

**Article****Remission of prison sentences through reading in Rio de Janeiro:
possibilities and advances****Vanusa Maria de Melo*¹, Sandra Maciel de Almeida**²**

*Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), ** Fluminense Federal University (UFF), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Abstract

In this paper we present a description of the activities involved in the project called “remission of sentences through reading”, being carried out in prison units in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Currently, three institutions are responsible for conducting these activities: Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Unirio), operating in male and female incarceration units; the “They Exist Association”, responsible for the activities at a transgender facility; and Rio de Janeiro Federal Rural University (UFRRJ), working in a unit where former police officers and militia members are serving sentences. The aims of this study are to ascertain the progress of the initiative in terms of number of remissions granted; to identify the main types of literary works read by the three groups; and to analyze the perceptions of the respective project coordinators. For these purposes, we analyzed institutional documents and conducted open interviews with the coordinators. In addition, we analyzed the legislation pertinent to the theme, in particular the Criminal Enforcement Law, which has not been amended to make the remission practice mandatory. Despite resistance to these actions, which are carried out in partnership with the Rio de Janeiro State Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration (SEAP), the number of inmates released early has been growing. However, the effects of the proposal to enhance the reading and writing skills of prisoners involve complexities that deserve deeper analyses. As a partial result, however, we noted some tensions between the possibility of remission through reading and the punitive perspective of prisons, besides a lack of systematization of the information about the practices.

Keywords: Remission of sentences, reading, writing, criminal enforcement.

1. Introduction

In 2011, Law 12,433 altered Law 7,210 of 1984 (Criminal Enforcement Law - LEP in the Portuguese initials), allowing (but not mandating) the reduction of sentences for study or work activities (Brasil, 2011). Despite the practice of reducing sentences of prisoners for engaging in the two activities, there was no law regulating the practice, resulting in instability and lack of guarantee. Thus,

¹ Doctoral Candidate in Education at PUC-Rio. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3234-9138> E-mail: vanusamelo@yahoo.com.br

² Professor of Pedagogy at the School of Education of Fluminense Federal University (UFF), where he coordinates the Group on Ethnography, Education and Social Justice; member of the Research Group on Pedagogical Formation and Practices and the Teacher Training Group. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5201-0735> E-mail: sandramacieldealmeira@gmail.com.

remission was considered a benefit instead of a right. Based on this alteration of the LEP, inmates became eligible for a reduction of one day in their sentence for each 12 hours of study.

The next year, Joint Edict 276 was issued by the Federal Justice Internal Affairs Minister and the Director General of the National Penitentiary Department (Brasil, 2012), which provided for the offer of education and complementary actions to stimulate reading. Among other provisions, it requires the libraries of federal penitentiaries to have at least 20 copies of each book on the established reading list, with the objective of serving the needs of groups of up to 20 inmates. The participants have 21 to 30 days to read each work, and then must produce a book report or review, with allowance of a sentence reduction of four days. Therefore, an inmate who reads during the entire period can have 48 days remitted. The prison authorities in the state of Paraná had already started a similar program in 2009.

The Edict also establishes criteria for evaluation of the “homework” presented by the participants and the performance of the people responsible for guiding the activities. Since its issuance, the practice has been analyzed and reproduced in some Brazilian states. In the state of Rio de Janeiro, on July 1, 2016, SEA Resolution 621 was issued by the State Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration. According to its stated motives, reading is recognized as making a contribution to social reintegration of former inmates, as follows:

[...] it is unquestionable that education, as a right of all and a duty of the State, is one of the most important forms, if not the most important, to assure the dignity of the human person, since formal education is the most effective way of integration of individuals in society (SEAP, 2016, n.p.).

Of particular note is the great importance attributed to the right to education and the idea that access to this right can be sufficient for the success of the so-called social reintegration processes.

We believe in the value of formal education and realize it is fundamental for it to be definitively guaranteed to the entire prison population, but we also know that other rights also must be assured. In this sense, we agree with Onofre, for whom “education cannot be considered ‘all powerful’, but care is needed not to cultivate pessimism” (Onofre, 2011, p. 22).

We believe that the actions for remission of sentences through reading cannot be strictly classified as formal education activities, since the reading does not necessarily occur in classrooms, or even when occupying such spaces, is not connected to the curricular procedures of schools. Nor are the reading activities regulated by the same rules that apply to routine school activities. Instead, the governing document is the Criminal Enforcement Law (LEP). We believe that those actions are complementary, as indicated by Resolution 3 from the National Council for Criminal and Penitentiary Policy.

With respect to the guarantee of remission, the Resolution is in line with rules that had been defined previously for federal institutions, namely reduction of four days for each book read, as proved through a book report or review, with the possibility of reduction of up to 48 days per year.

The Resolution established the Committee on Remission of Sentences through Reading, chaired by the director of the Division for Education, Culture

and Sports of the SEAP, plus two aides appointed by the Office to Coordinate Social Insertion, who must be students majoring in pedagogy, literature or social communication. Besides inmates, the staff members of the penitentiaries involved in the program are also assured of the right to participate in reading workshops to stimulate the habit of reading.

Besides establishing the orientations necessary to monitor the activities and judge the writing of the required book reports, the Committee also can sponsor activities such as reading roundtables, workshops, expositions, presentations, literary competitions and related activities. As can be imagined, these initiatives have a strong softening influence on the old rigid institutional model of incarceration (Goffman, 1974).

Among other rules, the Resolution determines the secret nature of the texts produced by the participants, unless disclosure is authorized by the author and the manager of the SEAP, a procedure that is typically very slow, but is fundamental for the more comprehensive analysis we intend to undertake.

In this context, our goal in this article is to depict the current situation of the actions for remission of sentences through reading in the state of Rio de Janeiro, to verify the effectiveness of the processes and procedures for their implementation. We also aim to shed light on the challenges to the success of the actions for remission of sentences, to analyze the impasses that exist between the offer of the benefit and the routine exercise of activities by inmates, and reflect on the occurrence of tensions between these routine activities and the rules laid down by the prison administration in a context where punishment often collides with the guarantee of rights.

The article is divided into four sections including this introduction. In the second section we describe the methodology, in particular the process for selecting our interlocutors for open interviews. The third section covers the development of the text, starting with the subsection on "School education in prison settings", containing a brief retrospective on the topic, with focus on the state of Rio de Janeiro. Next, in the subsection entitled "Actions for remission of sentences through reading", we present a basic description of the actions developed, in particular its insertion as an extension project of the School of Literature of Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Unirio), under the coordination of Professor Marcelo Santos. The following subsection deals with schools and the curricular practices of reading in relation to other practices offered outside the formal education context, especially considering the contributions of Candido (1994) on the right to literature. The last subsection covers remission and its measurement, focusing on and thinking about the role of the mediator of reading in prison settings, guided by the ideas of Petit (2005). In our final considerations, we reiterate the importance of the practice of reading for the purpose of remission of prison sentences as discussed at the start of the article.

2. Methodology

Besides analyzing the legal documents that deal with the theme, we conducted open interviews with the coordinators of the projects who develop the activities involved in remission of sentences through reading. This option

was based on our belief that this is the proper method to gather broad information about a determined theme, according to the viewpoint of the respondents, with the possibility of obtaining greater details on that theme.

The interviews were used to obtain descriptions of the perceptions and representations of the respondents about the meaning of their projects in their own words. This shed light on the perspective of the respondents and their interpretation of their realities (Almeida, 2013). We gave broad leeway for our interviewees to express their ideas (Minayo et al., 1994).

We conversed in person with Mariana Paganote and Marcelo Santos, but due to scheduling problems we needed to engage in dialog with Marcos Pasche by e-mail. We chose these interlocutors because they coordinate the projects for remission of sentences through reading at the institutions they represent.

Marcelos Santos coordinates the remission activities through a partnership with the School of Literature of Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Unirio) and the sector for Social Insertion of the State Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration. The actions involve professors at the School of Literature and students majoring in literature and pedagogy at Unirio, both those receiving scholarships and volunteers (Unirio, 2020).

Mariana Paganote is a member of the association “Elas Existem: mulheres encarceradas” (“They Exist – women behind bars”). At the time of the interviews she was in charge of the project called *Leitura, Existência e Resistência*, or LER for short (“Reading, Existence and Resistance”), a partnership between the University of Quebradas and the Advanced Extension Program for Contemporary Culture (PACC) of Rio de Janeiro Federal University (UFRJ). The objective of the LER project is to carry out the activities for reduction of sentences through reading at Evaristo de Moraes Prison, with the transgender women and transvestites serving time there³. Besides the activities of the members of the association, who are all volunteers, extension students receiving scholarships also participate.

Finally, Professor Marcos Pasche is responsible for the activities at *Bandeira Stampa Jail*. His activities are carried out through the School of Literature of Rio de Janeiro Federal Rural University (UFRRJ). The project is coordinated by him with the assistance of students receiving extension scholarships and volunteer students.

The three respondents reported similar difficulties regarding the delay in defining the administrative procedures involving registration of the subjects

³ Evaristo de Moraes Prison, within the administrative structure of the penal system of Rio de Janeiro, is designated as a protective custody facility. According to Jorge Alexandre Mota, a prison agent who prepared a glossary of prison jargon, protective custody means being kept in “a cell reserved for inmates threatened by other prisoners.” (Mota, 2018, p. 47). In the specific case of Evaristo de Moraes Prison, this division is more complex, because it is a prison, not just a cell, intended to preserve life. According to Orlando Zaccone, in an interview cited by Felitti (2016), the prison has turned into a “ball of confusion”, because it has evolved into receiving inmates disowned by organized criminal factions. The penitentiary administration in Rio de Janeiro assigns inmates to prisons according to the gang faction they belong to. So, the prison now holds, besides people convicted of sex crimes and those under threat of drug trafficking gangs (such as *Comando Vermelho*, *Terceiro Comando*, *Amigos do Amigos* and others), cisgender homosexual men, transsexual women and transvestites, because they generally are at risk in the general prison population at other facilities.

involved, measures involving the documentation required for participation of mediators and the scheduling of activities, a matter that depends on other actions considered to have priority, identified by the civil servants who work with these procedures as a “question of security”.

According to Mariana Paganote, the association “Elas Existem: mulheres encarceradas” has been facing more difficulty because it is a project promoted by a partnership between a civil society entity and a university extension project. Therefore, as of this writing, the LER project had not begun its activities at the prison facility, because it was still in the process of training mediators.

All the interlocutors described difficulties with the restrictions imposed by the list of approved books authorized for reading, which is determined by the Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration (SEAP/ RJ).

In the interviews conducted with Marcelo Santos and Mariana Paganote, we started with some basic questions, but as mentioned, we opted for open interviews, for the reasons already explained, so the respondents were free to stray from the questions. The initial questions were: What were your motivations to get involved in a project for remission of sentences through reading? When and how was your initial process of adhesion to the remission practice? How are your relations with the penal system operators? How does the dynamic of leading the activities and correcting the book reviews work? What importance do you attribute to these actions?

For the interview with Marcos Pasche, conducted by e-mail, we sent the following questions: When did you start working with remission of sentences through reading? Was it via UFRRJ? Is there a specific project, with its own name? Are you the coordinator? Are other professors involved? Do you have students helping? Are they scholarship recipients or volunteers? How is the work structured? How many times per month do you visit the prison? How many inmates are served? Do you follow a set of rules or do you have freedom of action? I read that the prison is Bandeira Stampa; did you choose this facility or did the SEAP indicate it? If possible, briefly describe why you became part of this project.

For analysis of the roles attributed to the actions aimed at reduction of sentences through reading, we applied the notion of “reader as protagonist”, an expression coined by Santos and Leite (2017) as foundation for the project developed at Unirio. According to this idea, the central importance is focused on the readers and their processes of making sense of the literary text, in which they attribute to these processes a power that can contribute to their resocialization, to overcome the reality experienced at the institution and guide their lives in critical, autonomous and emancipatory form.

We use the word resocialization here, despite its complexity, because it is widely used in the documents pertaining to enforcement of penalties, in the justifications for the adoption of some measures, including in the text of Recommendation 69 of 2019 from the National Public Prosecutor Council, which states “Considering that combating the idleness of incarceration is one of the most effective measures to prevent rebellions, escape attempts and severe misconduct and promote resocialization...” (Brasil, 2020, n.p.) in the introduction regarding programs to reduce sentences through reading.

In this respect, we believe the metaphor used frequently by the jurist Carlos Elbert (2011) in interviews and debates is pertinent, that “the intention of teaching a person to live in society through enclosure is as absurd as intending to train someone to play football inside an elevator” (Elbert, 2011, n. p). Therefore, resocialization while removed from society generates contradictions.

Since we do not intend to discuss legal aspects of the concept that has been dubbed penal abolitionism⁴, we do not delve into this issue. Nevertheless, it is fundamental, without indicating the fragility of the expression.

3. Development

3.1. School education in prison settings

The establishment of the first state public school in a prison unit in Rio de Janeiro dates to 1967 (Julião, 2016, p. 25). Today there are 28 such state teaching establishments⁵ and according to information available at the website of the SEAP, there are 3,557 students studying at these schools. Considering that the total number of prisoners in the state reported by the Department of Penitentiaries (DEPEN) is 52,691 men and women, the number of students represents fewer than 7% of the total (Brasil, 2017).

The data from the DEPEN, however, indicate the existence of 5,026 prisoners involved in educational activities, of whom 435 are involved in activities for remission of sentences through reading. The total in this case is nearly 10%. It is a small level, but it shows that complementary educational activities help to minimize the precariousness of the offer of the right. The low percentage of people deprived of their freedom who engage in educational activities indicates this is an exception to the normal practice.

In any event, the numbers are disconcerting, because the schooling level of the prison population in Rio de Janeiro is very low. A total of 64% of the inmates have what is defined as low schooling (not having concluded 9th grade), of whom 744 are classified as illiterate and 2012 as literate but never attended school. This is a context in which it is common to attribute to formal education the main role in the process of reintegration of prisoners.

The difference between the information cited here and that indicated by the interviewees is obviously explained by the time difference. The data from the DEPEN were last updated in 2017 while our interviews were conducted in July and August 2019.

The list of inmates engaged in the program with respect to schooling level contains six people with postgraduate college degrees. These are certainly people who attract media attention and public opinion, especially when information began to circulate that they had adhered to the program for sentence remission through reading. An emblematic case is that of Sérgio

⁴ The theory of penal abolitionism proposes paths that lead to decriminalization or depenalization in certain cases, or substitution of incarceration with other modalities of punishment, such as alternative penalties, within the anti-punitive logic. Angela Davis (2009) is one of the leading proponents in this discussion.

⁵ Data available at the site of SEAP, at: <http://www.visitanteseap.rj.gov.br/VisitanteSeap/projetossocioeducacionaisseap/escolasemunidadespenais.html>, consulted on August 15, 2019.

Cabral, the former governor of Rio de Janeiro, imprisoned since 2016 for involvement in various corruption schemes.

The participation of Cabral in the project for sentence reduction through reading was noted in the press⁶, causing agitation of public opinion and discussion of the theme. The criticism of the program is inserted at a moment when many people associate human rights with privileges, against a backdrop of hot debate and strong political polarization and rejection of rights, including by Brazil's current president.

Despite having a college degree, reading was still the alternative chosen by the ex-governor to reduce his days behind bars. The punitive spirit of the moment has generated negative reactions and criticism of the idea.

Of particular note about this question is the fact that prisoners with college educations find no alternatives other than studying to reduce their sentences, or find few opportunities. The contingencies that exist in prisons perversely affect the prison population with low schooling, but also those with advanced schooling.

The schooling opportunities for people who have high school diplomas or college degrees in prisons are practically nil, so the possibility of reducing the sentence by reading also is pursued by prisoners with higher schooling levels. Although it is not obligatory to offer formal education in prisons, this is still a right of people deprived of liberty, in line with the intention and nature of rehabilitation, the maximum assumption of the utility of imprisonment.

3.2. Actions for remission through reading

Before proposing to the SEAP the partnership to enable entering prisons to conduct activities aimed at reducing sentences through reading, the coordinator of the project, Professor Marcelo Santos, was involved in the initiative called "Culture in Prison", carried out in partnership with the University of Michigan. The project called "Theater in Prison", begun in 1997, is part of this initiative, together with the project "The Reader as Protagonist", for the purpose of reducing sentences.

The mentioned projects are part of extension programs, which can be defined as follows:

University extension, based on the constitutional principle of the inseparability of teaching, research and extension, is a multidisciplinary educational, cultural, scientific and political process that promotes the transformative interaction between the university and other sectors of society (FORPROEX1⁷, 2012).

⁶ O *Globo* newspaper. In the reviews of the books read by Cabral in prison, the leading themes have been injustice and human evil (May 26, 2019, available at <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/em-resenhas-de-obras-literarias-lidas-na-prisao-cabral-privilegia-temas-como-injustica-a-maldade-humana-23694565>, consulted on August 15, 2019.

⁷A forum for the deans of the extension programs of Brazilian public universities.

In support of the characteristic presented above, “The reader as protagonist”, besides taking the program to prisons, also brings inmates and their family members to the university to take part in literary activities, such as reading roundtables and dramatizations, in a venue for interaction and discussion in which the development of good citizenship is a constant concern. The practices described by the project’s coordinator go beyond the vision of extension programs as redeemer of the social function of the university, redesigning this role in the sense of building a collaborative extension effort.

Marcelo Santos stated that the team thought that in proposing to go beyond the action in prisons, they could help the inmates involved with reading to find in the university a place to go when they are released.

The professor also stated that in 2014 he met Édson Sodr , a writer, actor and theater director, co-founder of the theater group called Kriadaki, created together with prison inmates. Sodr  at that time was an undergraduate student of philosophy at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ), but he switched to literature at Unirio in 2016, and obtained a scholarship to participate in the project, through which the two became partners.

All told, in 2019 about a thousand book reviews or reports produced by the inmates in the program coordinated by Unirio were evaluated. Enthusiasm was evident in the comments of Marcelo Santos, who has a doctorate in comparative literature and views literature as a path for readers to rethink the world and themselves or the system in which they are inserted. An example of this was the result of reading Franz Kafka’s *Der process (The Trial)*, which according to his analysis, expressed in an article published in *O Globo* newspaper, was the most enriching of the titles studied so far:

As we imagined, the inmates said it was a complicated book, that they did not understand the story. But we insisted, and worked on the question to overcome this difficulty. Surprisingly, at the end it was the book that attracted the most comments. There was strong identification with the question of facing a trial with no knowledge of the charges. We never know the limits of a reader — stated Santos (Heringer, 2019, n.p.).

At Unirio, one of the concerns now is the possibility of including blind people or those with weak vision, who could participate in the activities with the support of out-loud readers. Santos considers this would produce a double gain, because there would be another inmate involved, the reader, also seeking reduction of his sentence, besides being exposed to the literary works. It is interesting to muse about the aspect of solidarity that could be developed should this materialize, where the evaluation would be done orally.

Among the difficulties faced, Santos mentioned the lack of financial resources to develop the program, because the university can only afford to grant a scholarship to one student of the team that performs the work. The other participants (22 all told) are volunteers. Besides this, there are communication difficulties between the civil servants of that work to coordinate social insertion of the Penitentiary Administration Secretariat (SEAP) and the agents at the prisons where the activities take place, hampering the team’s routine. There are constant delays in retrieving the inmates involved in the project from their cells, among other impediments caused by the prison staff (Melo, 2014).

Mariana Paganote, a member of the association “They Exist – women behind bars”, a lawyer and creator of the project “Reading, Existence and Resistance” (LER), also faces administrative obstacles, because since 2018, after receiving financial support from the Brazilian Human Rights Fund and authorization to enter the prison, has recently been facing difficulties with the bureaucracy of Rio de Janeiro Federal University (UFRJ), the partner institution of the association for conducting the activities.

The group to be helped by the association will be composed of transvestites and transgender women who are incarcerated at Evaristo de Moraes Prison. So far, there has been no activity with the inmates, only actions to train the students of UFRJ who will engage in the support work there.

For Paganote, what motivates her efforts in favor of remission of sentences through reading is the need to strive to guarantee rights and the desire to improve reading skills and encourage reading. She considers an inclusive path to reduction of sentences, because the only requirement for participation is that the prisoners be literate, besides the fact there are no openings in the state schools located in the prison facilities.

Seventy prisoners will be served at Evaristo de Moraes Prison, and according to Mariana Paganote, the Association’s intention is to organize groups and assure the activities will last at least six months, considered to be the minimum period to achieve procedural results (sentence remission).

She also expressed a reflection on penal abolitionism in the interview. She stated that the association “They Exist” is abolitionist in nature, as originally conceived by Davis (2009), but indicated a reservation: “It’s clear that abolitionism is an ideal to pursue over the long run, but until we achieve this ideal, we will strive to guarantee rights.”

She also expressed concerns over the type of reading offered. She believes it is important to valorize Brazilian authors, especially Afro-Brazilian authors, to strengthen the identity narratives as a way to valorize groups that are currently devalued or often invisibilized.

All told, the actions for sentence remission via reading already under way under the auspices of Unirio and UFRJ serve 1,300 prisoners (Heringer, 2019).

3.3. School and reading practices

The typical school curriculum often restricts the study of literature to the content seen as necessary to prepare students to pass the National Secondary School Examination (ENEM), used for entrance in federal universities in Brazil (Bernardo, 2010).

Another relevant aspect refers to reading activities determined only to obtain school grades, motivated by a verb conjugated in the imperative (read). In this respect, we can cite the ideas of Pennac:

The verb to read does not support the imperative. This is an aversion shared with some others: the verb ‘to love’... the verb ‘to dream’... So, it is also possible to try, of course. So we have: ‘Love me!’ ‘Dream!’ ‘Read!’ ‘Read now, dammit, I’m ordering you to read!’ (Pennac, 2003, p. 13).

Kleiman (2013) also offers a vision that complements the idea described above, by stating that “when we read because somebody else orders use to read, as often happens at school, we are only engaged in mechanical activities that have little to do with meaning and sense” (Kleiman, 2013, p. 35).

The existence of this situation, added to the fact that only a small minority of the inmate population can attend formal schools, as already demonstrated, indicates the importance of regulating the activity of sentence reduction through reading in various Brazilian states, especially Rio de Janeiro, because the interest in the formation of readers, of investing to stimulate the activity of reading beyond the restricted utilitarian goal of obtaining a reduction of penalties, is common in the discourse of the three people involved in these actions interviewed here.

Antonio Candido (1999), according to whom access to literature is a fundamental right, also stated that:

A certain type of psychological function is perhaps the first thing that occurs when we think of the role of literature. The production and its fruition are based on a type of universal need for fiction and fantasy, which to a certain extent is shared by all humans, for invariably appearing in everyone's life, as individuals and groups, along with satisfaction of the most elementary necessities. And this happens in both primitive and civilized settings, in children and adults, in the literate and illiterate (Candido, 1999. pp. 82-83).

The function described by Candido certainly also pertains to people deprived of freedom, many of whom experience a process of identification with the characters of some literary works, as shown by stories in the press (Heringer, 2019). This allows them to reflect on their roles in the world and in the system imposed on them by the jail sentence.

Hence, it can be stated that the gain in the sense of guaranteeing rights (Baptista, 2012), stressed by Mariana Paganote, is not the only one, because there is also a differential in relation to the work with literature that is common in the schools.

It is important to stress that the projects in question are targeted at inmates who do not have access to formal school education (Unirio works in prisons that do not have schools, UFRRJ is present in a prison where nearly all the inmates have high school diplomas, since they are former policemen, and the Elas Existem association has not yet begun operating its project). This also expands the possibilities for reducing sentences to a larger number of people.

3.4. Remission and measurement of reading

Many pessimistic voices can be heard about reading in Brazil. A commonly expressed feeling is that the book is dead. Social networks, for example, are filled with people lamenting the lack of the reading habit among youths, often claimed by people who do not have this habit themselves. In counterpart, there are many initiatives for formation of readers that describe a viable path for reading.

We are speaking of formation, not construction. Like Petit (2005), we believe that literature helps lead “people to construct, to discover a little bit more about their lives and about their destinies, including in highly restrictive social contexts” (Petit, 2005, p. 17). We believe the space of deprivation of freedom is a highly restrictive space and perceive, based on the positions described by the interviewees, the power of the work that is been performed.

Petit also says that,

[...] children, adolescents, women and men elaborate a space for freedom from where they can make sense of their lives and encounter, or re-encounter, the energy to overcome the impasses in which they feel trapped (Petit, 2005, p. 7).

We call attention to the use of the word “sense”, where it can be noted that the universe of the people contemplated by the author does not include incarcerated people, who are literally trapped. However, it is possible to understand that the reading strategies promoted as being actions *for* freedom are often realized *in* freedom.

From this standpoint, Santos and Leite (2017) proposed investing in the role of mediation of those who conduct the activities, the professors or students of the committee for remission through reading.

In this respect, a researcher who reflects about the teacher as mediator affirms it is necessary for the teacher “to know that his or her role goes beyond what can be conceived as presentation of cumulative wisdom: the teacher who is an enthusiastic reader tries to cause students to experience in reading the same pleasure he or she does” (Santos & Leite, 2017, p. 60). Enjoying reading and practicing reading are fundamental prerequisites to enable stimulation of reading.

Furthermore, the context also acts as a mediator of the experience of reading. This can be observed, for example, in the daily efforts in the writing workshop of the *Escrevendo a Liberdade* project⁸, where the participants give lessons about things they have never thought about previously, showing that in the stories we choose to read, there are always possibilities for self-reflection in the context of socio-education.

Thinking about literary works is not sufficient to act as a mediator. It is also important to formulate strategies, remain open to feedback and act as a “place for listening”, to understand the contexts via the people who construct it.

This study has shown that to truly meet the needs of prisoners, it is necessary to recognize them as interlocutors of their processes of creation, in light of the legitimacy of their comments. As stated by Freire (2005, p. 90), “It is not through silence that men achieve, but through speaking, work and action-reflection.” In this sense, the experiences of reading in prisons can also represent a link between those deprived of their freedom and those who live outside the four walls.

⁸ The portmanteau word “escrevendo” can be translated as “writing-living”. The *Escrevendo a Liberdade* project was conceived in March 2019. Among the proposed actions are the conduction of creative writing workshops with adolescents of the female facility of the Department of Socio-Educative Actions (DEGASE). The activities are in the process of being registered for purposes of studies and are available at: <https://www.facebook.com/escrevendoaliberdade/>.

4. Final considerations

The experience begun in the state of Paraná in 2009 was systematized and taken to federal penitentiaries. As of the issuance of Recommendation 44 of 2013, the practices became more visible and their structure was systematically organized.

The authorities in the state of Rio de Janeiro adhered to this project by signing a technical cooperation agreement between SEAP and Unirio in 2016. Since then, two other institutions have started to participate in the actions: UFRRJ in 2018 and the association called “Elas Existem - Mulheres encarceradas”, in partnership with UFRJ, which is pending initiation.

We believe these developments are important actions to strengthen the set of rights afforded to the prison population, since the number of those with access to formal schooling is small. Complementary actions are necessary to expand the right to education.

We also stress the opportunity to train teachers. We believe that students who join the projects in return for scholarships or as volunteers will know and learn about the universe of inmates from a perspective of human rights, which can expand the number of professionals who in the future will work in these venues of deprivation to favor access of prisoners to education, in furtherance of their rights. These professionals, unlike reported by Mariana about her experience with *Elas Existem*, will facilitate access of prisoners to projects, studies and rights.

The interdisciplinary character of the work with reading appears to favor the construction of a significant practice for those involved, because investing in reading is not investing in a practice as an end in itself, much less is it aimed only at the utilitarian aspect of reducing prison sentences, although this is a fundamental factor of the interaction of mediators and participants. Instead, mediation is a basic element for understanding what occurs in the routine interlocution of the practices of reading to reduce sentences. We see this role as being active, to instigate reflections in search of discussion and changes in behavior regarding the relationship with literature.

Therefore, for effective mediation it is not sufficient to select the texts to be read. It is also important to have close contact, occupying the place of a reader and enthusiast of literature, to redefine certain words, as also done by João Cabral de Melo Neto in *Morte e Vida Severina* — to contaminate, corrupt and infect people with the pleasure of reading, seeking to exercise the role of the “place for listening”, as we have insisted in the debates on the theme.

References

ALMEIDA, Sandra Maciel. **Educação de mulheres e jovens privadas de liberdade: um estudo de abordagem etnográfica.** 2013. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2013.

BAPTISTA, Myrian Veras. Algumas reflexões sobre o sistema de garantia de direitos. **Serviço Social & Sociedade**, São Paulo, n. 109, p. 179-199, jan./mar. 2012. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0101-66282012000100010>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

BERNARDO, Gustavo. **Redação inquieta.** Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2010.

BRASIL. **Lei nº 12433, de 29 de junho de 2011.** Altera a Lei nº 7.210, de 11 de julho de 1984 (Lei de Execução Penal), para dispor sobre a remição de parte do tempo de execução da pena por estudo ou por trabalho. Brasília, DF: Presidência da República, 2011. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2011/lei/l12433.htm. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

BRASIL. Ministério da Justiça. Departamento Penitenciário Nacional. **Portaria Conjunta nº 276, de 20 de junho de 2012.** Disciplina o Projeto da Remição pela Leitura no Sistema Penitenciário Federal. Brasília, DF: DEPEN, 2012. Available at: <https://www.conjur.com.br/dl/portaria-conjunta-jf-depen.pdf>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

BRASIL. Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública. Departamento Penitenciário Nacional. **Relatórios analíticos do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.** Brasília, DF: Sistema de Informações do Departamento Penitenciário (SISDEPEN), June 2017. Available at: <http://depen.gov.br/DEPEN/depen/sisdepen/infopen/relatorios-analiticos/RJ/rj>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

BRASIL. Conselho Nacional do Ministério Público. **Recomendação nº 69, de 7 de maio de 2019.** Dispõe sobre a necessidade de observância, pelos membros do Ministério Público, dos artigos 126 a 129 da Lei nº 7.210/84 (Lei de Execução Penal - LEP), para que também fomentem ações voltadas ao oferecimento de cursos e disponibilização de livros às pessoas privadas de liberdade e dá outras providências. Brasília, DF: CNMP, 2019. Available at: <http://www.cnmp.mp.br/portal/images/Recomendacoes/Recomendao-69.pdf>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

CANDIDO, Antonio. A literatura e a formação do homem. Remate de Males, Campinas, SP, p. [81]-90, 1999. Available at: <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/remate/article/view/8635992/3701>. Consulted on: December 20, 2020.

CANDIDO, Antônio. O direito à literatura. *In: Vários escritos.* São Paulo: Duas Cidades; Rio de Janeiro: Ouro sobre Azul, 1994.

DAVIS, Angela Y. **A democracia da abolição: para além do império, das prisões e da tortura.** Rio de Janeiro: Difel, 2009.

MELO, V. M.; ALMEIDA, S. M. *Remission of prison sentences through reading in Rio de Janeiro: possibilities and advances*.

Dossier Education in prisons: educational experiences, training of teachers and social-educational agents.

ELBERT, Carlos.. **Sociedade sem prisões**. [S. l.], 1 out. 2011. Available at: <http://sociedadesemprisoos.blogspot.com/2011/10/carlos-elbert.html>. Consulted on: December 15, 2020.

FELITTI, Guilherme. O bicho que pega dentro da cadeia. March 22, 2016. Available at: <https://super.abril.com.br/comportamento/o-bicho-que-pega-dentro-da-cadeia/>. Consulted on: August 6, 2020.

FORPROEX (Fórum de Pró-Reitores de Extensão das Universidades Públicas Brasileiras). **Política Nacional de Extensão Universitária**. Manaus, 2012. Available at: <https://xn--extenso-2wa.ufrj.br/index.php/o-que-e-extensao>. Consulted on: August 6, 2020.

FREIRE, Paulo. **Pedagogia do Oprimido**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2005.

FUNDO BRASIL. **Associação Elas Existem: LER – Leitura, Existência, Resistência**. [S..l.], [201-]. Available at: <https://www.fundobrasil.org.br/projeto/associacao-elas-existem-mulheres-encarceradas/>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

GOFFMAN, Erving. **Manicômios, prisões e conventos**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1974.

HERINGER, Carolina. Projeto em presídios troca leitura de livros por redução de penas. **O Globo**, Rio de Janeiro, jun. 2019. Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/projeto-em-presidios-troca-leitura-de-livros-por-reducao-de-penas-23743459>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

JULIÃO, Elionaldo Fernandes. Escola *na* ou *da* prisão. **Caderno Cedes**, Campinas, v. 36, n. 98, p. 25-42, jan./abr., 2016. Available at: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ccedes/v36n98/1678-7110-ccedes-36-98-00025.pdf>. Consulted on: August 10, 2020.

KLEIMAN, Angela. **Texto e leitor: aspectos cognitivos da leitura**. 15. ed. Campinas, SP: Pontes, 2013.

MELO, Vanusa Maria de. **Aproveitando brechas: experiências com cinema em escolas prisionais do Rio de Janeiro**. 2014. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

MINAYO, Maria Cecília de Souza *et al.* **Pesquisa social: teoria, método e criatividade**. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes: 1994.

MOTA, Jorge Alexandre Salvador. **Glossário de palavras e expressões utilizadas por facções criminosas e presas**. Registrado na Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, Escritório de Direitos Autorais, reg. n°. 419734, Livro 784, fl. 394, em 03/01/2008, Rio de Janeiro. Available at: <https://docplayer.com.br/72549176-Glossario-de-palavras-e-expressoes-utilizada-por-faccoes-criminosas-e-presos.html>. Acesso em 17 dez. 2020.

ONOFRE, Elenice Camarosano. **O espaço da prisão e suas práticas educativas: enfoques e perspectivas contemporâneas**. São Carlos, SP: EdUFSCar, 2011.

PENNAC, Daniel. **Como um romance**. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2003.

MELO, V. M.; ALMEIDA, S. M. *Remission of prison sentences through reading in Rio de Janeiro: possibilities and advances*.

Dossier Education in prisons: educational experiences, training of teachers and social-educational agents.

PETIT, Congresso Internacional dos Editores de Buenos Aires. Mesa Redonda: “Estratégias para a construção de leitores”. **Asolectura**, Bogotá, n 4, abril, 2005.

SANTOS, Marcelo; LEITE, Luciana de Paiva Vilhena. Leitura e (re)socialização: as práticas de mediação pela leitura. **Leitura em Revista**, Rio de Janeiro, n. 12, dez. 2017. Available at:

<https://iiler.puc-rio.br/leituraemrevista/index.php/LER/article/view/154/5>. Consulted on: August 6, 2020.

SEAP - Secretaria de Administração Penitenciária (Rio de Janeiro). Resolução SEAP nº 621, de 01 de julho de 2016. Institui no âmbito do Sistema Penitenciário do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, a remição de leitura. Rio de Janeiro: SEAP, 2016. Available at: https://seguro.mprj.mp.br/documents/10227/17427961/resolucao_seap_n_621_de_01_de_julho_de_2016.pdf. Consulted on: August 6, 2020.

UNIRIO (Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro). **Plano de ação – extensão e cultura**. Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Letras e Artes da Unirio, 2017. Available at: <http://www.unirio.br/unidades-academicas-1/letraseartes/escoladeletras/o-leitor-como-protagonista>. Consulted on: August 6, 2020.

Acknowledgments

We thank Professor Marcelo Santos, Professor Marcos Estevão Pasche and the lawyer and human rights activist Mariana Paganote for the dialog that enabled the reflections presented here.

Contributions of the authors

Author 1: Conduction of the interviews, participation in the discussions of the results, substantial contribution to the analysis of the results.

Author 2: Participation in the discussions of the results, substantial contribution to the analysis of the results, final revision.

Sent on August 15, 2020 | Approved on December 3, 2020

This text was translated from the original Portuguese by Márcia Rinaldi de Mattos.