CONCLUSIONS

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Penitentiary institutions can be seen as «cognitive systems» (Vicari and Troilo, 1999; Federighi and Torlone, 2015). It implies that they can be seen as source of learning for prisoners for two different reasons. On the one hand such systems manage learning actions that take place inside the prison for the transfer of knowledge (classrooms, laboratories etc.) aimed at solving gaps of knowledge and often leading to formal certifications. On the other hand penitentiary institutions can give value to the knowledge they possess themselves through educational actions that are managed – intentionally or not – by any individuals living therein. Knowledge they possess is in terms of relations, routine assignments, personal culture and beliefs, values, procedures. Learning for prisoners is affected also by all of these components. These latter ones do also affect blended learning, the way it is structured, formalised and made available for prisoners (authorisation needed to enter the classroom, use the internet connection, define the duration of PC’use etc.).

From a pedagogical point of view the design, activation and management of rehabilitation processes on an individual level refers to the creation of wide opportunities for personal growth and learning for inmates, in and outside prison. Prisoners can grow, reflect on their personal life and expectations for the future by being part of different learning opportunities, like the formal and blended, non-formal, informal, ‘embedded’ ones.

The penitentiary cognitive system should try to make any learning opportunities available for prisoners as to address the re-educational goals assigned to punishment and penitentiary institutions as such. The perspective evidenced by our research is new: in addition to education, vocational training, school activities, laboratories, etc. that are widely organised and very much appreciated the focus may be also on how to make the whole penal system a learning system for prisoners (surveillance judiciary, penitentiary officers, heads of prisons, volunteers, teachers and trainers, chaplains, health care personnel, lawyers etc.: all of them play an educational role towards prisoners in their daily actions and tasks). Blended learning is part of the system and is surely an important part of
the penitentiary learning mosaic: it promotes learner’s autonomy, independence, responsibility, freedom as learner – following penitentiary rules and restrictions and his/her own treatment plan – can decide whether to practice e-learning, when and how long, control his/her learning pathway via the use of distant tools like assessment entry and exit tests etc.

Another crucial related issue is to investigate on learning needs individuals-learners-prisoners do have. Prisoners – like most of the individuals – do not always have clear in mind and cannot articulate and communicate what they would like to learn and why. Penitentiary ‘educators’ in all countries do have in common the responsibility to deeply investigate on individual learning needs and demand in the frame of prisoners’ biography and ‘penitentiary history’ and design a tailored learning pathway that will activate transformative learning processes in the individual-learner-prisoner. Blended learning can support such transformative process.

The challenge for policy makers, researchers, professionals is to go on building penitentiary institutes as «learning cities» (Federighi, 2016) where educational actions are taken at all levels in the view of prisoners’ re-education and rehabilitation. Managers of prisons play an important role in that.

References