Photography workshops in a feminine prison: educational possibilities for under freedom privation students

Oficinas de fotografía en una prisión feminina: posibilidades educativas para alunas em privação de liberdade

Talleres de fotografía en una cárcel femenina: posibilidades educativas para alumnas en contexto de privación de la libertad

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Abstract: The present article is resulted of an investigation accomplished at a female prisional institution at Rio Grande do Sul/RS. As its objective, the article intended to investigate in which way the students in freedom privation of NEEJA Freedom create narratives from Tatsuya Tanaka’s photography. The methodology used in the investigation was the focal group, whose objective was to create conditions in order to able the components to do critics, analysis, problematizations in group about a theme. The research theoretical framework is based on authors such as Foucault (2013), Maeyer (2013), Julião and Onofre (2013), among others. The results are presented with five student’s reports, who have participated in the workshops. The photography contributed with an expansion of the students in freedom privation’s imagination, making possible to exchange ideas, as well as guaranteed the learning due the interexchanges and divergences that occurred during the focal group workshops.

Keywords: Prisional education. Photographies. Narratives.

Resumen: Este trabajo es el resultado de una investigación realizada en una cárcel femenina de Rio Grande do Sul/RS; tiene como objetivo investigar de qué forma las alumnas en contexto de prisión, del Núcleo Departamental de Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos (NEEJA, por sus siglas en portugués) NEEJA Liberdade, crean narrativas a partir de fotografías de Tatsuya Tanaka (fotografías de actividades cotidianas en miniatura). La metodología utilizada en esta investigación fue grupo focal, que buscó crear condiciones para que los componentes pudieran hacer críticas, análisis y problematizaciones de forma conjunta, partiendo de un tema específico. Este trabajo se basó en las teorizaciones de autores como Foucault (2013), Maeyer (2013), Julião y Onofre (2013), entre otros. Las fotos de actividades cotidianas en miniatura de Tanaka, contribuyeron con la expansión de la imaginación de las alumnas en contexto de prisión; posibilitaron trocas de ideas y por su vez posibilitaron intercambio de ideas y por su vez posibilitaron naturales.
aprendizajes debido a los diálogos y divergencias que se presentaron durante los talleres de fotografía y grupo focal.

**Palabras clave:** Educación en contexto de encierro. Fotografías. Narrativas.

**Introduction**

This article is the result of an undergraduate thesis in Pedagogy at University of Taquari Valley (Universidade do Vale do Taquari - UNIVATES), concluded in the year of 2018. The inquiry was made at a female prison in Rio Grande do Sul/RS and it counted with the involvement of five inmate students from State Core of Education to Young and Adult (NEEJA Liberdade - Núcleo Estadual de Educação de Jovens e Adultos), ranging in age from 22-54 years old. The research issue revolved around photographies and narratives, that is, it looked into ways that NEEJA Liberdade students created narratives through Tatsuya Tanaka’s photographs. This research attempted to actuate in the points of view of the inmate students, in order to enable them to analyze the world in different ways.

The research counts with a theoretical framework based upon the following authors: Foucault (2013), Maeyer (2013), Julião and Onofre (2013), among others. Each author used for the development of the research has a different point of view, since prison education has its own characteristics and specificities. In this way, it is necessary the interchange between these authors, in order to perceive the existing singularities when discussing about prison education.

As research instrument, it used the focal group. In order to develop the research methodology, the studies were based on the perspective of Gatti (2005). This research instrument aims the data production through conversations between groups. For these conversations, five photographies of the artist Tatsuya Tanaka were used, which later enabled the students in freedom privation to create their narratives. Along the focal groups meetings, these students were incentivized to look at the photographies in a more careful way, in order to realize the details. While they were looking at the photographies, questions related to the images were cast to allow them to create their narratives.

Thinking about the importance of using photographs in educational workshops with students in freedom privation, we can deduce that the reading of the photographic image makes possible the formation of a sensitive look, and, above all, critical. The subjects in freedom privation will be able to access other sensations, or even live new life experiences, acquiring other knowledges, other relations and familiarities. A reading of a photography image does not reduce itself to a short look, instead it is a look that feeds itself and aims to discover something else. It is possible to want to know why the picture was taken in a certain way, the idea or photographer’s thought in that moment, the feeling it provocates in who sees it.

Thus, the uses of photography in prison education can be seen as a positive point, allowing the subject in freedom privation to rescue their self-esteem through interaction
between one another. Photography can provoke memories of those who sees it, enabling, in this way, a memory exchange, life experiences in group.

**Prison education**

The law n° 9.394 from December 20th, 1996 (Law of Guidelines and Basis in National Education) points out in its article 37 “the young and adults education will be intended to those who did not have access or continuity of their studies in Elementary and High school in proper age and it will consist in instrumenting to education and learning over their lives” (BRASIL, 1996). Therefore, the young and adults education is offered to everyone who did not have opportunities to study access, or the ones who, for some reason, abandoned their studies.

According to Julião and Onofre (2013, p. 11),

The education in freedom privation spaces in many countries in the world, in general lines, it has been considered as one of the ways to promote the social integration and the acquisition on knowledges that allows the recluse ensure a better future when they recover their freedom.

Prison education aims to promote the social reintegration and the acquisition of knowledge, therefore providing to the subject in freedom privation a worthy future. Maeyer (2013, p. 34) points out the importance of offering education in prison:

The demand for education in prison is paradoxical: this demand comes from the fright of the administration, that fears the idle moments in prison, so they execute activities that enable the inmates to bear the freedom privation in the best of ways. Sports and recreational competitions, religion, working opportunities in workshops, professional formation and courses are sometimes offered to the inmates [...].

According to Maeyer (2013), the offered activities usually work toward to not increase the idle moments of the subjects in freedom privation, and in this way the inmates can spend their “free time” doing pleasurable activities that will maintain them occupied. Besides occupying the idle moments of the subjects in freedom privation, these activities also function as a way of controlling the subjects, that’s established when there are tasks to be accomplished.

According to Carvalho Filho (2002, p. 55), “The inmate in closed or semi opened regime can ‘regain’ the prison time through work, by the ratio of minus one sentence day for three worked days”. In this quote, the author refers to the Criminal Enforcement Law n° 12.433, from twenty-ninth of June 2011ii, which, in the article number 126, speaks about the remission of the sentence through work and study. In this way, the subjects in freedom privation have the opportunity to study or work, in order to decrease their stay in prison, in other words, they can choose between the offered options a way to reduce their sentence, what gives them the right to go back to life in society before the expected date, since three days of work or study reduce one day of the sentence. Besides that, the institution also
incorporates the subject in freedom privation with others, in order for him to interact and gather different information besides the ones that come from his environment.

It is possible to notice that prison education presents many positive points in its educational proposal such as include subjects in freedom privation, provide interaction with others, rescue self-esteem, enable reflection production. Such positive points can make the subjects in freedom privation to feel like they belong to society, since prison education is a right they have. Although these positive aspects, there are also negative aspects, inasmuch as not every subject in freedom privation have access to schooling in prison.

Regarding to prison education, Foucault (2013, p. 256) advocates that “The inmate education is, by the Public Authorities, at the same time an indispensable precaution in society interests and an obligation”. The offered education to the subject in freedom privation is responsibility of the Public Authorities, which aims delinquency prevention and, in this way, guarantees the citizen safety. Society requires the subject in freedom privation’s correction, which will be given through the education he will receive in prison, since society sees education as a method to criminality precaution.

It is important to stress that Public Authorities and society see benefits in prison education, because they believe that it can rescue and correct the delinquent subject. Maeyer (2013, p. 43), however, defends that education in prison is, in a certain way, anti-educational, “[...] because it fixes an individual in his role, [...] but does not contribute in anything to the permanent faulted person’s education”. Therefore, the anti-educative education occurs when the subject stop living in society and from there he learns through the prison education, upon the imposed standards. After receiving the freedom back, the subject goes back to life in society, in which he must relearn all that was not practicing in prison. In other words, he shall go back to the labor market, relearn to administrate his salary, paying for his bills, among other actions that were not experienced in prison. This is the anti-education the author refers, because first the subject stops living in society and later is expected from him to relearn again what was not lived in prison.

As for counterpoint to Maeyer’s (2013) idea, Julião and Onofre's (2013, p. 53-54) studies defend that:

[...] education in prison, such as other social practices existing there, is an interaction generator among subjects, it promotes better quality life situations, roots, recomposes identity, values marginalized cultures, promotes affective networks and enables the citizenship (re)conquest.

In this way it is possible to realize that the subjects in freedom privation do not unlearn through the educational practices offered in prison. Instead that, Julião and Onofre (2013) show that educational practices, the ones which value cultures and enable the citizenship reconquer, provide interaction among the inmates and still allows the identity recomposition.
The use of photography in prison education

The interest in researching prison education arose during the classes of Investigative practices II (in Portuguese, Práticas Investigativas II), offered in the first semester of 2016 and taught by the Associate Professor Fabiane Olegário. Through the studies and readings concluded in the subject, the matter touched me, and as the semesters went by, the urge to study prison education became greater. When I was reading the articles and specific texts about prison education that were offered during classes, I was wondering how prison works. Following the conclusion of the subject, I remained thinking and reflecting about the knowledge I had gathered. It was from there that I started thinking about the possibility of doing my Undergraduate thesis in this environment, involving the topic of prison education, even though two more years lasted for my undergraduate thesis writing.

After some readings and orientation meetings for the Undergraduate Thesis writing, arose an idea of researching about the effects of photographs in a class of students in freedom privation at the State Core of Education to Young and Adult (NEEJA) of Lajeado. But how to think about photography as an educative possibility in prison education? In which way a picture can be provocative and make someone think? Silva (2010, p. 31) defends that “[...] the development of activities that enhance education and culture have great results when seen as instruments of reflection, change and incitement”. In this case, the use of the photography, which is also an instrument of reflection and incitement, has the possibility of becoming a resource that enables the inmate to access new sensations and to create narratives through the image.

As mentioned previously, for this research were selected five photographs of the Japanese artist Tatsuya Tanaka, which are going to be presented in this section. Images that refer to childhood, and images that portray daily actions (outside prison) and also images with different points of view were chosen, which made the dialogue between the students in freedom privation possible.

Image 1. Sponge farm

Fonte: Instagram @tanaka_tatsu (2018).
In his techniques, the artist utilizes a diversity of objects to create his art and then photograph it, that is, the art created with objects becomes a photography. The resources that the photographer utilizes are food, clothespins, bath towels, cloths, hangers, anyway, he utilizes simple daily materials and recreates daily-routine scenes.

The photographer creates a great world with these resources, because he inserts tiny dolls in the scenes, what gives the impression that the designed ambient had become gigantic in comparison with the beings that habit in them.

Image 2. BGM

It is through the sigh of photography that reflecting and problematizing the sensations that he provokes becomes possible. It is observing the photographic images that the tiny aspects that had been unnoticed are perceived, and usually, those are the ones that reveal the sense of the photography. For Samain (2012, p. 22), “in recent reflexions about the image, an idea has been developed that feeds a privileged relationship between what it shows, what it grants to think, and what, above all, refuse to reveal [...]”. In this way, a photography becomes a great resource for the creation of narratives, because it is possible to think about it and problematize it from what it show and what it refuses to reveal.
In a certain way, a photography can be loaded of senses, intentions, feelings, memories, regards, meanings, being able to awakening different sensations in the one who sees it. Dantas (2000, p. 8, digital text) points out:

The fundamental in photography reading is what does it awake in which one. The photo as a frozen image just has meaning when awakes in the other the need to defroze it, making its characters go back in scene, mixture themselves, reorganize the moment in which they were cristalyzed.

A photograph, in a certain way, is a cristalyzed moment, frozen, it does not come back. Usually, when a subject look at a photographic picture, the regard comes up. By making a single photograph available in order to be analyzed in a group of people, subjects in a research, as an example, the same imagen can awake something different in which one, could be a feeling, a meaning or a memory, what enable reflections and dialogues from that. In this way, the insertion of photography in prison education, could contribute in the inmates criticality and enable life experiences exchange.
The selected photographs were utilized in a way they could be analyzed and observed in a more attentive way. In order for the students in freedom privation to look closely to the selected images, some questions were raised during the meetings to ease and instigate their narratives, that is, the questions were created in an inciting way. Among the question made to the group, some examples can be highlighted: what is possible to perceive in Tatsuya Tanaka’s photographs? What do these images bring to the imagination? Which are the regards and memories that are triggered by looking at these photographs? What does a photograph provoke? Following the questions, the narratives, that are going to be presented throughout the research, began.
Data production in focal group workshops

Team discussion, this is the goal of focal group methodology. It has as its goal to create conditions in order to enable the components to criticize, analyze and problematize in group starting from a theme. It is not about an interview to rise data, instead, an open and collective conversation. From the collective conversations, it is possible to occur an exchange of ideas, as well as the possibility of divergences and convergences happening between the participants' dialogue. However, the divergences in a group could also contribute in the participants’ learning process.

Morgan and Krueger (1993), cited by Gatti (2005, p. 9) explain that

[...] the research with focal groups has as its objective to capture, from the exchanges accomplished in group, concepts, feelings, attitudes, believes and reactions in a way that it would not be possible using other methods, such as, for example, the observation, the interview or questionnaire.

According to the excerpt above a focal group research have as its objective to produce data from group conversations. These data are produced from questions thrown to the research participants. From these questions the knowledge exchange occurs, different feelings emerge from that, concepts, experiences, reactions, among other aspects.

“The active stimulus to the group interaction is related, obviously, to conduce to a focal group discussion and guarantee that the participants talk among them, instead of just interacting with the researcher or ‘moderator’” (BARBOUR, 2005, p. 21). In this sense, the researcher’s function is to throw questions to the free group debate. It is about questions which enable dialogues among the participants.

In relation to the concept of workshop, a study was made about the works of Roos and Munhoz (2015, p. 199), who defend that “[...] this notion of workshop is closer to the theorizations of Corrêa (1998) and Corrêa and Preve (2011), that does not intend to make a knowledge or content practical, but to put it in motion”. The authors make a reference to the studies of Corrêa (1998) and Corrêa and Preve (2011) when citing the objective of a workshop, that is to give motion to a theme and make it possible to the subject to invent, to create, to imagine. A workshop can provide moments in which the subject will be free to create whatever he wishes to, that is, to practice what he knows or thinks.

Ross and Munhoz (2015, p. 199) believe that turning the workshop into a practical modality “[...] implicates to think about the teaching-learning process not just as a cognitive act, but also as a process of invention”. Therefore, a workshop can also be seen as an educative modality that makes the teaching-learning process more creative, working with inventions and creations, making changes in the traditional teaching of the classrooms.

For the development of the research, two classes of NEEJA Freedom were observed at a prison in Rio Grande do Sul, where the research was put into practice. The participants of the research were all the students in freedom privation that used to have classes during the period of the research, that is, five students. There were more women in freedom privation at the institution, but the research was made only with the ones that were registered at NEEJA.
The interventions began just after the observations. The proposal was made during three meetings, which had between forty-five minutes to an hour of duration each.

The first meeting of the workshop happened on the October twenty second, at 3:30 pm, in NEEJA Freedom, located at a female prison in Rio Grande do Sul/RS. The meeting lasted forty-five minutes and, during this period, the research was briefly presented to the participants, who received explanations referring to the method of the focal group and the planning of the workshops. The students in freedom privation also received explanations related to the Informed Consent Form (ICF, in Portuguese: Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido (TCLE)), which was read out loud by the researcher. During the reading of the term, the students got aware that the research did not present any risk to them. After the theoretical explanations of the research, the focal group began to act. It is important to stress that in every workshop meetings an audio recorder was used as a source to data production.

Firstly, while the five selected photographies circulated among the group, the conversation circle began, after an explanation referent to the Tatsuya Tanaka’s working method. Along this moment, it was possible to perceive that the students in freedom privation questioned the possibility to assemble photographies in a certain way. It was thrown the first question: “What does we can perceive in Tatsuya Tanaka’s photography?” Initially, the participants where thoughtful, but little by little they expressed themselves.

Student C took advantage to speak a little about the “Sponge Form” photography, which she had in her hands: “The people seem real. Taking a look, really looks like people working in the farming. The first impression when we look at it is real plantation, people working in farming”. After that speech, the students B and C begun an idea exchange among themselves. Immediately student B answered:

- I liked this “Food canyon”. It is a lettuce, a broccoli and he made it look like a tree. There is a person at the broccoli, it looks like is a miniature. It looks like he is looking the train from the top of the broccoli. It is interesting the lettuce, which looks like a very big tree.

Like this it was possible to perceive that the students talked among them, even with different points of view, one contributing with the other’s narrative, even if the narratives were from different images. Other question thrown to the group was: “What does these images bring to our imagination? Which regards and memories are reach when looking to this photographies?”.

The student A began the ideas exchanges contributing to the following narrative: “This sponge remember me the time when we harvested tobacco at the farming”. Student B answered in the following manner: “One after the other harvesting tobacco, coffee, but reminds me more a tobacco farm, all them in a row”. Here there are one more example of how, in a focal group, can occur ideas exchanges with different opinions and points of view.

In this first meeting, beyond the questions thrown by the researcher, there were also questions in the narratives form. The student B throw a question to the other participants, challenging them: “A brick town… What is that he used here?... bricks that are not, it seems like plywood pieces”. This narrative started a conversation with different points of view.
between the students B and C. The student C answered by saying: “It’s a wall”. The student B contributed with a different point of view: “It is a wall, but there are people walking on it. For me, it is a floor, a city of bricks, because people would not walk on the walls. This is the impression that I’ve got”. Defending her point of view, the student C answered: “It depends on what he used to make this. We can’t assume if that’s on the floor or on the wall”. The student B concluded the dialogue in this way: “If they were walking on the walls, they would be bugs, but no. People are walking on the walls”. While the both of them were learning with each other, the student D chose to be silent, observing the images and listening to the others. Divergences are common in conversations of focal groups, due to the different ways of thinking of the participants. It is important to point out that it is possible to gain knowledge through divergences.

The second meeting of the workshop happened on the twenty-third of October, at 3:30 pm, and it lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes, due to the workshop’s organization. Initially the materials were spread in three desks right in the center of the classroom, so they would be within reach of all the students in freedom privation. Five students participated in this meeting. Between the available materials were erva mate, soap powder, styrofoam trays, cotton, swab, reusable cups, clay, sponge, dolls and miniature animals, apple, banana, carrot, tomato and broccoli. The styrofoam trays were used to auxiliate the assembly of the scenario, that is, the participants of the research builded their scenarios inside the trays.

From the beginning, some of them had already made their minds about what they were going to create, while others were looking thoughtfully at the materials. While chatting with each other, at the same time they were modifying their creations. “I do not know what I will do… It is hard, he is really creative”, mentioned the student A, referring to the photographer’s ideas. The student B, that was already taking her photograph, complemented: “I will build a zoo, with kids and adults visiting it”. In order to instigate the group, Tatsuya Tanaka’s photographs were shown again to inspire the students, so they could organize their creations.

In this meeting, the participant students remained silently, each one focused in their creation. Some of them created, photographed and, right after, began the construction of the next scenario. The ideas were so many that to create only one scenario was not enough. While the students in freedom privation were assembling or photographing their inventions, they were also circling around the room to observe the other colleagues’ ideas. Before finishing the workshops, the participants were informed that in the next meeting they would receive their photographs printed.

The third and last workshop meeting occurred on October twenty-sixth, at 15:40 and lasted for 30 minutes. This meeting was shorter in time, because there was only two students in freedom privation at the classroom. To begin the last practice, the ten photographies were handled to the students. These photographs were taken at the second workshop meeting, when some of the participants created a scenario to photograph. In this way, the two present participants (students B and C), exchange between them, taking a silent look.

Following that, the students in freedom privation spoke about their photographs, specially what it represented to them. The student C contributed saying: “I loved this one of
mine. I have a feeling of freedom, happiness. Happiness of being in a good place, a peaceful place”. Taking the opportunity, student B comments on it: “I thought in dreams… I always wanted to see the snow. I did a zoo with children, animals, the responsible for the children… It transmits some peace, a feeling of being free, happiness, our dreams”. Both spoke about good feelings and the dreams portrayed in their photographies.

Other question was thrown to the participants: “In the creating moment, did you already have idea of what you would create, or you created without thinking?”. Student B answered the following: “The moment a took the objects in my hands, I was thinking about animals and people at a zoo, a pretty place, full of animals, It is something that a like”. Taking the opportunity, student C reported: “I was just creating, I did not thought the sea would be like that, looking like real water. I did not have idea of what to do. I thought on doing the water to see how it would looks like. Then I had the idea to place in island in the middle and with the boats It got even cooler”. While one of the students was deciding about her creation, the other was undecided, however she was creating until the images shown up.

Final considerations

Aiming to provide moments of interaction and reflexion between the students in freedom privation, this research had the objective of investigating in which way NEEJA Freedom students created narratives from Tatsuya Tanaka’s photographs. Photography was used as an instrument of reflexion and incitement, so it did not just enable the formation of a sensitive look, but it also offered the opportunity to access different sensations, in a way of living new experiences and acquiring further knowledge through the interactions and relations with others.

In relation to the interactions between the participant students of the research, the photographs contributed to the exchange of experiences between them. In this way, it was possible to conclude that the photographs enabled the creation of narratives, since they are loaded with feelings and intentionality, and also because they are related to memories and regards. The photographs contributed to the expansion of the students in freedom privation’s imagination, they made the exchange of ideas possible, as well as guaranteeing the learning process due to the exchange of experiences that happened during the workshops of the focal group.

Over the workshops, it was possible to perceive that the students in freedom privation expressed themselves in a creative way in their photographs, since they let the imagination be their guide. It was perceived that the majority of the students were thinking about freedom in their creations, and all of them represented this freedom in different ways. The workshop seen as a educative modality enabled the NEEJA Freedom students to create, imagine, and express themselves in a different way, that is, through photographs. It was possible to note that they got the inspiration from Tatsuya Tanaka’s photographs to create their narratives and, following that, to create their photographs.
References


Notes

i Japanese artist who photographs daily actions life scenes in miniature. The photographer works with this method since 2011, year when he started his miniature calendar project, in which he uses daily bases products and very small dolls to portray daily scenes.

ii In Portuguese, Lei de Execução Penal. The Law n°12.433, June 29th, 2011 changes the Law n° 7.210, July 11th, 1984 (Criminal Enforcement Law), to dispose about penalty execution time remission by study or work.

iii The research participant students narratives were keep as the original speech.