

EDUCAÇÃO NAS PRISÕES

RUMOS E DESAFIOS

PRISON EDUCATION

PATHS AND CHALLENGES

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[coordenação]

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ÍNDICE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5 **PREFÁCIO**
FOREWORD

6 **APRESENTAÇÃO**
INTRODUCTION

PARTE I

10 **EDUCAÇÃO NAS PRISÕES – UMA PANORÂMICA**
PRISON EDUCATION – AN OVERVIEW

11 *A Educação nas Prisões em Portugal – do passado ao presente formando o futuro*
José Alberto Pinto

21 *Prison Education in Italy: Learning “Inside”*
Wilma Greco

26 *Prison Education in France*
Julien Vieira

32 *Prison Education in Slovenia*
Vesna Mielitz & Polona Franko

38 *Educação de Jovens e Adultos em Penitenciárias de Moçambique*
Júlio André Vilanculos

42 *Leitura e Liberdade: breve panorama da leitura em prisões no Brasil hoje*
Valéria Medeiros

PARTE II

- 49** **DAS NARRATIVAS AUTOBIOGRÁFICAS AOS DESAFIOS NA EDUCAÇÃO DE ADULTOS**
FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES TO CHALLENGES IN ADULT EDUCATION
- 50** *Prisoners' words: orality and autobiographical narratives for an artistic pedagogy in penitentiary institutions*
Andrés González Novoa, Pedro Perera Méndez, María Lourdes C. González Luís & María Daniela Martín Hurtado
- 57** *The chrysalis and the butterfly – autobiographical paths of penitentiary pedagogy*
Wilma Greco
- 61** *Towards the construction of a liberating and socially inclusive autobiographical narrative: an experiment with “information seeds”*
Eric Lacombe & Lise Vieira
- 69** *Formar Trabalhadores da Educação de Adultos: uma necessidade por suprir*
Armando Loureiro
- 73** *Jovens adultos que praticam crimes e a sua relação com a escola intra e extramuros*
Luena Marinho

PARTE III

- 81** **UNIVERSO PRISIONAL**
PRISON WORLD
- 82** *Projeto EPRIS – possibilidades e potencialidades*
Rita Barros & Angélica Monteiro
- 89** *Saúde mental em contexto prisional*
Gloria Jólluskin & Isabel Silva
- 97** *Observatório Europeu das Prisões: práticas penitenciárias em Portugal e na Europa*
António Pedro Dores
- 104** *O nada estranho caso de Salomão*
Filipe Macedo

PRISONERS' WORDS: ORALITY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES FOR AN ARTISTIC PEDAGOGY IN PENITENTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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The project «The chrysalis and the butterfly: Autobiographical paths of penitentiary pedagogy» stems from the hypothesis that a critical pedagogy of art favours the development of preventive education. A second hypothesis places the word as a transversality so that people deprived of their liberty can re-signify their past – or face it – and equip themselves with tools to transform reality and invent a future based on sustainable and communitarian ways of being in the world. Over the last few years, we have worked on the design of the objectives that have created a project based on oral tradition, literature, reading, writing and artistic expression, with the idea of complementing the educational structure of the penitentiary institution in the search for the critical, creative and ethical development of a citizenry that enriches a democratic society based on a social state and the rule of law.

Some of these objectives are:

- To create a space for reflection on specific issues so that those deprived of their liberty can redefine their own lives after the prison experience.
- To strengthen identity and self-esteem in a community context.
- To encourage and motivate prisoners to describe their personal experiences and communicate the difficulties of life in prison through oral storytelling and creative writing strategies.
- To divulge printed and digital documents to raise the visibility of the group.

- Provide prisoners with critical and self-critical tools and communicative and expressive skills to make their experiences and creations visible inside and outside the penitentiary institution.
- To establish links between the prison community and the educational community.

The methodology has followed the PAR (Participation-Action-Research) model and is based on Foucauldian cartography and diagrams, Deleuze's rhizomatic structures and couplings, Bachelard's epistemological thresholds, Spinoza's multitudes, Proust's signs and Nietzsche's disenchantment, through which the project has been transforming and resizing itself alongside their protagonists: the prison community, the socio-artistic community of the International Storytelling Festival of Los Silos, the PEDACRI research team of the University of La Laguna (ULL), the Cultural Classroom of Oral Narration of the ULL and the Centre for Adult Education (CEPA) with the goal of forming an international network with other European penitentiary institutions (González, Perera & González, 2020).

Ha sido la literatura como zaguán de palabras la que acompañó, protegió, fortaleció, perdonó y emancipó a los que sufrieron la oscuridad de las celdas y el frío de los grilletes. Insistimos en que en este estudio no pretendemos justificar ni entender los motivos del crimen, sino resaltar la necesidad de que las palabras habiten las prisiones para

que estas cumplan la función capital que señala la ley, la reinserción en plenitud y en igualdad de condiciones. Una vez pagada la deuda ésta no puede portar eternos intereses, eso se llama usura. (González, 2018, p.39)¹

Inviting cultures to the arts is the strategy of a critical pedagogy that dreams of complementing the formative itineraries of the penitentiary institution. To offer inmates the opportunity to retrieve their experience as narrative and writing material, based on Freire's ideas, so that they can re-signify their past, revisit it time and time again, become aware of their place in the historical fabric and aspire to build a future with their own words.

No se trata de reinsertar a la persona para que acepte la realidad del delito sino de dotarla de herramientas para transformar la realidad que la tornó en una exterioridad, en una anomalía, en una amenaza. El concepto de inclusión sin participación resulta una suerte de domesticación al servicio de un modelo de superproducción insaciable y adictivo, implica que la pedagogía crítica y artística actúe como una educación preventiva y prospectiva. (González *et al.*, 2019, p. 923)²

Memory is the nutrient that feeds an autobiographical methodology so that people deprived of their liberty can make their way along the paths of pedagogy. A slow pedagogy that emanates from the furtive love between ethics and politics for the construction of a citizenship that gives meaning to democracy.

¹ "It has been literature as a hall of words that has accompanied, protected, strengthened, forgiven and emancipated those who suffered the darkness of the cells and the cold of the shackles. We insist that in this study we do not intend to justify or understand the motives of the crime, but to highlight the need for words to inhabit prisons so that they fulfill the function that the law indicates, full reintegration in equal conditions. Once the debt is paid, it cannot carry eternal interest because that is called usury."

² "It is not a question of reinserting the person so that they accept the reality of their crime, but of giving them tools to transform the reality that has turned them into outlanders, anomalies, into threats. The concept of inclusion without participation is a distortion at the service of an insatiable and addictive overproduction model, and it implies that a critical and artistic pedagogy acts, as and for, a preventive and prospective education."

If politics is the art of making decisions that affect others, and ethics is the art of thinking about the effect of these decisions, pedagogy concentrates its efforts on identifying what people need to learn in order to live in community.

The result of such reflections converges in cultures and arts that are custodians of a memory of coexistence and consensus in the face of violence and hatred. In other words, the aesthetic expressions of memory that represent us as a creative, rather than a destructive humanity.

La prisionalización supone a la persona, como el laberinto al minotauro, un efecto Sísifo que fragmenta y desgasta los relatos experienciales que conforman la memoria de manera que el pasado de la persona privada de libertad sufre el síndrome de la buhardilla, los recuerdos se empolvan en un abandono similar al árbol de navidad de Andersen y el presente coloniza el pensamiento como un *deja vu*. La reconstrucción de esa memoria resulta fundamental. Sugiere Unamuno; «La ciencia termina con el diagnóstico. El tratamiento no es más que arte». (González, 2018, p. 37)³

Propp's morphology unfolds in multiple ways in which words create opportunities and new passageways where people deprived of their liberty take the lead role of their memories and transform them into literature. It is a slow-burning pedagogical process that requires listening, reading, talking, writing and narrating in order to turn prison limbic time into one of those stories that challenge the limits of time, and create new narratives. Time for the useless, for the non-productive, the not efficient; time to lose it in order to gain it, filling sixty seconds of every minute with something worthwhile, a non-consumable time, non-profitable time: a time in community.

³ "Prisonization supposes the person, like the labyrinth supposes the minotaur. A Sisyphus effect that fragments and wears down the experiential stories that make up memory in such a way that the past of the person deprived of liberty hides or stores itself. The memories are dusted in abandonment in a similar way to Andersen's Christmas tree, and the present colonizes ideas and thoughts like a *deja vu*. The reconstruction of that memory is fundamental. Unamuno suggests; «Science ends with diagnosis. Treatment is nothing but art.»"

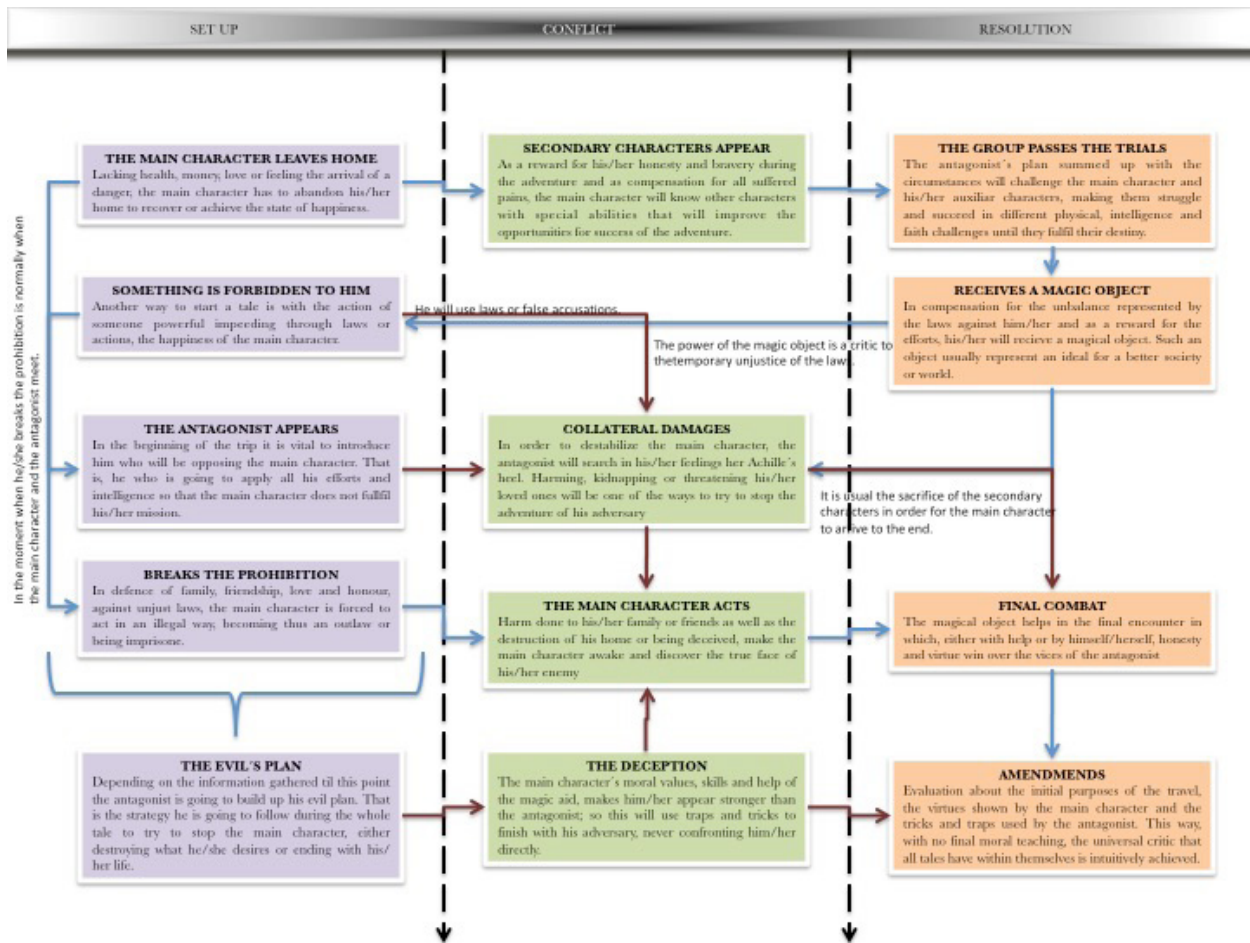


Table 1: Own elaboration based on Vladimir Propp's Story Morphology

Mirta Colangelo whispered *slow down the world*. The poetic antidote against the speed of power that colonises the world, minds and even bodies. The speed that Virilio feared will turn us into *homo invalidus* among the automatism invented by the techno-scientific pact, which, like the grey men in Michael Ende's *Momo*, buys our time in exchange for entertainment in order to steal our protagonism and turn us first into things, and then, into products.

sustancia. Y las personas doblemente confinadas, despojadas de sus derechos fundamentales, solo tienen tiempo de condena, tiempo que pueden pasar entre rutinas mecanizadas o convertirlo en un tiempo pedagógico. (Perera & González, 2021, pp. 593-594)⁴

Los conflictos que emanan de la globalización, del neoliberalismo y de la emergencia de los populismos son el combustible del delito; el 90% de las personas que están en la institución penitenciaria de Tenerife cumplen condena por los efectos de una sociedad enferma, adicta al consumo de lo que sea para llenar el vacío de una vida sin

⁴ "The conflicts that emanate from globalization, neoliberalism and the emergence of populism are the fuel of crime. 90% of the people who are in the Penitentiary Institution of Tenerife are serving a sentence for the effects of a sick society, addicted to the consumption to fill the void of a life without substance. Those who are doubly confined, stripped of their fundamental rights, only have sentence time, time that they can spend between mechanized routines or turn into pedagogical time."

As Foucault warned, we will end up making the wretched responsible for the evils of the world. Whoever steals a piece of bread to feed their children will be the biggest criminal; the banks, meanwhile, do not steal, they rescue themselves.

It is difficult to speak of reintegration without social critique, without what Freire requires for emancipation and autonomy: knowing oneself to be a contextual being who can play a leading role or participate in the transformation of a reality towards what is desirable. The opposite is to place an unbearable burden on the person deprived of freedom that makes it impossible for them to return to the world, already stigmatised and labelled with the sticker of failure, destined to be watched for their inability to do good.

Is that what we think? Do we think that we cannot be on the other side of the prison wall? What circumstances would make it possible? Are there elements or factors that would catch us between a rock and a hard place? We are not only talking about the capital sins that tempt us: vanity or lust, anger or laziness, pride or gluttony, even less envy, but also about the sins of capital; consumerism, addictions, lack of culture, populism, banality, indifference. Would any of this influence us?

Sin los grandes diagnósticos de la sociología ni las prodigiosas terapias de la psicología, lo que estudiamos es el cómo partir en un viaje desde las palabras hacia la libertad de las personas, cómo la literatura o lo inútil, resulta necesario para que las personas se sientan parte de la memoria colectiva que supone la cultura, para que esas mismas personas privadas de libertad intuyan la oportunidad de participar en el metarrelato de la humanidad con sus palabras y reconstruir una trama en la que aparentemente, han perdido el hilo; han llegado a un callejón sin salida. (González, 2018, p. 38)⁵

⁵ “Without the great diagnoses of sociology or the prodigious therapies of psychology, what we study is how to start a journey from words to the freedom of people, how literature or what is considered useless, is necessary for people to feel part of the collective memory and culture, so that those same people deprived of liberty sense the opportunity to participate in the metanarrative of humanity with their words, reconstructing a plot in which they have apparently lost the thread, reaching a dead end.”

That is why the importance of words and names, that is why the Los Silos International Storytelling Festival, the PEDACRI-ULL research group and the Tenerife Penitentiary Institution became accomplices so that this listening, reading, talking, writing and narrating could leave the prison and be taken to the stage. So that citizens who do not know what it means to live behind bars could understand, through the very words of people deprived of their freedom, what lives in silence and melancholy.

The orality that vertebrates the autobiographical methodology comes from the earliest times, when the elders narrate to the community in the shade of a Baobab tree or in a cave. Orality as a community rite link us to the common, as opposed to the particular. We cannot fail to remember that the Greeks defined the citizen who gave precedence to the common over the particular as *politikós* and the one who defended his own against the communal as *idiotikós*.

Trabajamos con el método propio ELCEN — escuchar, leer, conversar, escribir y narrar— (González, 2018). Los primeros pasos fueron superar los prejuicios de las personas privadas de libertad hacia las culturas, ofrecerlas desnudas de oropeles, desde esa imagen en África de un anciano narrando a su comunidad a la sombra de un árbol o de una anciana en la plaza de un pueblo. (Perera y González, 2021, pp. 588-589)⁶

The ELCEN method (originated by the Spanish acronym for *escuchar* ‘listening’, *leer* ‘reading’, *conversar* ‘conversing’, *escribir* ‘writing’ and *narrar* ‘narrating’) gives value to prisoner memoirs as literature of freedom, leading us not only to the creation of a storytelling performance by prisoners at the Los Silos International Storytelling Festival, but also to the integration into the educational itineraries of the Prison Institution of reading, writing, theatre and storytelling workshops, an educational radio programme “*Prisoner Words*” (*Palabras Prisioneras*), and the creation of audio-visual materials for diffusion on social media platforms.

⁶ “We work with the ELCEN method [which in Spanish refers to] —listening, reading, conversing, writing and narrating— (González, 2018). The first steps were to overcome the prejudices of people deprived of liberty towards different cultures, offering them without embellishments, from that image in Africa of an old man narrating to his community in the shade of a tree, to an old woman in a town square.”

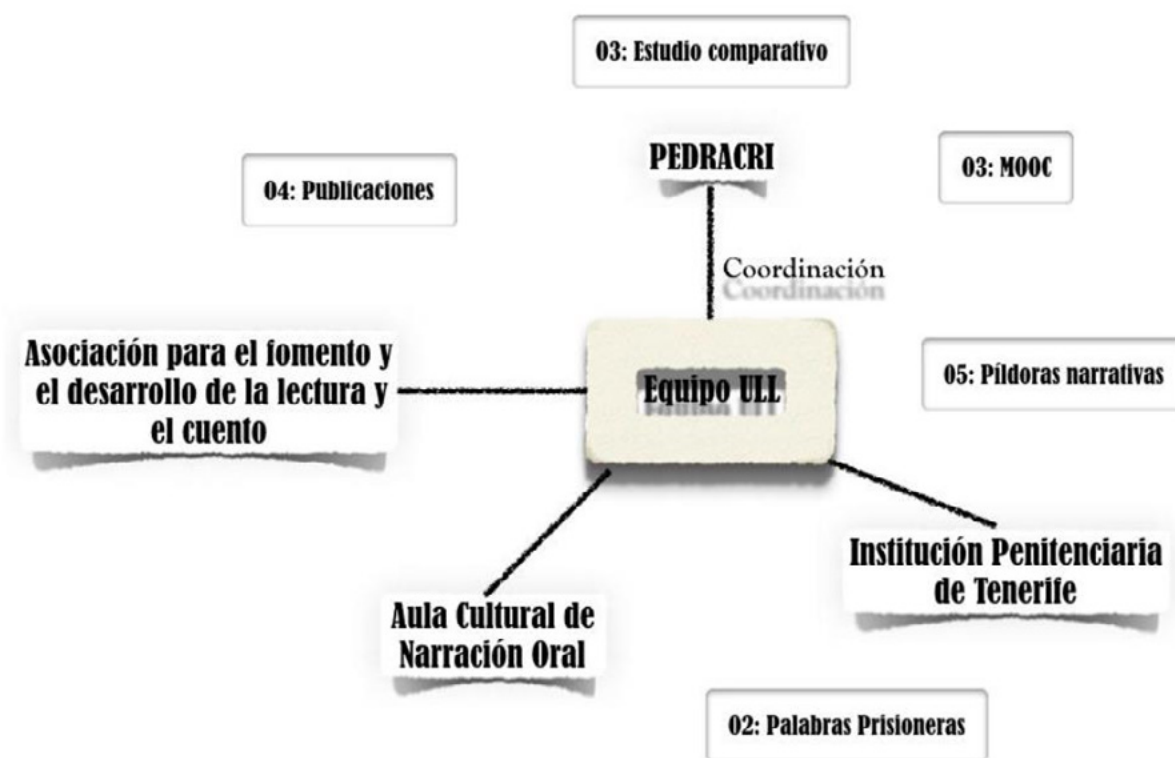
All these steps over the years connected us with other penitentiary institutions and, because of the need to share experiences and link pedagogical and artistic work, the project «The chrysalis and the butterfly: Autobiographical paths of penitentiary pedagogy» was born.

We are talking about an Erasmus+ KA204 project funded with 201.787,00 € which aims to organise an autobiographical activity within prisons to promote and encourage reconsideration of the past and planning for the future beyond bars. In short, the objectives of the project are: to encourage and motivate people deprived of their liberty to describe their personal experiences and to communicate – even in a European context - the difficulties of living in prisons; to compare the outcome of the Erasmus project with similar experiences in other European prisons; to present their work to regional networks operating in prisons; to diffuse the work and the multimedia produced at the end of the project; to share the results of the project with the European partners involved; to make the chosen methodology

(autobiography) a common pedagogical practice in the educational processes for adult prisoners.

It involves the Associazione Culturale ‘Le Interferenze’ (Italy), Associação Portuguesa de Educação nas Prisões (Portugal), Center za Dopisno Izobraževanje Univerzum (Slovenia), Maison des Sciences de l’Homme d’Aquitaine – Université Bordeaux Montaigne (France), Udruga za Promicanje Književnosti i Kulture Skribonauti (Croatia), Changes&Chances (the Netherlands). The University of La Laguna, through the research group PEDACRI, is coordinating the project with the Aula Cultural de Narración Oral of the ULL, the Asociación para el fomento y desarrollo de la lectura y el cuento and the Penitentiary Institution of Tenerife.

The project is based on paths, oral trajectories, that will be freely used by the partners to frame the canvases of the lives of those deprived of liberty in an immaterial structure, which will give a self-reflective and introspective value through different disciplines or areas. The writing of oneself (or, in general, the opening of a window into one’s own



Organisation chart 1: Own elaboration based on the functioning structure of the ULL Team within the project «The chrysalis and the butterfly: Autobiographical paths of penitentiary pedagogy»

existence) will be understood as a questioning of the subject's identity, an individual work, a way of self-care, and hopefully as the work towards re-signification and re-direction of thoughts and life. At the end of the project, we intend to see what proposals, based on our own results, we will be able to give to other contexts. Here are some of the base lines of work:

- *The flight of the butterfly*: The detainee tells or writes by making choices, going back and forth in the past, reflecting on the present and the future, composing a meaningful and conscious plot of his or her existence. Therefore, autobiography is the autodidactic method par excellence, not only based on writing, but also on orality (narrative conversation) and other forms of self-telling.
- *Autobiographical paths*: A workshop is first and foremost a place of analysis and construction of the participants personal identities. It is about building something together, which is why the presence of a group is necessary. The number of participants should be a maximum of twenty people, so that the work can be shared and exchanged. The memories of one person can stimulate the others and become an important resource.
- *Memory pedagogy*: The autobiographical group focuses on the person, it aims to bring forgotten parts of oneself to light through memory. These personal memories can be beautiful and less beautiful: in any case, this reflection is always activated in a playful and never therapeutic context, mainly pleasant and stimulating.
- *Reading otherness*: The group activated by the workshop produces positive effects on the self-image of the group members. This can be redefined not only through an empathic relationship within an educational exchange, but also through a reflection on relationships with peers.
- *Butterfly, butterflies*: The choral nature of the experiences, the feedback, the reflection on the partner's story, are great ways of getting to know each other and discovering others. The existential themes dealt with within the autobiographical laboratory combine, by their very nature, the different age groups and the psychological, sociological, ethnic and cultural differences

of the prison population. Recognize oneself in others through common experiences reassures and strengthens those who are afraid of their own feelings, making them aware that they are not so rare. In this way, showing and sharing feelings becomes possible.

- *Community of words*: During the autobiographical workshops it is important to make a series of individual experiences which will be shared with the group. The workshop activity leads to the development of an attention to individual differences and to the life stories of others. Autobiographical workshops take advantage of an inseparable pair: the immediacy of oral expression and the depth of self-writing.
- *In the name of the prisoner: autobiography in prison*. Often, the story of the deviant is only told through the words and the report of the psychologist, the educator, the social worker, the lawyer: many prisoners have never had a real right to speak in their lives, they have never been able to truly express themselves, their moods, their anger, their emotions and reflections. Having someone who listens respectfully and without judgement is a privilege for a few (and not only in prison!). Accepting the biography helps the narrator to feel welcomed and this facilitates the process of self-acceptance. He or she is the active protagonist during the autobiographical journey, the one who provides the stimuli, clarifies the rules of the game and produces the work.
- *Narrating futures*: The use of the autobiographical method arises from the need to develop educational opportunities to go beyond the bars, beyond the obstacles to change. This method is situated in a zone of discomfort seen as a moment of emptiness, of lack, of coercion, but also as an opportunity for change.
- *Border citizenship*: This is the visualization of the end of punishment. That specific moment of detention – which has not yet been sufficiently explored – which lies between the inside and the outside of the prison life. The path we intend to retrace with prisoners approaching their release is an orientation work that will help them to redesign their near future, exploring the myth of the outside and the loneliness that often accompanies them at this moment of passage.

The story we write behind bars dreams of transforming penitentiary institutions into pedagogical institutions capable of hosting arts and cultures in order to build a border citizenship inside the prisons that will allow us to invent a Community of Words.

Una comunidad de palabras más allá de los muros. Conectando a los de dentro con los de fuera imaginamos aquel espacio vacío donde los griegos inventaron la democracia como un lugar que puede ocupar cualquiera sin llenarlo; la oralidad presta la misma disponibilidad a cualquiera —tenga la condición que desee o tenga que portar—, cualquiera puede escuchar o narrar un cuento; le basta con estar vivo y tener memoria. Somos tecnología comunicativa de alta gama, capaces de conmovir al otro con nuestras palabras y que permite crear el clima de confianza donde cualquiera se puede sentir perteneciente y, por ende, participar. (Perera & González, 2021, p. 594)⁷

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⁷ “A community of words beyond the walls. Connecting those inside with those outside, we imagine that empty space where the Greeks invented democracy as a place that anyone can occupy and be a part of; orality lends the same availability to anyone — whether they want or just have the condition they carry—, anyone can narrate a story or listen to it; it is enough to be alive and have memory. We are high-end communication technology, capable of moving others with our words and being able to create a climate of trust where anyone can feel they belong and, therefore, participate.”