



ON OFF Project

“Exchange of methodologies in education of detainees”

The motivation of this project derives from the difficulties that instructors meet in carrying out their profession in prison environments. Differently from teaching in ordinary schools, education in prison implies variables - related to the context, the prison organization, the detainees, the rules, the schedules and also other influences that may affect the didactic activities - that make it extremely complex.

The peculiarity of the specific target learners (either they are detainees or already sentenced) influences their participation into educational activities. The same can be said for working detainees, because of the possible coincidence of the working and the didactic sessions.

For these reasons, the teachers involved in the proposed partnership aim to share their own experiences, discuss teaching methodologies and compare effective practices as well as occurred criticisms. This approach implies an analysis of methods generally adopted in prison education and, particularly, a deeper focus on the ones concretely practiced by each of the instructors. In other terms, the approach implies a sincere evaluation of one's competences and limits, motivation and needed professional profiles in a significantly complex environment.

Indeed, the environmental impact for teachers operating in prison is strictly connected to their "atomized world", where the generally recognized values generate a variety of contrasting attitudes. In this "mondo atomizzato" there are not common pre-defined objectives, deception and dishonesty often prevail over affection and cooperation. It's a world of individuals whose life is constantly characterized by frustrations and unhappiness, resignation, hostility and even a desire for revenge, whose daily relations are significantly personalized: a "self-world", i.e. centred on one's selfishness and negative individuality. In this world, where lack of interest predominates, the newcomers - detainees just sentenced or in wait of a sentence - enter the group of already detained people and intermingle with the latter. Thus the process of prisonization (as Donald Clemmer has defined it) begins, that means "the acceptance, on a higher or lower level, of traditions, lifestyles, costumes and general culture of the penitentiary". Every detained individual undergoes, to a certain extent, prisonization. It affects the status of the detainee, who turns into an anonymous figure in a subordinate group, conditioned by the peculiar environment. Rehabilitation in prison has a counterpart in the negative influences of prison culture. Depending on the extent the detainee has underwent prisonization, s/he will or will not be able to overcome the experience of reclusion. However, some of these individuals, even though in rare cases, show their willingness to rehabilitate themselves by detaching from their previous deviating lives and experiences, avoiding close contacts with other individuals, studying and planning a new honest future to live once they are free again.



At this point the educators' struggle for changing the detainees' condition starts, often obstructed by the long didactic times as well as by interruptions that may vanish the carried out work. Consequently, we consider "the adult as a learner if in need of learning" (for professional or cultural purposes). We believe that the potential of education in prison is significantly high; however, since the detainees' cultural deficit is clearly visible, their attitudes to culture is often affected by their own low self-esteem, lack of perspectives and expectations; their fear of facing a learning experience results, in most cases, into a refusal of any possible educational or cultural offer.

Prison educators are committed in helping the detainees learn in a particular context. They are aware of the experimental features of their work - which requires creativity and flexibility - but also of the lack of a theoretical basis of reference.

The task of prison instructors is re-nourish the roots of knowledge, re-building a knowledge starting from the detainees' experiences and competences. They offer new possibilities but are limited by the peculiarities of both the context and the detainees themselves.

The educational objectives must be realistic, feasible, not excessively demanding. Prison educators should find a balance between the possible discouragement - often derived from the prison routine and practices - and the belief of a deep and radical change of the learners detained - a hopeful belief which, on its turn, may lead to a total and scarcely critic involvement in the educational mission.

It is undeniable, however, that education in prison is really an almost unique possibility: it is a cultural offer and, at the same time, an occasion for comparison and exchange with the outside world in a context where the relation inside-outside is a sort of no-where land: in this land instructors may be determinant by making the detainees aware of their unexpressed or unconscious educational and cultural needs. For this reason, it is essential to create collaborative working conditions.

The presence of a European context can certainly help overcome these adversities. We so believe that it is important to collaborate with European colleagues who work in such an environment on a daily basis. We are aware that European citizenship can be determined through a learning process, particularly through the way one works and reasons things out with others. This helps the individual to understand others who come from a different background. During their teaching experience, teachers come across several problems that need to be solved in due time. Comparing work with that of European colleagues will allow to find new ways and tools to improve teaching methods in prison. This exchange of methodology will help to develop professional skills and ensure more self esteem.

ON OFF Partners

IT (Sicily) as coordinating organization – Centro Territoriale Permanente - Augusta

ES - CEPER Retamar - Almeria

FR - Euro-CIDES / UPR de Bordeaux

IT (Sardinia) – Centro Territoriale Permanente - Nuoro

PT - CF Ria Formosa - Faro

TR – Open prison - Afyonkarahisar