lifelong learning and active citizenship (European Parliament and Council, 2006), can inmates effectively use the opportunity offered by the university in prison, also well beyond their compulsory stay, and use training and learning as true instruments of growth, capable of limiting the risk of exclusion from society and the labour market.

The Genoese Prison University Centre model, now in its second year, has joined the traditional project and workshop services to work with the inmates on the development of communication skills in their native language, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence, digital competence, learning-to-learn, social and civic skills, a spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship, awareness and cultural expression.

The strategy on which the interventions are based in favour of the highest possible number of inmates is that of promotion, orientation, and direct involvement towards specific paths to facilitate a recovery of their own non-deviant dimension aimed at a model of active citizenship. In order to pursue this goal, it is essential to intercept in the inmates and in a phase of important transition in their lives, an interest in growing their cultural condition, to develop the ability to maintain correct and constructive relations of coexistence, to understand the dynamics of the context in which they are living, to retrieve a necessary self-esteem and plan new life projects in an identity of active citizenship.

The operation presents itself as a challenge to the prison situation, precisely because of the concentration of social and cultural fragility, the tangible effects produced by the exclusion, the fragmented nature of the spaces and relationships and the heterogeneity of the population, however, it is consistent with the principles of Knowles' andragogical model (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2010), in which an educational intervention for adults must be based on certain essential prerequisites:

- helping learners become aware of their need to know;
- considering the particular transitory situation, helping them change from dependence to a capacity for autonomy in learning and in life;
- opening inmates' minds to new approaches, helping them overcome resistance to learning, also deriving from their previous life experience and from a disinclination to study, and who have often, even in the case of Italian students, difficulties in oral or written expression;
- increasing their willingness to learn, by linking the learning to situations or needs of life and social reintegration, considering that a large part of the inmate population originates from culturally



deprived circumstances or from cultures that are linguistically and anthropologically distant from ours;

- offering experiences that will improve the quality of their life in prison and their self-esteem, stimulating positive interpersonal relations.

The Prison University Centre project, directed and coordinated by the university and also realized with the network of social workers already present in prison for many years, uses the workshop method and tools of experiential training to present an educational offering parallel to the disciplinary one. Among the initiatives proposed:

- The realization of a workshop on the right to study and a guide to university studies which, starting from the constitutional principles of the rehabilitation objectives of punishment, of the right to study, of equality for all citizens as well as from the Republic's duty to remove obstacles against useful social participation, and investigating the peculiarities and rules of access to university studies for inmates (cf. art. 44 of Presidential Decree 230/2000), show the range of the university offering, the tools for their support realized by the University of Genoa;
- a workshop to support learning in which dedicated tutors assist learners in their studies and in the consolidation of their ability to learn and train tutors among the inmates who can support their companions' learning processes in turn;
- a workshop on understanding legal and bureaucratic language which provides inmates with tools to understand legal documents, judicial acts, and bureaucratic communications, but whose ultimate aim is to make them non-passive users of the communications they need to deal with and thus agents of active and participatory citizenship, albeit within the limits of their condition;
- a workshop on the theme of rights, duties, and citizenship to promote the concept of an informed citizenship based on the essential principles of "rights" and "duties", respect for others, rules and laws, and active participation in society;
- a final workshop which analyses, with the tools of action-research, critical issues relating to communication in a multilingual and multicultural environment.

In addition to these, two projects of community and intercultural mediation have been organized with the twofold objective of letting inmates work on the rules of civil coexistence and steering them towards the possibility of reintegration by showing them the opportunities provided by local and national business and cultural training courses.

Any type of intervention is however preceded by an adoption, i.e. by a service arrangement which develops with the single inmate the choices, teaching and tutoring methods, learning timeframe, tests, objectives, and targets to be achieved. Looking at the principles of adult education (European University Association, 2008), it is important that learners are aware of the path they are going to undertake, establishing their own learning objectives, and co-planning their course, and therefore becoming an active part of the service in which the trainer is more like a companion who helps the learner monitor and assess their individual course defined jointly.

The effectiveness of such a complex project, made possible thanks to European funding, can only be evaluated after some time and not so much by measuring the possible increase in enrolments as the decrease in relapses, the increase in the percentage of former inmates with a stable job, decreased conflict in prison, the continuation of studies once out of prison, in general by evaluating the signs of the university's public engagement in terms of improving the citizenship skills of the inmates and ex-inmates involved in the project..



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Since 2001, Monica Sbrana has coordinated the Lifelong Learning Office at the University of Genoa, with specific expertise in the design and creation of training courses for adults. Email: sbrana@perform.unige.it

<sup>2</sup> The collaboration with the territorial network was made possible thanks to the project "Oltre il Muro", financed in 2017 by the European Social Fund and realized with the community mediation association, Consorzio Agorà, Circolo Vega, a.l.p.i.m Associazione Ligure per i Minori, Associazione Culturale Teatro Necessario Onlus Genova; Consorzio Motiva, and the Associazione Sportiva Dilettantistica CUS Genova.

<sup>3</sup> As provided for by the Statute of the RUIAP - Italian University Network for Lifelong Learning, founded in Genoa in 2011 and chaired by prof. Mauro Palumbo, a lecturer at our University.

<sup>4</sup> Enhancing adult education, in particular to facilitate social integration and reintegration is one of the objectives of the University of Genoa's third mission in its Integrated Plan for 2017-2019

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# Generative themes of change in prison. Analysis of the “Ristretti Orizzonti” experience

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## Keywords

Rehabilitation, Freire, Prison

### Abstract

*This article proposes a reflection on possible forms of the rehabilitation intervention in prisons, starting from an analysis of the “Ristretti Orizzonti” experience, begun in 1997 at the Detention Centre of Padua inspired by Freire’s “generative themes”.*

*These are not merely concluding remarks, but considerations that arise in practice and from which we can draw hypotheses of research and development for the future.*

## 1. Prison as a limit-situation

The experience of detention is described as extreme by those who have lived through it. In it we can recognize dehumanization, a despairing impossibility to recognize elements of humanity – in themselves and in others. Prison is one of the conditions that undoubtedly fit the definition of “limit-situations” proposed by Paulo Freire. Limit-situations however are not, according to Freire – who picked up on the thoughts of the Brazilian philosopher Vieira Pinto – “the unsurpassable border where possibilities terminate; they are not the border between being and nothingness but the border between being and being more” (Vieira Pinto, 1960 cited in Freire, 2011: 91).

Therefore, in limit-situations we meet dehumanization in its even more brutal forms, however these situations also mask the conditions for their surpassing towards humanizing. For this reason, according to Freire, limit-situations need to be addressed with “limit-acts”. In fact, limit-situations:

...challenge people, affecting them through actions that Vieira Pinto called “limit-acts”, those that are directed to the overcoming and denial of a given situation, instead of leading to a docile and passive acceptance of it. This is why there are no “limit-situations” that generate a climate of hopelessness but the sense that people have of it in a given historical moment, as an imposed brake, as something they cannot overcome. As soon as critical perception begins, a climate of hope and confidence develops in the action itself which inspires people to engage in overcoming the “limit-situations”. This overcoming, which does not exist outside of people/world relations, can only be verified through people’s action on the concrete reality in which the “limit-situations” occur. Once these have been overcome, through the transformation of reality, they will arise again, which will lead to other “limit-acts” of humankind (Freire, 2011: 91).

In this same perspective, we can interpret certain actions performed in prison – creating a school, producing a magazine, meeting people from society, acting, learning a profession... – as limit-acts, that carry out and exacerbate the limit-situation they tackle. In this way the hidden contradictions are highlighted, to cause the need to develop a critical conscience in relation to reality.

In fact, these are acts where the conditions seem to make learning and change impossible. Yet it is from such acts that learning is born (new knowledge and ability, new ways of relating) along with profound changes: different visions of oneself and others, of one’s own past and way of living the present, of presumptions on the



world and personal convictions. If learning and change do occur, they basically translate into a development of awareness, which becomes critical in the face of certain situations. This means that individually, but especially with others, people begin to wonder about the causes of the situations they are living through and on the effects arising from them. The development of critical awareness consists in the subject opening up to the world, their interior one, that of others, and that of their own situation. This deeply transformational process also occurs in prison, albeit in the course of many difficulties and sufferings, uncertainties, steps backwards and insights that generate new energies.

## 2. Generative themes

The construction of knowledge, when it does not occur as a unidirectional transfer of knowledge or skill from those who know to those who do not know, is a process of developing awareness which the subject performs with reference to the world they live in. Subjects, in reading the world, identify the significant issues for themselves, ones that are relevant to their own lives. Here we find some of the fundamental principles of today's adult education: the subjects learning from what they know and developing motivation from recognition of their concrete condition of life. Posing the relevant questions already constitutes an act of critical awareness and in turn creates the conditions for awareness to develop further.

The questions are to be found in the words that people use to describe and narrate their own situation.

Once again Paulo Freire defines these questions "generative themes". They are themes in the sense of objects of possible knowledge and are "generative" in a double sense: on the one hand they constitute the deepest causes of the contradictions and the problematic situations present in that world, while on the other, they contain the possibility to generate processes to transform reality. They are, in fact, generators of other themes, as well as tasks constituted as limit-acts, for the purpose of changing limit-situations and thereby producing transformations in reality.

Generative themes, in Freire's view, can be found in the existential condition of people of any given epoch. They must not be created but recognized and investigated. They are to be found in the "limit-situations", i.e. in the concrete conditions of life – such as prison – where people meet the limit to their realization as human beings.

Generative themes occur under a dialectical form; in fact, they express the tensions between different factors, express the contradictions of a specific social and historical context. The dialectic can also be present between elements that are not necessarily opposites, but which come under tension. For example, between security and freedom, between personal growth and the collective dimension, etc.

This article proposes a reflection on possible forms of rehabilitation in prison, starting from an analysis of secondary data, i.e. articles written by inmates and published in the magazine "Ristretti Orizzonti", founded in 1997 at the Detention Centre of Padua, in search of those generative themes of change mentioned above.

These are not merely concluding remarks, but considerations that arise in practice and from which we can draw hypotheses of research and development for the future on the transformative value of some of the educational activities offered inside prisons.

## 3. Analysis of an experience: the writing of "Ristretti Orizzonti".

In Italy an enlightened Constitution assigns punishment a rehabilitative function (art. 27 Const.). This declaration should have followed a debate in which pedagogical science could contribute to the direction and sense of this exalted objective, but this has never been done, relinquishing its place for some time to other disciplines (Law, Sociology, Psychology) (Rapanà, 2006).



The situation of our prisons was, and still is, the subject of attention on the part of Europe, because of the structural conditions in which the inmate population lives, and these conditions necessarily affect the possibility of an authentically educational intervention, if it is true, as Piero Bertolini has stated (the author with Letizia Caronia of a fundamental contribution on the themes of prison re-education), that “above a certain threshold, the material, affective and intellectual failings limit or annul all the effectiveness of any educational intervention.” (Bertolini & Caronia, 1993: 78).

In this situation, the voluntary sector has a crucial role in proposing and implementing interventions that fall among the so-called “treatment activities” and which are an integral part the courses to re-educate inmates. Among these we have chosen to analyse the experience of writing “Ristretti Orizzonti” [Narrow Horizons], a significant consolidated experience, which inmates have participated in for a long time.

In prison jargon, the “narrow” are the inmates, whose existence is indeed restricted and limited, reduced by the deprivation of liberty and by everything this situation entails.

The name “Ristretti Orizzonti” refers to visions that are reduced and partial and that characterize the thinking of society in general and the prison itself as an institution on themes related to the sense of punishment and to justice.

The magazine “Ristretti Orizzonti”, whose publisher is the voluntary non-profit association Granello di Senape Padova, was created in 1997 in the Detention Centre of Padua by the desire of Ornella Favero, a journalist, with the aim of presenting “honest information” on the themes of punishment, justice, and prison, starting precisely from a place (a prison) rarely associated with the word “honest”, through daily work of encounters and searching interviews with inmates.

Over the last twenty years, “Ristretti Orizzonti” has been accredited nationally as a benchmark on prison information for sector experts, magistrates, and members of the Penitentiary Administration, who periodically participate in round tables with the editor inmates, the Association’s volunteers, and operatives.

There is not enough room here to look closely at all the activities promoted by the editors, however, we can briefly describe the three activities that we found in the writings of inmates published in “Ristretti Orizzonti” over the last 5 years, as the main driving force.

The first is the editorial work which every day sees about twenty inmates, the director Ornella Favero and other volunteers, meeting and discussing in a real melting pot of ideas and a fundamental negotiating table. At the table the editing tasks are meticulously prepared, there are meetings with students and external people (judges, academics, politicians, prison administrators, crime victims, writers, journalists, etc.); after the meetings a comparison is made of the effectiveness of the communication, on any issues still pending, or themes linked to prison, the death penalty and justice are discussed.

The second key activity in the “Ristretti Orizzonti” experience is a project named “Prison enters the school. The schools enter the prison”, through which editorial staff inmates meet every year about 6,000 students in a comparison of their life experiences, on the “slipping” from deviant behaviour, often at a young age, to real offences. This comparison is based on a path to empower the inmate in relation to their own life experience, which offers students a testimony without resorting to excuses or justifications but simply by trying to retrace moments of “derailment” in their lives.

The inmates make themselves available and perceive that what takes shape is a sort of silent pact: they undertake to tell stretches of their life in a sober, no-frills, and sincere way, and in turn the youngsters undertake to ignore the commonplaces and listen without prejudice, recognizing that they are in front of people and not, as a study day organized by the editorial staff in 2007 was called, “walking crimes”.

The third is the path of social mediation that has involved offenders (editors) and persons who have suffered, directly or indirectly, from offences, including serious ones.





This is a fundamental, very difficult path for the editors; the mutual recognition of their common humanity. Just recently, Benedetta Tobagi, in a video posted on the site [ristretti.org](http://ristretti.org) stated: “it was an indirect reparative experience of justice (...) [I met] some inmates, many inside for serious offences and I met them as the victim myself of a serious offence. This meeting marked by the greatest respect and the maximum sensitivity was an experience that enriched me deeply, even if it wasn’t easy. Without the Ristretti Orizzonti dimension, I don’t believe I would ever have addressed it nor would it have been possible.”

Analyses of the texts has allowed us to track these activities as the most significant ones, but above all to recognize some generative themes, in the sense described above.

Among the themes recognized are the pairs: “silence-word”, “labelled-recognition”, “inside-outside”, “empowerment-infantilization”, “adaptation-transformation”.

Here we have chosen to look at the dialectic “silence-word”.

### 3.1 The “silence-word” generative theme

In reference to the existential condition of those who live in prison, among the various themes encountered, particular importance is assumed by the dialectic pair “silence-word”. The silence, concerning oneself and the world inhabited is a condition of suffering; on the other hand, the word is a constituent need of the human condition, impossible to totally repress. Silence is often due to an inability to access one’s inner world, in addition to that of the external reality, clearly narrow in the prison condition. Yet between silence, often predominant, and word, sometimes very rare, a tension is generated; the two elements are interrelated. The words are spoken, read, and listened to with difficulty. The silence is interrupted or suspended; it is filled with cracks and gaps.

Certain limit-acts, as we consider the writing of a periodical in prison, cause dialectical tensions between silence and the spoken word, and lead to critical consequences, make things explicit. In this way, the generative “silence-word” theme is no longer submerged, unspeakable, but is brought to the surface, is an object of comparison, one that it is possible to question and act upon. This possibility enables the activation of processes of personal and collective change, in the specific sense of developing critical awareness, of a problematic relationship with the world and one’s own existential condition.

But how is it possible in prison to move from the “silence” as dumbness, as deprivation of self, as lack of recognition, to the “word” intended as the assumption of responsibility and a conscious definition of the self? In the editorial of the issue 6/2017 of “Ristretti Orizzonti”, which celebrated its twentieth anniversary, Ornella Favero identified certain keywords that mark the path of the editorial staff, among which “listening” has a special place.

Listening: We thought when we started the project with the schools that the most important thing was to learn to communicate, and certainly being capable of good communication is a matter of no little account, but in reality, the students and inmates focus above all on their ability to LISTEN. Which cannot mean distracted listening since the issues at stake are too delicate: on the one hand, inmates “showcase” their life, the disasters, defeats, slips and falls, all proof that needs to be heard without comments and without distractions from other students. Apart from anything else, the students learn to listen to others, the “bad guy”, the enemy, but they also want to be heard, with their questions, the anxieties and fears of those who live in a society that is increasingly scared and nasty.

The passage from silence to the responsible word is possible, according to Favero, through listening, an action that allows people to recognize others as a subject worthy of attention. In committing an offence people do not recognize others and their humanity, cannot relate to others on their own.

“Six years of meetings between victims and perpetrators of crimes have taught us to listen and to know



another's suffering, or better other sufferings, since we have had several guests in these years and we have discovered that sufferings are always different kinds of pain. So, while they were trying to learn not to hate, we learned to listen to the pain of others. Thus discovering a humanity that is perhaps sometimes forgotten. And this listening to the pain of others, for me, but also for my companions and the people that I have met, has become a path of maturation." (E. K., Ristretti Orizzonti, year 16, no. 4).

This lady (a crime victim) told her story (...) for her the sentence was no longer important, 5 years, 10 years or life imprisonment, but the man was important (...) and perhaps this gave me a cue to begin from myself and led me to say: "But hang on, it's not always the fault of others, perhaps it's also my fault, perhaps it's time I looked at my responsibilities." (E. C., Ristretti Orizzonti, year 17, no. 3)

The inmates writing "Ristretti Orizzonti" have listened to both victims and students, who, with their questions, stimulate inmates to reflect on their own experience without indulging in excuses but assuming responsibility themselves.

When instead detention is spent in isolation and suffering without confrontation with others, then there is no room for a path of awareness and rehabilitation.

"And so, living alone, I became almost autistic because I was speaking to myself, I created my own world, my own joy, I came to the point that when I was doing interviews also people dear to me disturbed me, I wanted to immediately return and stay inside my cage, because I was the one who invented my world, I made balls of paper and there I was playing on the ground as if I were a billiard player. (...) In time, in creating my own world, I realized that I could no longer speak, I couldn't talk anymore." (B. C., Ristretti Orizzonti, year 17, no. 3)

"At the time I was angry, I felt anger towards those institutions that took me to a detention so full of conflict. Instead, when I arrived in this prison in Padua, with its school/prison project, starting from the questions that the guys asked me, I began to question everything I did, to understand that perhaps I was responsible, too, but how could this happen? Because I no longer underwent repressive punishment, I did some reflective punishment, I mean, they're leading me to understand that perhaps many of the life choices I made in the past were not really the right ones, and what's more, I realized that I no longer wanted to feel all the hatred I'd felt, even if still have a little, I can't deny it, for the institutions, because I always find myself in prison. However, I'm not now giving all the blame exclusively to them, and I believe that in this way – and I'm not saying that I've become a saint – but I am a different man, this is thanks to a reflective punishment." (L. R., Ristretti Orizzonti, year 17, no. 3).

From the living experience of the persons involved in this activity emerge interesting clues to construct situations that could promote a change in the direction of assuming responsibility and recognizing others: two elements that are fundamental to a path of rehabilitation in prison.



## Notes

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<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Freire commented: “...The “generative theme” concept is not some arbitrary creation, nor a working hypothesis that must be proven. If the “generative theme” was a hypothesis to be proved, research would not investigate its contents, but whether it exists...it seems to us that finding a generative theme, as a concrete fact, is achieved not only through our existential experience, but also through a critical reflection on the relationship of people vs. the world and people vs. people, implicit in the former.” (Freire, 2011: 88-89).

<sup>4</sup> In 2016 the number of people from so-called “civil society” who ended up in prison was 15,959 units. <http://www.ristretti.it/commenti/2017/giugno/pdf6/volontariato.pdf> (03/2018).

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