Chapter 8

Inmate Communication as a Conscientization Approach to Societal Mainstreaming

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ABSTRACT

This chapter submits that societal mainstreaming of ex-convicts to have a normal life is possible through inmate communication. Inmate communication is a conscientization approach that consists of a holistic strategy to nourish the head, heart, hand, and soul of an inmate, the prison management, and the society. While restorative justice aims to reintegrate inmates once they have served their sentences, life for an ex-convict outside may no longer be the same. A condescending society condemns “convicts as convicts for life” no matter how much they have changed because of the rehabilitation efforts of the government to reform them. The case in point is the National Bilibid Prison, the biggest prison facility that houses more than 22,000 most dangerous inmates in Metro Manila, Philippines who have committed heinous crimes to serve their sentences. Media materials that can nurture the mind such as poems, songs, bookmarks, jingles, letters, etc. for instance that bear words and thoughts of endearment can build a positive attitude and look forward to an accepting society.

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INTRODUCTION

Prisoners face maltreatment because they are viewed as menace to society. They are ridiculed and shun upon for the wrong deeds committed. However, it is universally acknowledged that criminals are a product of the society. Radical views tend to suggest that social class structures, socio-economic dynamics and socio-cultural injustices bleed criminality (Maburi, 2009). In essence, the society is obliged to foster prisoners, to an extent, once they serve their sentences and attempt to reintegrate themselves and reduce the likeliness of recidivism in the process. Recidivism is the act of a person repeating an undesirable behavior after they had either experienced negative consequences of the behavior, or had been trained to extinguish that behavior.

Being imprisoned for erring individuals is giving prisoners a chance to rethink while serving their sentences what they have done which could eventually reform them in confinement. Ironically, in the Philippines, life behind bars faces challenges and difficulties that are no better than life outside. Prisoners also experience plights of their own including overcrowding, hunger, poor hygiene and sanitation facilities, violence, lack of rehabilitation measures, and a slow-moving justice system (Philippine prisons overflowing with hungry inmates, 2017). Prison population, including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners, are currently at a total of 178,661, a 436% increase in 2017 (The Condition of Philippine Prison and Jails). While several programs are being implemented to support prisoners’ welfare and development in serving their time, a structured transition program has to be designed and implemented by the Government to further assist prisoners in reintegrating themselves in society.

A proper and smooth reintegration of prisoners in the society does not only ensure their welfare but also lessens the tendency of recidivism. Reintegration programs aim to assist ex-prisoners in acquiring skills, knowledge, and access to government support system that will enable them to start over upon release. Ex-prisoners are envisioned to have a ‘second shot’ at being productive citizens of the society, and they will also be able to live a dignified life away from the plights of being ‘criminals’ behind bars.

With these arguments, the Philippines has to start rethinking of its correctional and post-correctional programs that will support prisoners as they seek for reformation and assist them in becoming productive members of the society.

Correctional and post-correctional programs for ex-prisoners are critical for several reasons: 1) to reduce prison population; 2) to reduce the likeliness of recidivism; and 3) to ensure safety and security of the members of the community.

Therefore, could the problem lie on communication? Should management need to be more humane and change how they communicate with inmates? Should they
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