

# O professor e a educação em unidades prisionais: desafios e possibilidades do trabalho docente por entre as grades

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## Resumo

Este artigo identificou e analisou as possíveis dificuldades e desafios presentes na atuação docente em unidades prisionais. Através da pesquisa qualitativa, por meio da entrevista semiestruturada com professores licenciados em diferentes áreas do conhecimento, atuantes numa escola prisional, no interior do estado de Minas Gerais, foi possível verificar que o ingresso do professor para atuar no sistema prisional inclui apenas a exigência de seus bons antecedentes se comparado aquelas comumente solicitadas para o sistema regular de ensino. Devido às regras impostas pelas unidades prisionais, as aulas passam por uma série de adaptações e restrições que abarcam a relação professor-aluno, o ambiente das aulas, bem como o uso de materiais pedagógicos. Os professores percebem que a sua atuação no processo educacional nas unidades prisionais se encontra atrelada tanto às conveniências do sistema prisional quanto às prerrogativas dos detentos, em que parecem coexistir duas lógicas do significado de reabilitação e/ou formação: a possibilidade de transformação pela educação durante o tempo do aprisionamento e a cultura prisional caracterizada pela repressão, pela ordem e disciplina, impostas como forma de adaptação e de adequação ao meio.

**Palavras-chave:** Escola prisional. Prática pedagógica. Atuação docente.

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## **The teacher and education in the prison units: challenges and possibilities of teaching work across the grades**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of the present study was to identify and analyze aspects related the possible difficulties and challenges present in teaching activities in prisons. This was a qualitative study, carried out by applying semi-structured interviews to licensed teachers in different areas of knowledge, working in a prison school, in the interior of the state of Minas Gerais. The study showed that the teacher's entry to work in the prison system includes only the requirement of their good background compared to those commonly requested for the regular education system. Due to the rules imposed by the prison units, the classes undergo a series of adaptations and restrictions that cover the teacher-student relationship, the classroom environment, as well as the use of pedagogical materials. Teachers perceive that their performance in the educational process in prison units is linked both to the conveniences of the prison system and to the prerogatives of the inmates, in which two logics of the meaning of rehabilitation and/or training seem to coexist: the possibility of transformation through education during the time of imprisonment and the prison culture characterized by repression, order and discipline, imposed as a way of adapting and adapting to the environment.

**Keywords:** Prison school. Pedagogical practice. Teaching performance.

## **El docente y la educación en el medio penitenciario: retos y posibilidades del trabajo docente entre rejas**

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### **Resumen**

Este artículo identificó y analizó las posibles dificultades y desafíos presentes en las actividades docentes en unidades penitenciarias. A través de una investigación cualitativa, por medio de entrevistas semiestructuradas con profesores licenciados en diferentes áreas del conocimiento, que actúan en una escuela penitenciaria, en el interior del estado de Minas Gerais, fue posible verificar que el ingreso del profesor al trabajo en este tipo de sistema incluye solamente el requisito de sus buenos antecedentes frente a los comúnmente solicitados para el sistema educativo regular. Debido a las normas impuestas por las unidades penitenciarias, las clases sufren una serie de adaptaciones y restricciones que abarcan la relación docente-alumno, el ambiente del aula, así como el uso de materiales pedagógicos. Los docentes perciben que su actuación en el proceso educativo en las unidades penitenciarias está conectada tanto a las conveniencias del sistema penitenciario como a las prerrogativas de los detenidos, en las que parecen coexistir dos lógicas del significado de rehabilitación y/o formación: la posibilidad de transformación a través de la educación durante el tiempo de reclusión y la cultura carcelaria caracterizada por la represión, el orden y la disciplina, impuesta como forma de adaptación y adecuación al medio.

**Palabras clave:** Escuela penitenciaria. Práctica pedagógica. Desempeño docente.

## Introduction

Prison education has its origins in religion, with early concerns emerging, for instance, in the United States of America. The primary objective was to enable prisoners to read the Bible and other sacred texts. However, the initial efforts towards the education of the prison population encountered obstacles from prison authorities. One example of this situation was the prohibition imposed by the director of Auburn Penitentiary in 1824, which banned prisoners from reading and writing on the grounds that they might use this knowledge to forge documents. This view was eventually adopted by directors of other prisons (DEL PONT, 1984; SUTHERLAND; CRESSEY, 1966).

As this conception was overcome, in recent decades, education in prisons has been recognized as one of the main policies for social inclusion and crime prevention. Today, prison education goes beyond the idea of a mere humanitarian measure and/or prison management strategy; it is considered a right guaranteed to prisoners. In this sense, it is argued that the right to education is a social right of citizenship (MARSHALL, 1967). This right is enshrined in various international human rights norms to which Brazil is a signatory (MARCONDES; MARCONDES, 2008).

In the prison environment, the school functions as a legal device in the rehabilitation project for those who, due to deviant behavior, are paying their debt to society. This process involves exclusion from the social environment to create the possibility of inclusion, within the legally required standards. However, it is important to note that one of the defining characteristics of Brazilian prisoners is their low level of education. In other words, the school has not fulfilled its objective of forming citizens for most inmates, providing certification capable of allowing entry into the labor market, and sharing the social group's rules of coexistence (MARCONDES; MARCONDES, 2008).

Education in prison units can be characterized as transformative education, highlighting the creation and daily interactions as constitutive elements of the formative process. It also questions the already established and institutionalized norms that circulate in the daily life of schools. The culture of a prison school, built between the extramural school culture and the formal and informal culture constituted in prison, provides the subjects who interact there with a continuous process of becoming, simply movement, becoming, going beyond the realization of normative models (MARCONDES; MARCONDES, 2008).

To delve deeper into this discussion, a fundamental question arises: *Who are these teachers working in Brazilian prisons?* This is the first and fundamental aspect to consider when discussing content and methodologies of pedagogical projects for prisoners. Teachers in prison schools did not always choose this path; however, procedural aspects of the educational system led them there.

Pedagogical practice in adverse and threatening conditions can pose a challenge for many, pushing them to understand the reasons for imprisonment and to contribute to learning processes for those deprived of freedom and systematic knowledge.

The initial phase of a teacher in a prison unit school resembles a rite of passage in which they suddenly enter a professional environment. As Onofre and Julião (2013, p. 149) state, it is important to consider that when a teacher enters prison schools, they "undergo a process similar to the arrival of a newcomer in prison, when the house rules are explained to them by the governing team." At this moment, the teacher understands their condition as a learner in a space with peculiar characteristics and the need to remain in that professional environment. According to Duarte (2018), this teacher realizes the importance of acquiring knowledge, not only to deal with different cultures but also to handle conflicts and dilemmas for which they were not prepared in their initial training.

The teacher who works in the prison system typically holds the same qualifications as those teaching in regular schools. Even if they are given observations, restrictions, or some specific type of preparation by the prison unit or an isolated government program aimed at working in the prison system, in general, the teacher holds the same qualifications as those in regular schools. The minimal preparation prior to their insertion into the system generally pertains only to security measures, posture, and personal conduct for that environment, not to the specificities of curricula, subjects, or content to be taught in that context (CUSTÓDIO; NUNES; PAIXÃO, 2021).

The prison teacher, in addition to properly instructing their students, must also, indirectly, take on the responsibility of guiding them toward freedom and social reintegration through the education they provide. Their own image as a free and successful individual in the course of education seems to demand this affirmation, posture, conduct, and performance. In an environment of incarceration, it is imagined that this condition and self-image must conflict with the adverse condition of the students, upon whom the prison teacher will seek to imprint a reorientation of course that could potentially culminate in their liberation, both symbolically and in actual fact (DUARTE, 2018).

From this perspective, the objective of the present investigation was to identify and analyze possible difficulties and challenges encountered by teachers working in a prison school located in a rural town in the state of Minas Gerais.

## **Methodology**

Given the phenomenon under study, the scientific path of the human and social sciences proved to be the most appropriate to guide its investigation. Thus, this study is characterized as qualitative

The teacher and education in the prison units: challenges and possibilities of teaching work across the grades research, which, according to Minayo (2011), deals with a universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes. This corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes, and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables.

As a data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview was used, conducted and based on the studies of Spradley (1979), who highlights the interview with ethnographic characteristics as a discursive event, which, in turn, can be described by the way some dialogues are conducted in social occasions or meetings. For this research, conducted through personal-virtual interviews via Google Meet, a semi-structured interview was developed with the purpose of collecting, identifying, and analyzing data pertinent to the phenomenon in question.

In a universe of 10 teachers and one principal from the school in question, after being informed about the research, six teachers (five women and one man) working in the educational programs of a prison school located in a rural town in the state of Minas Gerais participated in this study. To preserve the anonymity of the research participants, codes were assigned, from P1 to P6, corresponding to the statements highlighted in this article. It is worth noting that the choice of this prison unit was motivated by the intention to contribute to the understanding of a local issue, offering feedback to the entity and the city where it is located. In the selection of the sample group, the following inclusion criteria were considered: licensed teachers working in the mentioned prison unit, and acceptance to participate in the research after being informed about the Informed Consent Form.

As for the characterization of the participants, P1 holds a degree in Pedagogy and a postgraduate degree in Coordination, Supervision, and School Guidance. She has 20 years since graduation and works in prison education in her area of expertise; she has 13 years of teaching experience in regular education and two years of teaching in the prison system; she holds another permanent position in the Municipality and is contracted by the State. P2 holds a degree in History, with a Master's degree in the same field of knowledge. She has been teaching in prison education for four and a half years; she does not hold another position and has always worked in public state schools. Graduated in Literature with a degree in Portuguese Language and English Language, P3 teaches in the prison system in her area of expertise. Until 2019, she taught English, and in 2020, she worked with Languages. She graduated in 2016 when she began teaching in regular education, and in 2017, she started in the prison, where she has been teaching until today, in the only position she holds. P4 holds a degree in Pedagogy and a postgraduate degree in Methodology and Philosophy of Religious Education, as well as in School Inspection in 1992. Although she does not teach in her area of expertise in the prison system, this teacher has been the principal since 2016. Participant P5 holds a degree in Literature and Pedagogy. She teaches in her area in the prison system, has 15 years since graduation in Literature,

and two years in Pedagogy; she has 10 years of teaching experience in regular education and, in the prison system, she claims to be the most experienced, having started there in 2014 when the prison school in question was founded. Finally, participant P6 holds a Bachelor's degree in Administration, a degree in Geography, and a postgraduate degree in Religious Science. He has four years since graduation in Geography and nine years as a Bachelor's in Administration. He has six years of teaching experience in regular education, three years in the prison system, and does not hold another position. In the system, he teaches in the area of Geography.

According to the participants' accounts, there is no requirement for a link with any external, state, or private educational institution for a teacher from any field to teach in the prison system, nor is specific prior training or a minimum period of experience in external regular education required. Additionally, there are no restrictions based on age, gender, ideology, physical disability, or any other criteria that would prevent a teacher from applying to teach in the system. The only restriction, which is an unconditional requirement, is a clean criminal record—teachers with any criminal process or record in their personal history are not accepted under any circumstances, which is justified by the nature of the environment in which they will be working. According to all participants, teachers working in the prison system do not receive any form of personal insurance or additional compensation for their workplace.

In the data analysis, after transcribing the information from the interviews, the content analysis technique was used (BARDIN, 2011; CAREGNATO; MUTTI, 2006). The cited authors identify three stages that constitute the content analysis technique: pre-analysis, material exploration, and treatment of results and interpretation. The first stage is an organization phase, which can utilize various procedures, such as floating reading, hypotheses, objectives, and the development of indicators that support the interpretation. In the second stage, the data are coded based on registration units. Finally, in the last stage, categorization is carried out, which involves classifying elements according to their similarities and differentiating them, followed by regrouping based on common characteristics.

In conducting this study, the guidelines regulated by Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Commission on Research Ethics were considered, with the project approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Viçosa on December 16, 2019, according to CEP letter No. 3.773.219.

## Results and discussion

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The discussion of the results obtained was developed through the analysis of the interview data conducted with the participating teachers, the bibliography used that aligned with the topic addressed, and also the positions assumed by the authors of the investigation concerning the theme. In this way, it was possible to gain a comprehensive understanding and in-depth discussion of the categories of analysis that emerged from the data, which are organized into three parts. The first part seeks to understand the curriculum programs, the training of inmates, and the structuring of classes; the second part addresses the organization of education in the prison system: the facilities and difficulties for intervention practice; and finally, the third part analyzes the resources, methodological strategies, the teacher-student relationship, and the challenges of pedagogical practice in the prison system.

### **Curriculum Programs, Inmate Education, and Class Structuring**

According to the interviewees, apart from the situational specifics imposed by the prison environment, it can be said that the curriculum programs and their content are practically the same as those in regular education, especially since they operate under the same framework as the Adult Education (EJA) programs practiced outside. The workload is slightly reduced, but they strive to follow the same guidelines and directives set by the State Department of Education for regular education.

What distinguishes prison education from regular education, according to the interviewees, are the necessary adaptations made to suit the prison context. These adaptations are particularly related to covering the content within a shorter time frame, as prison education has a reduced time period compared to regular education, as noted by participant P3.

We have to adapt a lot because we know that the curriculum is already very extensive for regular education, which has a whole year to cover the content. In the prison system, within the EJA as a whole, there's only one semester per grade. So, we end up having to make many adaptations, but in terms of the assessment schedule and the approval method, it's the same as in regular education (P3).

Regarding the opinions of teachers P2 and P4 on whether these adaptations affect the education of inmates, this is one of the few areas where they show some divergence. The main difference lies in how each teacher manages and implements both the time spent on activities with the inmates and the adaptations in their practice, due to the varying ages and differing levels of knowledge among the inmates (P2 and P4).

As for the structuring of classes, teachers P2 and P6 reported that there is no established requirement, either by the teacher or the prison system, for forming the classes. What these teachers refer to is an evaluation they conduct of the inmates who apply for education, based on the grade level



each inmate claims to have completed. This is done through research into the students' records with possible entries in the Department of Education or the schools where they claim to have completed their last grade. When the school administration is unable to obtain records or information to confirm the inmates' claims, according to teacher P5, the teachers design and administer an assessment to better place the inmates in the appropriate grade level within a particular stage of basic education.

Other issues are also reported, with an emphasis on the heterogeneity of the classes, particularly concerning the individual abilities of the inmates. The teachers need to navigate these challenges and, at times, implement adaptations, as stated by teacher P2:

The classes are very heterogeneous because what corresponds to the 6th grade, we refer to as the 1st period of elementary education. Sometimes an inmate arrives at this elementary level and doesn't know how to read or write properly; and sometimes, it's an older student, someone who dropped out of school many years ago. On the other hand, there's a young person, 18 or 19 years old, who recently entered (the prison) and was studying until not long ago. So, there's a great difficulty in leveling the students' knowledge within the class due to this heterogeneity [...] in the same grade, I have students who are 20 and 40 years old.

According to Paiva (2007), the challenges faced by prison educators are not limited to those commonly assumed to be inherent to the prison environment. The author addresses these issues with particular insight, offering a differentiated perspective by highlighting topics such as Adult and Youth Education (EJA), dropout rates, autonomy, and continuous education. Since EJA is the most widely applied educational modality in prison settings, Paiva (2007) expands on this concept by stating that, with this understanding, it is necessary to recognize that this group of young and adult men and women lives under special conditions. Therefore, they require educational and pedagogical proposals that are suitable for the extreme situation they face, particularly in terms of the education they can receive and the role that education can play in the resocialization process—one of the purposes of confinement, adopted as a form of social control over crime in many cultures (PAIVA, 2007).

The interviewed teachers reported that the composition and attendance of classes undergo various changes throughout the year. Students may be transferred to another unit mid-semester; new students may arrive from another unit where they were attending school; others may be released; or they may be suspended from classes by the prison administration due to internal disciplinary issues or simply drop out voluntarily.

Regarding dropout rates, Paiva (2007) warns against the common misconception that there is no dropout in prison schools. The author questions what is understood by dropout in EJA, and even more so, in the context of incarceration. The concept of dropout in adult and youth education has

The teacher and education in the prison units: challenges and possibilities of teaching work across the grades often been misunderstood, viewed as a lack of interest from the student, leading to their departure. While this aspect undoubtedly exists, it is necessary to look beyond what appears on the surface. Young and adult learners prioritize their adult lives, which include responsibilities such as home care, family, work, and financial obligations. Although school is important—and hence they return to it—it does not constitute a priority, as other demands take precedence, unlike in childhood, where these demands should not be as present (PAIVA, 2007).

Thus, rather than simply discussing dropout, it is crucial to understand it as a dynamic process of coming and going, driven by the necessities of daily life, which is not always stable enough to keep individuals fixed in place, forcing them into constant migrations of residence, work, and study locations. It is also essential to consider how the school itself, through its rituals, practices, routines, and pedagogical proposals, might contribute to students' disengagement, disillusioned by the inadequacy of what is offered compared to what they seek (PAIVA, 2007). The author further emphasizes that in prison, the reasons behind dropout do not stem from the usual life challenges and that it may be easier to evaluate how inadequate the school might be in meeting the needs and demands of these individuals. While, on the one hand, the deprivation of liberty could help ensure student attendance, it does not prevent disengagement if the pedagogical project fails to consider the reality of these individuals and their desires within the unique space of the prison environment.

## **Organization of Education in the Prison System: Facilitators and Challenges for Intervention Practice**

The organization of education within the prison system, along with the possible facilitators and challenges that arise from it, carries its own unique characteristics and dynamics specific to that environment where it is processed and attempts to be established. This became evident during the interviews. The teachers, who were the primary focus of these interviews, upon being introduced to that universe, began to interact closely and organically with the other actors within it, becoming an integral part of the processes occurring in that environment.

It was further observed that the teachers do not merely come to the prison to fulfill their teaching duties as part of their professional role. Instead, as they interact with that environment something they themselves report they become involved in a way that goes beyond their functional obligations and feel as though they are a part of that universe. They describe being absorbed by this environment and taking on a sense of responsibility to teach, develop, rehabilitate, and resocialize those who present

themselves as students, even if this responsibility extends beyond the conditions they previously experienced and considered in a regular education setting. Once they have engaged with this environment, they report that indifference is no longer an option.

Certain statements from the interviewees clearly illustrate some of the facilitators and challenges they face.

One teacher mentioned the ease that the discipline within the prison imposes but noted, "It's better there in terms of discipline, but it's a bit limited because their interaction is only among themselves, and that makes it difficult. They don't have access to the internet and can't research anything".

Teacher P1 reported difficulties related to space and the allocation of students within the prison school:

The difference we face is closely related to security issues and the physical space that is available to us... It's rare for a class to have more than 12 or 15 students, mainly because our classroom can't accommodate that number of students, as it's very small, and they need to maintain a minimum distance from each other and from the teachers (P1).

Teacher P5 further argued regarding the imposed behavior: "[...] the fact that they can't leave and have to behave, because otherwise they get punished, most of them participate, they want to learn, and the fact that they are already interested helps a lot".

Some teachers perceive higher-level impositions as a complication to their work, as evidenced in the statements of P3 and P6:

Yes, there is difficulty if we have to strictly follow what the government imposes for each grade or modality. If we had to follow it rigorously, I don't think we would manage, but for us in the prison system, they've given us the flexibility to work in the way the teacher thinks is best (P3).

Difficulty! Because, in fact, there is no specific curriculum or base for EJA. We follow the parameters of Elementary and High School and adapt what is essential. We are currently working on creating a common curriculum for EJA, and within this curriculum, we are trying to condense it a bit to see if we can make something just for the prison system, because we have students there who are 18, as well as some who are 60 years old (P6)  
(P6).

## **Resources, Methodological Strategies, Teacher-Student Relationship, and the Challenges of Pedagogical Practice in the Prison System**

According to the interviewees, due to the lack of more substantial resources of all kinds,

The teacher and education in the prison units: challenges and possibilities of teaching work across the grades including school funds which they only managed to secure for the first time in 2021 after many years they try to maximize their own personal, teaching, and pedagogical resources to optimize the classes and the dynamics of these activities. They enhance the lessons with games, short videos, and the most creative illustrations they can manage to engage with the group. As much as possible, they attempt to adapt what they used to do in regular education and offer the participating inmates a connection to the outside reality and the standard methods of regular education.

In her article, **the education-pedagogy in prison, in the context of social pedagogy: conceptual and epistemological definitions**, Pereira (2011) provides a definition of education within the prison context that is well aligned with the reality of that environment:

Legally, education in prison is a type of adult education aimed at providing schooling, training, and qualification to individuals temporarily incarcerated so that, after serving their time of deprivation of liberty, they can reintegrate with dignity into the social and work world. This is particularly important because most of these individuals have little or no formal education. In this sense, many incarcerated individuals require a broad and differentiated education to acquire knowledge, skills, and practices that enable them to (re)construct their citizenship if, at any point in their social and productive life, they were or felt like a citizen (PEREIRA, 2011, p. 3).

Due to the discipline imposed by the prison system on all inmates, teachers report that the development and implementation of various activities are facilitated by this discipline, avoiding the challenges and difficulties they would encounter if these activities were carried out in the regular education system. Regarding this environment, Goffman (2005) asserts that, characterized as a total institution, where massification, the mortification of the self, and homogenizing treatment establish the logic of its functioning, the prison aims to discipline bodies and reproduce power relations instituted by the order. Daily activities are subjected to strict regulation and standardization to contribute to the modification of the individual inflator's personality (GOFFMAN, 2005).

For a long time, schools have been attributed with failures, injustices, and possibilities. According to Dubet (1998), to what extent can a school be considered just, given that the school culture it transmits is that which is imposed and legitimized by the dominant classes? (DUBET, 1998).

As Goffman (2005) notes, the prison environment is marked by a culture and elements of the broader social context, such as language, values, norms, beliefs, science, education, repression, violence, order, and discipline, which often manifest subtly within its web of relationships. Prison units prioritize maintaining order, isolation, security, and discipline, and they often become almost impenetrable to change. Among their main characteristics is the lack of recognition of inmates as individuals.

According to Goffman (1974), the incarcerated individual undergoes a deterioration of their identity, and a new one is forged for them. The very lack of facial expression, combined with slang, allows the incarcerated person to manipulate aspects of the situation and communicate with others without the guards realizing what is happening. No one teaches them the unwritten code, but caution is essential for coexistence. In their daily actions, they know whom to obey they see, hear, and understand but it is wise, in many moments, to remain silent (GOFFMAN, 1974).

All participating teachers report that they try to maximize the use of the few resources they have, such as the projector, the board, the television, CDs, flash drives, and a notebook, and they note that everything has to be scheduled and checked.

Regarding security procedures, according to the statements of teachers P2 and P4, teachers are generally guided by a prison school staff manual that outlines a series of standardized security measures. These measures primarily aim to limit the introduction of information, products, and objects into the prison that could be used inappropriately or illegally by those deprived of liberty, such as cell phones, flash drives, MP3 players, notebooks, or similar devices (P2 and P4). They also noted that it is prohibited to carry bags or wallets with significant monetary value inside the pavilions. All professionals and their belongings must be searched upon entering and leaving the prison, and it is recommended that they bring only what is necessary for their work (P2, P3, and P4). All security procedures for the entry and exit of students and teachers from classrooms must be carried out by the prison guard, following the security norms of the Standard Operating Procedure (POP) (DUARTE, 2018).

Regarding the teacher-student relationship, the teachers unanimously reported that the inmates show them great appreciation, respect, consideration, and a significant amount of emotional transference. This facilitates interaction, the execution of activities, and the transfer of knowledge, which the students are able to absorb. It also allows the teachers to address and work with the students on personal, collective, and social issues that transcend the educational programs and the walls of the penal institution. In this regard, teacher P4 reported

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We have a subject called 'Life Project.' In this Life Project, we made adaptations. Each teacher is responsible for working on the life project with a different class. So, each one works with a different group. Since there are several teachers, each one ends up with a class. So, in addition to mathematics, they also work on the mathematics of life. This is EJA, and EJA focuses on the student's lived experience, what they bring with them (P4).

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Regarding the greatest and most significant challenges for pedagogical practice in the prison system, the unanimous consensus among all the teachers' statements was the lack of resources of all kinds that could and should be provided by the state. Among other aspects, they also pointed out the limited number of students in each class, which makes it difficult for them to foster a more dynamic exchange among the students (P3); the limitation to the EJA universe and the consequent circumstantial restriction on research methods, including the internet, which is prohibited (P5); the restriction on textbooks and the ban on various communication media, even if they were to be used in a restricted and targeted manner; the limitation of studies exclusively to the classroom, with no materials allowed to be taken to the cells (P2, P5, and P6); and the restriction on teaching materials for the teachers, who are not allowed, for example, to use books by Paulo Freire and other educators (P1).

Regarding these statements, it became clear throughout the research that, although school education in prisons is not a recent phenomenon in the country's history, it remains one of the most neglected and marginalized areas by public policies and the education system itself, especially concerning the role of the teacher. In light of this, it is necessary to reflect on the school education provided in prison institutions and, above all, on the formation of the identity of teachers who work in this specific educational reality (DUARTE; SIVIERI-PEREIRA, 2018).

As for the possibility of overcoming these various and ongoing challenges and limitations, the majority of the participating teachers expressed optimism, dynamism, and hope, particularly due to the introduction of the *Caixa Escolar*, which they will begin to benefit from in 2021. During the interviews, it was observed that all the teachers working in this prison school are determined not to be defeated by the difficulties and obstacles imposed on them, or those that arise due to the general lack of resources. They seek to overcome these challenges by relying on their personal resources, individual and collective creativity, as well as the encouragement and motivation they receive from both the students and themselves.

Teachers P1 and P3 reported that, once they became involved in that interactive work, within an environment of widespread lack and in the face of the state of neglect experienced by both the students and the system itself in its precariousness, they could no longer abandon them, pretend they don't exist, deny that reality, or fail to commit to trying to change it. Once involved, the natural choice is to commit fully.

In general, it was also noted in the interviews and the teachers' statements that their direct experience with teaching in the prison system, particularly with inmate students, confirms most of

the points raised or addressed by the authors referenced in this research. Some of these statements even fully echo what the authors have observed about this unique environment.

In this sense, the educational process is much broader than what is commonly referred to as formal education, which occurs within the confines of school settings. It can represent a real understanding that captures the mechanisms effectively produced and reproduced by individuals in their concrete life processes, or, conversely, it can be an alienated view that, instead of fostering this understanding, fills this space in people's consciousness with myths, illusions, and conceptions that reinforce their inability to understand themselves and the world a world they are producing and reproducing daily, often without being aware of it (SADER, 2007).

It is also important to remember that experience in working with individuals who, for some reason, find themselves in prison has shown that, at some point, many of them were denied the right to education. In many cases, the reasons that led these individuals to prison are related to this denial of rights. This situation underscores the social relevance of research, as in such cases, including prisoners in the educational system, beyond correcting an injustice, can also help integrate them into the social system. However, much discussion today revolves around the inability of prison systems to provide prisoners with the conditions needed for participation in social life. The prevailing view of the system is that it is very costly for society and that individuals who go through it often emerge worse off. In this context, it is crucial to determine whether there are, in fact, policies in place to include prisoners in the educational system and whether this inclusion helps the system fulfill its intended purpose: to prepare prisoners for social reintegration (ALMEIDA; SANTOS, 2016).

Not only in a general sense, but specifically referring to prison education, we can once again turn to Nóvoa (1995) in his work *Formação de professores e profissão docente* ("Teacher Training and the Teaching Profession"). In this work, analyzing the decades from the 1960s to the 1990s, and in a context far removed from our Brazilian reality, Nóvoa seemed to foresee much of what is happening with this profession today. He describes that the tensions and conflicts currently surrounding teacher training are not only tied to occupying an important job market but, more importantly, to the control of the teaching field. In the coming years, a significant part of the future definition of the teaching profession will be decided: will it be the consolidation of new regulations and control mechanisms over the teaching profession, or the scientific development of the profession within a framework of contextualized autonomy? (NÓVOA, 1995).

Indeed, the assertions of the aforementioned author serve as a warning, and this became evident throughout the interviews with the teachers working in the prison school. Nóvoa could not have been

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Training should encourage a critical-reflective perspective that provides teachers with the tools for autonomous thinking and facilitates participatory self-formation dynamics. Being in training involves a personal investment, a free and creative effort focused on one's own paths and projects, with the aim of building an identity that is also a professional identity. The teacher is the person. And an important part of the person is the teacher (NIAS, 1991). Therefore, it is crucial to (re)find spaces of interaction between the personal and professional dimensions, allowing teachers to take ownership of their training processes and give them meaning within the context of their life stories (NÓVOA, 1995, p. 13).

It was also noted in the accounts of the interviewed teachers that the work of adapting to their teaching role in prison education aligns with what Cole and Walker (1989), as cited by Nóvoa, assert (1995, p. 15):

Work centered on the teacher's personal experience is particularly relevant during periods of crisis and change, as one of the most significant sources of stress is the feeling of not being in control of professional situations and intervention contexts. Time is needed to accommodate innovations and changes, to rebuild identities.

## **Final considerations**

This research sought to portray various aspects of education in prisons and its potential operability within that environment, focusing on the inclusion of teachers from regular education into a universe of almost total social exclusion. It also highlighted that education, like work, not only serves as the most fruitful way to reclaim the excluded individual but also as the most effective means to liberate, resocialize, and reintegrate those abandoned to their fate in prisons.

However, it became evident that there is no significant effort to propose a specific school education model for the prison context. At the same time, the importance of respecting the singularities of that space and motivating those individuals to see education as a possibility for emancipation, even while incarcerated, was emphasized. It was also noted that a specialized or differentiated training for prison teachers is not necessarily required, as within that environment, despite the exclusion, everyone is essentially dealing with a public school setting, with public school teachers, and with EJA students, with the particular singularities of this educational modality.

Through this research, it was possible to gain an overview of the current state of the decaying and precarious Brazilian prison system, where over 90% of the country's prison units are overcrowded. Rarely in human history have so many people been confined together.

The study addressed the challenges and issues faced by teachers and education within the prison environment, highlighting various instances of challenges and possibilities for teaching behind bars.



These are challenges to which prison teachers are constantly and fully exposed and subjected. However, they are also placed within the same universe of possibilities for teaching under such conditions, considering the latent certainty that education carries with it a great potential for change, for overcoming obstacles, for evolution, and for empowering those who engage with it.

It was observed that education in prisons serves both the conveniences of the prison system and the prerogatives of the inmates. There are no preconditions required for a teacher to enter and work in the prison system, apart from the requirement of a clean criminal record. The expectations a teacher has about the prison environment, education within that environment, and the inmates who engage in learning change significantly over time after their immersion and experience in that setting. The challenges and possibilities of teaching inmates do not necessarily require the teacher to adapt to that environment or undergo continuous training specifically for this purpose. Additionally, the learning, experiences, and accumulated knowledge of the prison teacher can indeed be drawn from their predecessors and passed on to their future successors and colleagues who join them in this work.

It was clearly noted that within the prison space, two opposing logics of the meaning of rehabilitation coexist: the possibility of transformation through education during incarceration, and the prison culture characterized by repression, order, and discipline, imposed as a means of adaptation and compliance with the environment. This sets up a conflict that needs to converge toward the goal of rehabilitating the incarcerated individual and properly returning them to social life.

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