



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

EDUCATION BEYOND THE BARS: REFLECTIONS ON SCHOOL IN BRAZILIAN PRISONS

¹Ênio Silva da Costa, ²Roberto Remígio Florêncio, ³Regivaldo José da Silva
and ⁴Carlos Alberto Batista Santos

¹Master in Cultural Criticism (UNEB); Professor at Metropolitan College of Petrolina, Pernambuco (FAM)

²Master in Education Culture and Semiarid Territories (UNEB); Doctoral Student in Education (FACEDE-UFBA). Professor at Federal Institute of Education Sertão de Pernambuco, Petrolina Campus Rural Zone

³Master in Information Science (UFBA); Library Coordinator Department of Technology and Social Sciences at the State University of Bahia (DTCS/UNEB)

⁴PhD in Ethnobiology and Nature Conservation (UFRPE); Professor in Postgraduate Program in Human Ecology and Social and Environmental Management/PPGEcoH; Department of Technology and Social Sciences at the State University of Bahia (DTCS/UNEB)

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 22nd October, 2019

Received in revised form

14th November, 2019

Accepted 09th December, 2019

Published online 29th January, 2020

Key Words:

Prison Education. Prison system.

Pedagogical Praxis.

*Corresponding author: Ênio Silva da Costa

ABSTRACT

The discussion on education within the Brazilian Prison System is strongly connected with the social function of the school, once the criminal policy is directly related to the failure of the prison system, taking into account its primary objectives, viz. resocialize and insert its subjects into society, without the prospect of relapsing into the prison system. Many laws have emerged towards the possibility of emancipatory education and the redemption of sentences, but practically little has been done to alleviate the effects of imprisonment, recidivism and the social consequences, which end up in the retro-feeding effect of the penitentiary system.

Copyright © 2020, Ênio Silva da Costa. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Ênio Silva da Costa et al. 2020. "Education beyond the bars: reflections on school in brazilian prisons", *International Journal of Development Research*, 10, (01), 32921-32925.

INTRODUCTION

With a chaotic prison system, prison-spaces are by far dark places covered with cruelty, blood, and fear, according to Carvalho Filho (2002). Surrounded by walls and railings, locked by chains, bars, and handcuffs, under the sight of firearms, almost two million human beings¹ spend years of their lives serving their sentences, according to official data from the Brazilian Prison System. In this scenario, education in prison can be an alternative and essential condition for building and redeeming the self-esteem, productive and reflexive capacity of the subjects, as well as the return of fundamental human rights, such as the feeling of social

belonging. Although sometimes this procedure is confused or used as part of treatment to occupy the time of incarcerated people or as a proper function designed to correct intrinsically immoral people.

About 10% of the prison population in Brazil participate presently in some educational activity. The expectation is that the approval of the proposal (the remission by study) will stimulate the school formation of the prisoners since most of them have low schooling since only 7% finished high school, and 66% did not even complete elementary school whatsoever².

¹ According to the National Penitentiary Department, the number of convicts exceeds 1.8 million people, taking into account the closed, open and semi-open regimes. Available at <http://portal.mj.gov.br>. Accessed on December 6, 2019.

² According to the National Penitentiary Department, inmates should be offered classes at the elementary and middle levels, in accordance with the 1984 Criminal Execution Law. Available at <http://portal.mj.gov.br>. Accessed on September 20, 2019.

Needless to elucidate that the concept of education now defended is related to the acquisition and construction of knowledge as a cultural instrument, which will lead to human emancipation, based on Freire (1987; 2005). It is transformative and liberating education.

For Freire, education is only genuinely humanist if, instead of reinforcing the myths with which it is intended to keep man dehumanized, it strives for the desocultation of reality. Desocultation in which the existential man realizes his real vocation: that of transforming reality. If, on the contrary, education emphasizes myths and leads to the path of adaptation of man to the fact, it cannot hide its dehumanizing character (PAULIST EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT, 2008, p. 3).

Freire (2005) proposes liberating education in which subjects can become aware of their existence to act on it and guide it towards the construction of an egalitarian society. Within the global framework, education appropriate to the prison context has been seen as a mandatory and essential part of social resocialization or reintegration activities. The concept of resocialization or social reintegration marks the history of incarceration around the world precisely because it exposes a contradiction that must be highlighted, once it does not resocialize what was not part of the social. It would only make sense if there were previously private measures of freedom, with the effective implementation of public policies for the majority of the suburban and peripheral population, potential "clients" of the prison system. Convicts constitute part of the community of the impoverished "produced by economic models that exclude and deprive them of their fundamental rights to life" (ONOFRE, 2007, p. 12). They are products of segregation and social maladjustment, misery and drugs, selfishness, and loss of humanitarian values.

The concept of resocialization emerged with the development of behavioral, social sciences in the 19th century, and is the fruit of positivist law science, clearly reflecting the ideology/repression binomial (CAPELLER, 1985, p. 129).

This resocialization does not appear clearly in the text of the Law of Criminal Enforcement. However, Article 1 states that the objective of criminal enforcement is to give effect to the provisions of the sentence or unlawful decision in "providing conditions for the harmonious social integration of the convicted or internee." In practical terms, however, these supposed "conditions" are nothing more than a dead letter of the law. Article 3 states that "to the sentenced person and the internee it shall be guaranteed all rights not affected by the sentence of the law." Now, if the sentence does not achieve the right to education, because the law treats the matter very timidly, how will educational assistance in prisons be promoted?

Education Beyond the Bars

In the face of the inhumanity and violence of imprisonment, the hope lies in educating the subjects in the pedagogy of humanization and emancipation. Not a pedagogy to serve the system in its current format, but so that the inner pupil recognizes himself as a subject capable of building another life story. An education that is willing to consider the human being as the subject of his learning, of his evolution as a social being

and not as a mere object of the system. The importance of education in the prison system transcends the punitive ideal, assuming an essential role in humanization, seeking to create possible paths for social resocialization or social reintegration, as signaled by Onofre:

The school is a space where tensions are relieved, which justifies its existence and its role in the resocialization of the prisoner. Inserted so that "works inside out," it offers the imprisoned man the possibility to rescue or learn another way to relate, different from the usual prison relationships, contributing to the deconstruction of the criminal identity (2007, p. 25).

Although education in prisons is offered on an improvised basis since the related Education Departments note the absence of a political-pedagogical proposal consistent with their specific unmotivated demands, it is still discredited by both internees and society. However, the few who make use of it have achieved relevant results in the process of schooling, such as continued studies and entry into university courses. Education, based on such principles, aimed at subjects deprived of their liberty provides sufficient conditions for a less traumatic return to social coexistence. According to Goffman (1974, p. 23), "if the internee stay is much too long, it may occur, if he returns to the outside world, what has already been called 'uncultivation,' i.e. 'untraining,' which makes him temporarily unable to attend aspects of his daily life." Educating for reflection-action embodies the concept of freedom as a way to acquire the traditional senses that men lives become an active subject capable of deciding. This implies restructuring the educational act as an act of political reflection in which the student learns to read the word from the reading of his world of culture, toil, pain, hunger, and injustice.

Formal education is part of prison as a means of guaranteeing prisoners the opportunity to have access to schooling, which, for various reasons, they did not enjoy when at liberty. It is understood that it is an essential resource in the human development process and that although most people working in prison do not accept it, education is a public and subjective right guaranteed by law to all people, including those serving sentences. For the condition of an inmate must not take away from him the possibility of expanding knowledge, since this is the indispensable condition for his process of emancipation as a human being (LIMA, 2010, p. 91).

With all the contrasts of the prison environment, although there are limits herein treated, the classrooms are the place for the differentiated exercise of the social processes, which throughout the permanence of the subjects deprived of freedom, offers sufficient conditions of social reintegration. The schools that operate in prisons welcome subjects "expelled" from regular schools, so they need to assume a differentiated character in which subjects achieve emancipation, liberation, and, above all, find meaning for their existence, even if deprived of freedom. According to Gadotti (1999), it is necessary to work with the re-education of the antisocial act and the consequences of this act, the hereditary disorders, personal losses, and social stigma.

[...] an education aimed at the intellectual autonomy of students, offering conditions for analysis and

understanding of the prison, human and social reality in which they live [...] Educating is liberating [...] within the prison, the word and dialogue remain the primary key. The only force that moves an inmate is freedom; it is the great force of thinking (GADOTTI, 1999, p.62).

Preparing subjects for a return to social coexistence and their personal and social development is one of the tasks of education in the Prison System, understanding it as one of the only processes capable of transforming the potential of people into skills, abilities, and abilities. In this case, education assumes itself as the act of creating spaces for the inner-student, organically situated in the world, to undertake the construction of his being in individual and social terms. In possession of reading and writing, for example, they struggle to have their rights respected. They can write and read letters, tickets, and follow the progress of their criminal proceedings. This means having more freedom, autonomy, and privacy, not least because those who don't know ask and those who ask inside the prison should. In prison, favor is a debt, and this is life risk (LEITE, 1997). Going beyond the bars, distancing themselves from their prison world, problematizing it, 'decoding' it critically in the same movement of consciousness, subjects rediscover themselves as protagonists, objectively witnessing their history. Even the naive knowledge ends up awakening critically in the sense of identifying itself as a character that is ignored and called to assume its role (FREIRE, 2005, p. 15). In this conception, Freire (2005, p. 74) still tells us that "fatalism then gives way to the impetus of transformation and the search for which men feel themselves subjects." In many prison units, there are spaces for educational activities with desks, blackboards, notebooks, uniforms, snacks; however, the railings and massive iron gates do not provide adequate space for a classroom. Although for some boarders, the "classrooms" bear a striking resemblance to the structures of regular schools, with their railings and high walls. Rudder (2002), to designate these spaces uses the suggestive and real name of "class cells":

The classroom cell begins in a perfect setting. Through it, one seeks to make up for a lost time, one glimpses a world, until the moment unattainable. With it are created possibilities of communication with the literate society. Codes are learned, codes are deciphered. In it, the reading of the world is refined. No matter how much we make an apology for the classroom cell, in reality, it is a great metaphor, a temporary illusion, an island before the ocean of cruelty [...] (p.125).

It is in this structure that daily interpersonal students and educators spend about three hours in the learning process. In an attempt to make the educational spaces compatible, there was a change in the Criminal Execution Law, which was sanctioned by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and published in the Federal Official Gazette, making it obligatory to install classrooms in all the prisons in the country³. Not that it is possible to believe in the possibility of prison without the pain and stigmata, but that the prison can fulfill its function prescribed by law: that of re-socializing or re-educating subjects for a new life in society.

Education and the World of Work

Work is understood as a human activity through which man transforms nature and is, at the same time, transformed by it. It is how man relates to the view to change it and adapt it to his vital needs. By producing his means of life, man builds his material and spiritual growth. In this sense, the notion of production by work not only differentiates man from animals but also explains it. It is through creation that the social and historical character of a man is revealed, and it is also through production that man establishes relationships with his fellow men and produces knowledge, builds society, and makes history. It is imperative to have in the prison units a proposal of education for the world of work, "a school associated with professional qualification, that is, a school that articulates education and work" (JULIÃO, 2007; p.45), not only for the professional technical preparation for the market but also it cannot be in the way that one has today, the simple occupation or the development of labor activities with crafts.

Education and work are two essential categories that permeate the discussion on resocialization programs in the prison system. Although viewed in different ways, this is why many values work as a proposal for a resocialization program. But today, there is a consensus that both education and preparation for the world of work should be articulated (JULIÃO, 2006, pp.79, 80). Although many factors corroborate that school and work are on opposite sides, being "competitors," as Leme (2007) points out,

We must not forget that work in prisons is still a significant competitor to the school. When choosing between work and study, without hesitation, most prisoners will choose action. If work provides the food and education provides the meaning, food is still the most immediate need, not only for prisoners, for the majority of the population (p. 154).

Unfortunately, for many, there remains the imposition of deciding for work and survival, a dilemma that accompanies them before prison and even faces a "choice" between working and studying in prison reality. Even with the situation where inmates choose to work, it is not wage work with compatible remuneration. Still, the form of practice developed within the prison system, cleaning activities, handicrafts, and other services. In many cases, there is an exploitation of cheap labor that is not subject to social charges, as stated in Article 28 of the Criminal Enforcement Act. Even if such limits are considered, investing in education for work, or articulated with technical professional teaching, is a necessity in the prison context. The relationship between education and the world of work within the prison system is necessary because, throughout imprisonment, subjects lose track of their relationship with their livelihood. This condition creates a series of prison factors⁴ because it radically modifies the subject's attitude towards life and tends to create a magical image of the world (THOMPSON *apud* OLIVEIRA, 2003, p. 203). A worrying fact when you think or defend education for work is that you can produce a trap. We may unintentionally be manufacturing new disappointment if we take into account that the labor market is restricted, and the lack of professional experience and the gaps in the curriculum will make it more

³ Law n° 12245 of May 24, 2010. Amends Article 83 of Law n° 7210 of July 11, 1984 –Law of Criminal Enforcement to authorize the installation of classrooms in prisons.

⁴ The process of internalization of prison customs and habits has serious consequences for the social reintegration of persons deprived of their liberty. Farias Júnior *apud* Oliveira (2003, p. 78) states that: "Imprisonment leads to personality disorganization, character deformation, behavior degradation and abandonment of the standards of conduct of extramural life.

challenging to hire subjects that will come out of prison. For this reason, the curricular proposal that will integrate the “work” axis must make it different from the plan of teaching strictly with a professional decontextualized bias. For Hassen (1999), according to Leme (2007, p.128): “[...] The greatest probability of a working inmate’s future is to become at the end of his sentence a free man, unemployed, like so many other free men”. Therefore, it is necessary that the social actors have clarity that promoting an education articulated with the world of work or the offer of vocational training in the prison system does not give firm hopes to the inmates to be quickly inserted in the labor market. This happens because, besides the lack of experience, there is still the most terrible impediment: the prejudice against the egress of the prison system that leaves them marked for a long time. It is evident that only wretched and miserable subjects carry this stigma. Due to the absence of a social reintegration project that has the professional qualification, professionalization articulated with education as part of the prison objectives, and few prison units have workshops, rooms, and spaces for courses or other activities. Lemgruber (2004, p. 336) comments on this reality of prison establishments:

The Brazilian State has historically been incompetent in providing education and work to prisoners. Prison units are built without room for workshops. Prison units are built without school.

The labor and educational practices in prison, although permeated by several gaps, are instruments of significant organizational and ideological change. The idea that prisons are just a “school of crime” is gradually making room for the purpose that “even in prison, you can continue studying and working. But there is a need to transform all program initiatives into public policies, as a duty of the State to promote the operating conditions of social reintegration to those deprived of their liberty.

Considerations

Some Brazilian prisons function as real concentration camps in a time of supposed social peace, space where human aspects do not prevail, and men are reduced to categories of “animals,” regardless of the gravity of the crime they have committed. According to Carvalho Filho (2002), since 1820, it has been found that prison, far from turning criminals into honest people, only serves to manufacture new criminals or to sink them more now into crime. The real conditions of imprisonment have always been wrong because prison, before being an instrument for serving a sentence, is a space without the right living conditions. It was the place of waiting for the condemned to be tortured, and therefore there was no reason to have minimum requirements for prolonged human existence. Today, there is more chaos and deterioration of character, mainly due to the absence of criminal and prison policies that focus on the social resignification⁵ of subjects. In this hostile environment, one realization is inevitable: prison kills the man alive. It is absurd that, in the name of the law, someone should be subjected to subhuman conditions, without possibilities of personal, cultural, educational or professional development and qualification, having to be subjected to rules of sociability in which a logic of favors and benefits dictated by those who

have the power over others, including life, predominates. Among so many adverse factors to the prison sentence is its supposed objective of resocializing the subjects, which during their stay in prison is immersed in procedures, attitudes, and behaviors, which make them good prisoners for the prison system and incapable of returning to social coexistence in the full exercise of citizenship. The issue is aggravated by the divorce of criminal and prison policy from social policies, especially education. The proposal for re-socialization contained in the Law of Criminal Enforcement is meaningless, as the number of repeat offenders is not taken into account. It is estimated that more than 80% re-offend, but the directors of penal establishments and the companies that manage the units are not questioned as to the numbers of re-offending. However, when riots, rebellions, or escapes occur, the directors are replaced, or the companies’ contracts are terminated. A prison is only a place of punishment (LEME, 2007, p. 121).

Although in prison, some subjects use education as a survival strategy, the need for further discussion of the proposed education within prison units, which before being a privilege for “bandits” or “outcasts,” is a universal right guaranteed to all, wherever they may be. We can see, therefore, that one possible construction is the proposal of emancipatory and liberating education, according to Freirian precepts, which is articulated in the world of work and which is also a guarantee of the right to schooling, to those who were denied it long before imprisonment. The institutional school that operates in prisons cannot avoid its social function, which is different from its exclusive concern with only transmitting content and enabling social mobility. It is challenged to go further, and to contribute so that incarcerated subjects have new opportunities, understand and reflect on processes of incarceration, develop strategies for survival to depersonalizing power, and can reintegrate or reintegrate socially with minimal possibility of re-offending into crime. Finally, the walkthrough daily prison life developed in this research reveals that there is a world apart in that universe, a world sponsored by the State and under which it has little or no control. A world with cruel and ruthless laws, where subjects are adrift from their fate. After all, a world where a few minutes of relaxation, of access to culture, to the knowledge of the new through the “school” are vital so that the human essence is not lost.

REFERENCES

- Brasil. Lei de Execuções Penais. Lei nº 7210, de 11 de julho de 1984. Publicado no Diário Oficial da União. 1984. São Paulo: Saraiva, 1997.
- Capeller, W. O Direito pelo avesso: análise do conceito de ressocialização. Temas IMESC: Soc. Dir. Saúde. São Paulo: v. 2, n. 2, p. 127-134, 1985.
- Carvalho Filho, Luis Francisco. A prisão. São Paulo: Publifolha, 2002.
- Costa, E. S. A Desconstrução do Sujeito: Narrativas e Modos de Vida dentro da Prisão. Dissertação de Mestrado do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Crítica Cultural – PPGCC/UNEB. Alagoinhas/BA, 2011.
- Freire, P. Pedagogia do Oprimido. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2005.
- Freire, P. Política e educação: Ensaio. 2. ed. São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1995.
- Gadotti, M. Palestra de encerramento. In: MAIDA, M. J. D.

⁵Although I have used the concept of re-socialization in all work, I believe that social re-signification is the most appropriate concept. Because one cannot believe in resocialization for subjects in whom the concept of citizenship and the use of goods historically built by humanity were denied to them before they were imprisoned in prison.

- (Org.). Presídios e Educação. São Paulo: FUNAP, 1993, p. 121-148.
- Gadotti, M. Manicômios, prisões e conventos. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2008.
- Julião, E. F. Educação e Trabalho como propostas políticas de execução penal. Revista de Educação de Jovens e Adultos: Alfabetização e Cidadania. Brasília: RAAAB/ UNESCO/ Governo Japonês, 2006.
- Julião, E. F. Escola da Prisão: Espaço de construção da identidade do homem aprisionado. In: Educação escolar entre as grades. Elenice Maria C. Onofre (org.) São Carlos: EduFSCar, 2007.
- Leite, J. R. Educação por trás das grades: uma contribuição ao trabalho educativo, ao preso e à sociedade. Dissertação (mestrado) – UNESP, Marília, 1997.
- Leme, J.A.G. A cela de aula: Tirando a pena com letras. Uma reflexão sobre o sentido da educação nos presídios. In: Educação escolar entre as grades. Elenice Maria C. Onofre (org.). São Carlos: EdUFSCar, 2007.
- Lemgruber, J. Controle da criminalidade: mitos e fatos. São Paulo: Instituto Liberal, 2002.
- Lima, W. S. Quatrocentos contra um: uma história do Comando Vermelho, 2. ed., São Paulo: Labortexto Editorial, 2001.
- Movimento Educacionista Paulista, 2008. Available at http://www.uniso.br/hs/educacionismo/docs/etica_moral_e_filosofia_educacionista. Accessed on May 20, 2011.
- Oliveira, O. M. Prisão: Um Paradoxo Social. 3ª ed. Florianópolis: UFSC, 2003.
- Onofre, M. C. (org.). Escola na Prisão: Espaço de Construção da Identidade do Homem Aprisionado? In: Educação escolar entre as grades. São Carlos: EduFSCar, 2007.
- Thompson, A. A questão penitenciária. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Forense, 2002.
