Chapter 7

Prison Blogs, a Place of Freedom Behind Bars: Notes From a Workshop at the Barcelona Youth Detention Centre

Jorge Franganillo
University of Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on the cultural workshop which, from 2006 to 2008, encouraged a group of inmates at the Barcelona Youth Detention Centre to produce and publish blogs as a joint project between the Òmnia on-site internet access point, the prison library, and the Faculty of Library and Information Science of the University of Barcelona. The objectives of the project were to promote inmate education, improve their level of information, encourage them to read and write more, instill some ICT skills in them or strengthen those they already had, and broaden their contact with the outside world. Prison libraries are presented as an agent that supports the intellectual, social, and cultural development of inmates and thus can help them on the road to personal betterment. The prisoners’ responses are critically assessed; the experience was considered positive, although the insufficient technological infrastructure and the prisoners’ rejection of certain social conventions represent obstacles.
INTRODUCTION

In the Internet and in the library, prisoners have two useful tools for their cultural enhancement and personal development, as both can improve the conditions under which they move towards social reinsertion and integration. The mission of the library, despite the limitation of being a prison library, can expand almost infinitely. Through the Internet, and through the possibility of having a presence on the web which stretches beyond the necessary limits of the prison confines—and especially, a voice and a role to play in dialogue—prisoners can find a space of free and creative expression that is universal, and where they have equal rights. This space offers them the chance of personal enrichment and of improving their prison surroundings. Contact with and through the web can help dispel the dangers of isolation as, for much of the time, prison life is all the inmates experience, and so the Internet can improve their day to day existence while at the same time guaranteeing them a right.

Providing prisoners with access to the Internet is one of the Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA): «Where prison network security permits, prisoners shall be given supervised Internet access for education and treatment purposes, as well as pre-release planning.» (Lehman & Locke, 2006; Sulé, 2006). The Spanish Constitution expressly grants the right to access culture (art. 44.1) through, among other resources, a network of public libraries, and it extends this right (art. 25.2) to people who have been condemned to sentences which deprive them of their freedom. Declarations of a universal nature, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also express the right of prisoners to access information as an instrument of personal betterment (art. 19 and others). After all, the most general overall objective of imprisonment is to provide the educational tools and means of rehabilitation necessary to facilitate the reinsertion of prisoners into society. The library is precisely one of the institutions that can work efficiently as a framework and as a tool for personal improvement.

However, the reality of prison life seems to be quite different: we need to provide more space for the Internet in prisons to ensure that it is not reduced to insignificance. Both documented evidence and personal experience teach us that providing prisoners with access to what a library represents in general, and the Internet in particular, throws up important, but not insurmountable, challenges. The difficulties stem from weaknesses that tend to be firmly entrenched when we consider low levels of basic schooling; difficulties that result from cultural inequalities, particularly in terms of language and of social prejudices; difficulties brought about by practices that in one way or another govern the lives of people at risk of social exclusion. Moreover, there are difficulties in achieving the motivation necessary to carry out any task, even that of improving one’s own condition. The fact of having suffered from one failure after another makes it difficult for prisoners to want to embark on a
Social Media Engagement: Reshaping the Consumption Patterns of Generation Y Caribbean and Latin American Consumers
www.igi-global.com/chapter/social-media-engagement/192638?camid=4v1a