

Editorial Preface

Towards Educational Heterotopology?

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I was most happy when pen and paper were taken from me and I was forbidden from doing anything. I had no anxiety about doing nothing by my own fault, my conscience was clear, and I was happy. This was when I was in prison. (Daniil Kharms)

In a lecture given in 1967, published in 1984 under the title *Des Espaces Autres (Of other spaces)*, the French postmodern thinker Michel Foucault talks about different kinds of heterotopias. In this special issue, the editors concentrate on a specific form of heterotopia, that of deviation – disturbing spaces that divide presence and practices, for example, between the mad and the sane (the asylum), the sick and the healthy (the hospital), the alive and the dead (the cemetery), the free and the incarcerated (the prison). Heterotopias are places of otherness par excellence. They are places that are put out of our sight because they tend to contain different types of ‘deviants’ and ‘differences’, who inspire distaste, fear and even disgust. Foucault provides us with a list of heterotopias in his lecture: brothels, cemeteries, prisons, asylums, but also ships, gardens, museums, and festivals. Unlike utopias, heterotopias are real – and sometimes too real to be make us feel uncomfortable, hence heterotopias are often located out of sight, off city centres, far away from ‘normality’.

As editors of IJBIDE, we welcome this special issue on one controversial type of heterotopia: the prison. In the field of education, spaces like prisons are marginally considered. As much as they are relegated to the background of societal concerns, research on education has tended to neglect this important context. It is important to note, however, that the European Prison Education Association (epeag.org) represents an interesting exception. Made up of prison educators, administrators, governors, researchers and other professionals, this Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) aims to promote education in prisons in Europe. The NGO offers professional development of prison teachers, makes policy proposals, and stimulates research. For instance, the Association is part of an Erasmus+ project called Skills for Freedom that works to reinforce and enhance soft and hard skills of inmates and help their social and vocational rehabilitation (see skills4freedom.eu/home-en). The Association also organizes a bi-annual conference. *The Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* is also worth mentioning (<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jper/news.html>).

The press around the world often reports about prisoners taking up studies while and after serving years in jail. Unlike the somewhat absurd quote by the poet, dramatist and writer D. Kharms (Даниїл Іванович Хармс, 1905-1942) at the beginning of this editorial, most prisoners feel empowered by being able to use a “pen and paper” to study.

In November 2017, the *Malaysia Digest* reported about Jim who had been sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment after murdering his girlfriend’s stepfather for sexually harassing her. Jim received a master’s degree in business administration in prison and was planning to do a PhD. In the article, Jim explains that he will share his experiences to help young people when he is released. Through his studies, he claims that he has learnt to control his emotions and to have a positive influence on other inmates.

In a similar vein, in a piece entitled *From jail to a Master’s degree: the power of education*, published in the *Seattle Times* in March 2017, Omari Amilli shares his experience of studying

behind bars. Amilli explains how the lack of education (or poor education actually) he received as a youngster somewhat predestined him to become a dropout and end up in prison. He writes: “This is not a unique story. This happens time and time again.” After his time in jail, he decided to register for a degree and was very successful. He argues that “When people have a desire to change and become positive and productive members of society, they should be embraced and assisted as much as possible to ensure their success. Not everyone’s experience with re-entry will be the same, but as a society we need to do all we can to make sure that no one can ever use the excuse that returning to a life of crime was their only option”.

Some countries are more advanced than others as far as prison education is concerned. Like other Nordic countries, Finland adopted legislation for the education of all prisoners already at the end of the 19th century. With the widespread use of digital technologies for education, the Finnish Imprisonment Act was changed to include the following in 2015:

A prisoner may be granted a permission to use internet in order to attend to livelihood, work, education, legal, social or housing issues or for other corresponding important reason for instance e-learning and contact with authorities. Permission to use internet may be granted if use does not endanger safety or security. A prisoner may be granted permission to send and receive emails to maintain contacts and attend to livelihood, work, education, legal, social or housing or other important reason. (cited by Sunimento, 2015: n. p.)

A country like China has 680 prisons and more than 1.7 million inmates (Yunnan Provincial Prison Administration, 2014). In the city of Shanghai, “Administrative Measures for Education Reform of Shanghai Prison Administration” were taken in 2014. Article 5 stipulates that incarcerated individuals should learn legal knowledge (the Constitution, Prison Law, Property Law, etc.) so that they can understand what constitutes a crime, during their sentence. They should also be educated to reflect on morality, and the principles of citizenship (this is all referred to as Probation Education, 感化教育 in Chinese). Furthermore, for those under 45 years of age, and should needs be, they have the opportunity to follow the usual Chinese nine-year compulsory education (basic skills in literacy, numeracy and science). In some cases, prisoners can also be given access to high school (secondary) education, higher education self-study exams or other types of study. For incarcerated individuals who have no specific skills, access to vocational and technical education and training can be provided (ibid.). As in many other contexts, research is practically non-existent on education in Chinese prisons.

With this special issue we call for the establishment of *education heterotopology*: a new field of research that explores education in places of otherness. Today’s world is full of ‘other’ places, where people study and learn, formally, informally: hospitals, asylums, refugee camps, nursing homes, travelers’ camps, migrant schools, home education, etc. What purpose(s) does education serve in these heterotopias? Who provides it and how? Is there a danger for authorities to use these heterotopias to impose values, goals and desired subjectivity that go against diversities (Sandberg et al., 2016)? How could that be avoided? Can those who live in heterotopias refuse or impose views on education – for themselves and others? And family, what can the ‘majority’ learn from education heterotopology?

We also call for comparative and international research on these contexts outside the ‘West’.

We believe that the study of education in these heterotopias, but also after ‘leaving’ them, cannot but help us to rethink and problematize further many of the issues that matter to IJBIDE: social justice, equality/equity, empowerment, identity construction.

Thanks are due to Helen Farley, Marcus K Harmes and Anne Pike for putting together this fascinating special issue. It will, no doubt, open new vistas for our readers and for our journal.

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