

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY: AN APPROACH FOR THE RESIGNIFICATION OF THE DEPRIVED-OF-FREEDOM SUBJECT

PEDAGOGIA SOCIAL: UMA ABORDAGEM PARA A RESSIGNIFICAÇÃO DO SUJEITO PRIVADO DE LIBERDADE

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Abstract

Social Pedagogy has been established as an educational approach focused on inclusion and social transformation, particularly for individuals in vulnerable and marginalized situations. This study analyzes its role in promoting citizenship and reducing social inequalities, highlighting its relationship with non-formal education and its importance as a complementary tool to traditional schooling. The research explores the origins of Social Pedagogy in Europe and its adaptation to the Brazilian context, demonstrating how this approach contributes to empowering historically excluded groups. Additionally, it examines the relationship between social inequality and crime, emphasizing the impact of education on the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals. The study also discusses public policies and regulatory frameworks that support education as a fundamental right, as well as the challenges faced in its effective implementation. Through a literature review and theoretical reflections, the study concludes that Social Pedagogy does not replace formal schooling but enhances access to knowledge and significantly contributes to building a more just and equitable society, where

Resumo

A Pedagogia Social estabeleceu-se como uma abordagem educacional focada na inclusão e transformação social, particularmente para indivíduos em situações de vulnerabilidade e marginalização. Este estudo analisa seu papel na promoção da cidadania e na redução das desigualdades sociais, destacando sua relação com a educação não formal e sua importância como ferramenta complementar à escolarização tradicional. A pesquisa explora as origens da Pedagogia Social na Europa e sua adaptação ao contexto brasileiro, demonstrando como essa abordagem contribui para o empoderamento de grupos historicamente excluídos. Adicionalmente, examina a relação entre desigualdade social e criminalidade, enfatizando o impacto da educação na ressocialização de indivíduos encarcerados. O estudo também discute políticas públicas e marcos regulatórios que sustentam a educação como direito fundamental, bem como os desafios enfrentados em sua implementação efetiva. Por meio de revisão bibliográfica e reflexões teóricas, conclui-se que a Pedagogia Social não substitui a escolarização formal, mas amplia o acesso ao conhecimento e contribui significativamente para a construção de uma



education plays a crucial role in promoting dignity and strengthening citizenship.

Keywords: Social Pedagogy. Non-Formal Education. Social Inclusion. Inequality. Citizenship. Rehabilitation. Public Policies.

sociedade mais justa e equitativa, onde a educação desempenha papel crucial na promoção da dignidade e fortalecimento da cidadania.

Palavras-chave: *Pedagogia Social. Educação não Formal. Inclusão Social. Desigualdade. Cidadania. Ressocialização. Políticas Públicas.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of deprivation of liberty in Brazil reveals itself as an extremely complex phenomenon, intrinsically linked to profound social inequalities and a historical cycle of exclusion that disproportionately affects young, Black, and poor individuals. In this context, the prison system, often marked by precarity and a purely punitive logic, fails in its resocializing purpose, frequently becoming a space where vulnerabilities are deepened. Faced with this challenging scenario, education emerges not only as a fundamental right, constitutionally guaranteed, but as a strategic and potentially transformative tool, capable of fostering the resignification of identity and the reconstruction of the life project of the incarcerated individual. It is within this context that Social Pedagogy presents itself as a field of knowledge and an educational practice of singular relevance, offering a theoretical and methodological framework for working with marginalized subjects, beyond the walls of formal schooling.

This article, therefore, proceeds from the assumption that Social Pedagogy, with its focus on inclusion, social transformation, and non-formal educational action, constitutes a promising approach for the resignification of the deprived-of-freedom subject. The study argues that education in prison, to be truly emancipatory, must transcend the mere reproduction of school models that have historically failed this population, adopting instead practices that embrace, empower, and strengthen citizenship. In this sense, a critical analysis of the public policies governing education in the Brazilian prison system becomes essential to understanding the advances, contradictions, and gaps that permeate the implementation of this right.

The general objective of this research is to analyze the contributions of Social Pedagogy to the resignification of the deprived-of-freedom subject, based on a critical investigation of public policies for education in the Brazilian prison system. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were outlined: (a) to historically contextualize the

emergence and consolidation of Social Pedagogy as a field of knowledge; (b) to investigate the structural relationship between social inequality, criminality, and the profile of the incarcerated population in Brazil; (c) to identify and describe the legal and programmatic framework of public policies for education in the prison system; and (d) to critically analyze the content of these documents, contrasting their guidelines with the assumptions of Social Pedagogy.

This is configured as a qualitative study, with a bibliographical and documentary approach. The corpus of analysis was delimited by the Law of Penal Execution (LEP) and the National Program for Education in the Prison System (PNEESP), central documents that govern the matter in the country. The data analysis, guided by Bardin's (2011) thematic content analysis method, sought to articulate the consolidated theoretical framework of Social Pedagogy with the analysis of legislation and public policies, allowing for a critical interpretation of the interface between normative discourse and practical reality.

This article is structured in sections that, in addition to this introduction, address the methodological foundations of the research, the construction of Social Pedagogy as a scientific field, its relationship with marginalized subjects in Brazil, the analysis of the right to education as a pillar of emancipation in the prison context, and, finally, the concluding remarks, which synthesize the findings and reinforce the central role of Social Pedagogy in building a more just and equitable society.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research is configured as a qualitative study, with a bibliographical and documentary approach, aimed at analyzing the contributions of Social Pedagogy to the resignification of the deprived-of-freedom subject, based on a critical investigation of public policies for education in the Brazilian prison system. The choice of this methodological path is justified by the need to understand the phenomenon in its depth, articulating the consolidated theoretical framework of Social Pedagogy with the analysis of legal and programmatic documents governing education in prison, thus enabling a critical interpretation of the advances, contradictions, and gaps present at the interface between normative discourse and practical reality.

To achieve the general objective of analyzing the contributions of Social Pedagogy to the resignification of the deprived-of-freedom subject through public policies, the following specific objectives were outlined to guide the investigative path: (a) to historically contextualize the emergence and consolidation of Social Pedagogy as a field of knowledge, highlighting its guiding principles for action in contexts of social exclusion; (b) to investigate, through a review of specialized literature, the structural relationship between social inequality, criminality, and the profile of the incarcerated population in Brazil; (c) to identify and describe the legal and programmatic framework that constitutes public policies for education in the Brazilian prison system; and (d) to critically analyze the content of these documents, contrasting their guidelines with the assumptions of Social Pedagogy and the challenges of practical implementation.

The corpus of analysis for this research was delimited based on two fundamental documents that represent the legal pillar and the main public policy for the implementation of education in the Brazilian prison system. The first is the Law of Penal Execution (Law No. 7,210, of July 11, 1984), with analytical focus on Articles 10, 11, 12, and 13, which specifically address educational assistance, defining it as a duty of the State and a right of the prisoner. The second document is the National Program for Education in the Prison System (PNEESP), established by Resolution CD/FNDE No. 14, of April 29, 2014 (Brazil, 2014a), which sets forth the guidelines, objectives, and targets for the provision of basic and vocational education to young people and adults in situations of deprivation of liberty. The selection of these documents is due to their legal and institutional relevance, as the LEP defines the legal framework and the PNEESP represents the main federal strategy for its operationalization over the last two decades.

Data collection occurred in two complementary stages. The first stage consisted of a systematic bibliographical review, which sought to map and discuss relevant academic production on Social Pedagogy, sociology of punishment, and education in prisons. Reference works by authors such as Caliman (2010), Almeida (2008), and Machado (2015) were consulted for theoretical grounding, in addition to studies by Sampaio (2016) and Souza (2017) for contextualizing the relationship between social inequality and incarceration. The second stage, central to the analysis, involved documentary analysis, which included exhaustive reading and decomposition of the content of the selected documents (LEP and PNEESP). In this phase, the goal was not

merely a literal description of the texts, but an interpretation of their intentions, silences, and contradictions.

For the analysis and interpretation of the collected material, both bibliographical and documentar, the method of thematic content analysis, as proposed by Bardin (2011), was adopted. The defined categories were: “Education as a Right and Duty of the State,” which groups legal provisions regarding the obligation to provide education; “Institutional Responsibilities and the Fragmentation of Action,” which analyzes the attribution of responsibilities to different federal entities and agencies; and “Conception of the Subject and the Objectives of Education in Prison,” which discusses the assumptions about the prisoner and the purposes of education present in the documents. Finally, in the third stage, treatment of results, inference, and interpretation, the data were synthesized and cross-referenced with the theoretical framework of Social Pedagogy, enabling the development of a critical discussion that not only describes the content of the documents but also problematizes their effectiveness, limitations, and implications for the resignification of the deprived-of-freedom subject.

Thus, the methodology employed sought to ensure rigor and systematicity in the study, allowing the analysis of public policies to go beyond a mere legal description and become a theoretically grounded, in-depth, and critical investigation capable of addressing the research problem through a clear and replicable procedure.

2.1 Social pedagogy: the construction of a scientific field

When reflecting on the relationship between education and social exclusion, it is common to focus our attention on the school system. However, as Caliman (2010) warns us, the limits of institutionalized schooling are only part of the problem; there are numerous forms of education that operate beyond its walls, significantly influencing the lives of individuals. It is within this space of non-formal action that Social Pedagogy proves essential, particularly in embracing those who find themselves in situations of marginalization. This debate is not merely theoretical; it takes on dramatic urgency when we consider its object of analysis par excellence in the Brazilian context: the deprived-of-freedom subject.

Social Pedagogy, as defined by Almeida (2008), is not an abstract theory, but one that leads educational action directly upon social problems. Its objective is intrinsically

linked to transformation, seeking to promote both individual and collective growth. This feature makes it singularly relevant to the prison setting. After all, what is prison if not a microcosm of aggravated social problems? In this sense, Social Pedagogy does not merely offer a "method" of teaching, but a critical lens through which to view the incarcerated individual beyond their status as a convicted person, recognizing them as a subject of rights and potentialities, historically excluded. The act of welcoming the less favored, which Caliman (2010) identifies as the core of social pedagogical practice, becomes, within the prison, a political act of resistance against the punitive and dehumanizing logic that prevails there.

The European origins of Social Pedagogy and its later manifestation in Brazil, as a distinctive style and a response to the constitutional imperative, help us understand its plasticity. Paula and Machado (2009) argue that Brazilian social demands require a new conception of education, capable of educating individuals historically excluded. This assertion is particularly relevant when analyzing the prison population, mostly composed of young, Black, and poor people - the cruelest portrait of our inequality. Education in prison, therefore, cannot be a mere reproduction of the school model that failed these same individuals outside the prison walls. It needs, in essence, to be a practice of Social Pedagogy: one that embraces, resignifies, and empowers.

In this context, the distinction between Social Pedagogy and Social Education, as proposed by Caliman (2010), becomes operational and crucial. The author clarifies that Social Pedagogy is the science that provides the theoretical and methodological foundations, whereas Social Education is its practical dimension - the application of these techniques in everyday life:

Social Pedagogy emerges in Brazil as a science that offers the methodological and theoretical foundations for Social Education. Social Education, in turn, constitutes a practical dimension where the application of techniques, methodologies, and dynamics generated in dialogue with Social Pedagogy takes place. If one is associated with theory, the other is associated with practice. (Caliman, 2010, p.351, our translation)

In the prison environment, this duality manifests itself clearly. Social Pedagogy provides the foundation for questioning: what kind of education do we wish to offer? What is our objective with this subject? Social Education, in turn, is the materialization of that response in the practice of an educator who develops a reading workshop in a cell, or who mediates a discussion group on human rights. One cannot subsist without the

other. Practice without theory risks becoming innocuous assistentialism; theory without practice remains empty discourse, incapable of transforming the concrete reality of the prison.

Machado (2015, p. 8) deepens this reflection by asserting that the formal object of Social Pedagogy is in constant transformation, adapting itself to each new need for interpreting reality:

[...] the formal object of Social Pedagogy, that is, the way in which the meanings of Social Education are imagined and represented, is in constant transformation and readjustment. It can be understood that this formal object of Social Pedagogy is related to the different theoretical perspectives that are created and re-elaborated with each new need to interpret a reality, which organizes itself in different ways at each moment. (our translation)

This fluidity, far from being a weakness, is its greatest strength, especially in the face of the complexity of the prison system. A rigid and dogmatic pedagogy would be unable to engage with the violent dynamics, informal hierarchies, and psychological suffering inherent to life in prison. Social Pedagogy, on the contrary, due to its adaptable object, allows the social educator to read the specific reality of that prison unit, that group of inmates, and construct a coherent and contextually appropriate intervention. It proposes reflection guided by an emancipatory worldview, which is precisely what is needed to break the cycle of exclusion that marks the trajectory of most incarcerated individuals.

In this sense, Silva, Silva, and Lopes (2011, p. 6) define that:

Social Pedagogy is analogous to School Pedagogy, just as Social Education is analogous to School Education. There are no contradictions or disputes between them, as they are complementary when considering a holistic education that does not separate the world of life from the world of school. (our translation)

It is essential to emphasize, as the aforementioned authors do, that Social Pedagogy does not replace the school but complements it. They are analogous, just as Social Education is analogous to School Education. However, in the prison context, this complementarity is strained. The “school inside prison” often carries with it the same logic as the school outside: standardized curricula, merit-based assessment, a hierarchical and at times authoritarian relationship. Social Education, on the other hand, as highlighted by Machado (2015), systematizes practices that do not follow the school didactics of mere

content transmission. It focuses on the collective construction of knowledge, the transformation of reality, and emancipation through critical awareness. The great challenge, therefore, is not merely to offer education in prison, but to ensure that this education carries the emancipatory character of Social Education, rather than becoming just another instrument of control and discipline.

Finally, the core of Social Pedagogy's contribution to the deprived-of-freedom subject lies in the concept of empowerment, which Almeida (2008) highlights as its main strategy. It involves promoting the valorization of social rights and providing the means for the individual to be recognized as a citizen. In prison, a space designed for the annulment of identity and autonomy, empowerment is a revolutionary act. It means helping the individual to understand their own narratives, to recognize themselves as part of a collective, and to develop the cognitive and affective tools to, upon leaving prison, not return to the same condition of exclusion that led them there. Social Pedagogy, therefore, is not merely an educational tool; it is a philosophy of resignification of the subject, a path to reconstruct citizenship where it seems to have been lost forever.

2.2 Social pedagogy and marginalized persons in Brazil

Understanding the genesis of Social Pedagogy is not merely an exercise in historical erudition; it is essential for unveiling its very essence and, more importantly, for evaluating its relevance as an intervention tool in a context as complex and challenging as the Brazilian prison system. In this sense, it is necessary to comprehend the genealogies of social pedagogy in order to understand it as a historical and social phenomenon:

The precursors of social pedagogy have their origins in the charitable actions of Christianity and in pedagogists such as Pestalozzi and Froebel, even before it was systematized as a discipline. The socio-educational action surpasses the scope of charitable institutions and begins to develop within welfare and social policies. The term is of German origin and was initially used by K. F. Magwer in 1844, in the "Padagogische Revue", and later by A. Diesterweg (1850) and Natorp (1898), who analyzed it as a pedagogical discipline. It was the social problems that emerged from industrialization, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Germany, that motivated the systematization of social pedagogy as a science and as a discipline. (Caliman, 2006, n.p., our translation)

It is noted that the roots of this pedagogy lie not in academia, but in the charitable actions of Christianity and in the thought of pedagogists such as Pestalozzi and Froebel. It emerges in a systematized form in nineteenth-century Germany, not as an abstract field of study, but as a direct and pragmatic response to the social problems exacerbated by the Industrial Revolution. This historical context, marked by the exploitation of the less favored class and the emergence of a mass of individuals “disoriented” by the new social order, serves as a troubling mirror for contemporary Brazil. German industrialization created its “marginalized”; our structural and historical social inequality creates its own.

In analyzing this formative process, we realize that Social Pedagogy arises from a concrete need: to create a science capable of thinking about and acting upon subjects whom traditional schools and charitable institutions could not reach. Transposing this analysis to twenty-first-century Brazil, the question that arises is: who are these subjects today? To a large extent, they are the same people who fill our prisons. They are young, Black, and poor individuals, victims of a historical process of exclusion that preceded them and, in many cases, led them into criminality. In this sense, Social Pedagogy presents itself not only as a coherent instrument but as an indispensable one for dialoguing about this segment of the population that the Brazilian social and economic system has relegated to the margins.

The work of the social pedagogue, as emphasized by Caliman (2009), is marked by an “educational awareness” that enables them to analyze and identify social demands. In the prison context, this awareness transcends empathy; it becomes a political act of resistance. It means being able to see beyond the “criminal record” and recognize the human being in their entirety, with their histories, pains, potentialities, and crucially, with their denied citizenship. It is from this expanded perception that the educator can direct their attention to the specific needs of the deprived-of-freedom subject, seeking forms of cooperation that promote not only their cognitive development but also the strengthening of their identity and their sense of belonging to society. The challenge is monumental: how to promote citizenship within an institution that, by its very nature, strips the individual of their rights?

This reflection leads us to understand education, in the words of Petrus (1997), as a continuous and worldwide process, a fundamental part of the evolution of human beings as subjects inserted in a historical context. For the incarcerated individual, this perspective is even more vital. Education in prison cannot be seen as a “pastime activity,” but as a

path filled with possibilities for breaking a life cycle marked by exclusion. It is a means for these individuals to envision and build new futures, becoming active social agents, even under conditions of extreme restriction. Social Pedagogy, therefore, seeks to embrace precisely those who, in prison, find themselves in a situation of aggravated vulnerability, often without support or prospects to tread new paths upon leaving prison.

Caliman's (2006, n.p.) definition of the social educator's work gains special force when applied to the prison context. It emerges as a societal necessity to deal with the "situations of risk and social malaise" that manifest in prison in exacerbated ways: the poverty that preceded them, the marginality that defines them, drug use as escape or as business, abandonment by the state, and society's indifference. Social Pedagogy is realized there through intentional and non-formal educational interventions, organized outside the traditional logic of schooling. It does not ignore the school institution but complements it, offering a methodology that dialogues with the concrete reality of the deprived-of-freedom subject, something that school didactics, often rigid and distant, fails to do.

The individual on the margins, and especially the one who is imprisoned, does not have the same access as others. Social belonging is a fundamental aspect of being seen and heard as a citizen. In prison, this belonging is violently stripped away. The individual is reduced to a number, an entry in the penal system; their identity is erased and their citizenship is suspended. It is in this abyss of recognition that education, as social praxis, becomes a process of humanization and reconstruction of identity:

Still regarding the fundamental role of education in transforming the reality of these marginalized individuals, we turn to the following position:

Education is a social praxis aimed at inserting subjects into the historical process while simultaneously contributing to the construction of their subjectivity. It is, therefore, a process of humanization, of inserting subjects into the historically constructed human society, of socialization, and of identity formation. Education is, thus, the product of the work of human beings and, as such, responds to the challenges presented by different political and social contexts. Education reflects, portrays, and reproduces society, but it also projects the society one desires, being deeply linked to the civilizational and human process. Human society, in turn, is responsible for this process through its institutions, of which the school is a participant. As historical praxes, they face the challenge of responding to the demands posed by historical contexts. (Pimenta, 2014, n.p., our translation)

According to Pimenta (2014, n.p.), education inserts subjects into the historical process, contributing to the construction of their subjectivity. In prison, it is the primary tool through which the deprived-of-freedom individual can reinsert themselves into the social narrative, not as a “criminal,” but as a human being in a constant process of formation, with rights and a possible future.

However, this discussion would be naive if not anchored in the harsh reality of Brazilian social inequality, which is the fertile ground where crime and mass incarceration flourish. As Campello *et al.* (2018, p. 56) warn us, the debate on inequality cannot ignore the “asymmetry of access to goods and services.” A significant portion of the population lives on the margins of minimum dignified conditions. This is not a secondary issue; it is the starting point for understanding why thousands of individuals see no way out other than crime. The logic is perverse yet direct: how can one defend ethics and legality to an individual who has never had access to the basics, whose rights have been systematically violated by the very state that now punishes them?

The relationship between inequality and criminality, exposed compellingly by Sampaio (2016, n.p.), is the key to understanding the profile of the incarcerated population. “Inequality grows and violence grows,” the author asserts. Brazil’s Gini coefficient, which rose from 0.50 to 0.63 in thirty years, is not just a number; it represents the abyss that separates two Brazils and fuels a cycle of violence. For many, crime is not a moral choice but a desperate survival strategy in a society that has denied them dignified opportunities for existence. This is not about defending criminality, but about understanding it as a tragic symptom of a much deeper social disease: structural injustice.

The central issue, as Souza (2017, p. 13) reminds us, is that of power. It is power that defines “who commands and who obeys, who enjoys privileges and who is abandoned and excluded.” In Brazil, this dynamic manifests brutally in the prison system, which becomes an instrument of social control over the poor and Black populations, while an economic elite often benefits from a system of impunity. Garrido (2013, p. 4) gives voice to this latent resentment by describing robbers as “semi-literate, poor or even destitute individuals” who, “nurturing hatred and aversion toward those who possess goods,” acquire a “sense of violence.” This analysis, though harsh, exposes the moral fracture of a society that generates exclusion and then punishes the excluded.

In this sense, when reflecting on the profound socioeconomic impacts of inequality on the less favored, we must also consider those who find refuge in criminality.

In many cases, crime becomes the only survival alternative when the state fails to guarantee fundamental rights. Clearly, we do not defend criminality as a way out of poverty, nor as a viable solution for individuals in vulnerable situations. Nevertheless, the Brazilian reality shows that, for many, this ends up being the only option in the face of public power's negligence.

The question of power is the central issue of every society. The reason is simple: it is what will tell us who commands and who obeys, who enjoys privileges and who is abandoned and excluded. Money, which is merely a convention, can only exert its effects because it is anchored in political and legal agreements that reflect the relative power of certain social strata. Thus, to understand a society, it is necessary to reconstruct the intricacies of the process that allows for the reproduction of real social power. (Souza, 2017, p. 13, our translation)

Dissatisfaction with a reality that imprisons and annihilates dreams is the fuel that leads many to crime. But, as we argue, education offers an alternative, a breach in this cycle. However, this education cannot be the same that operated, or failed to operate, outside the prison walls. It needs to be a formative education, in the most Freirean sense of the term. As Paulo Freire (1996, p. 37, our translation):

(...) it is not possible to think of human beings far from, *let alone* outside of, ethics. To be far from or, worse, outside of ethics, among us, women and men, is a transgression. It is for this reason that transforming the educational experience into pure training is to diminish what is fundamentally human in the educational exercise: its formative character. If the nature of the human being is respected, the teaching of content cannot take place apart from the moral formation of the learner. To educate is substantively to form.

Educational formation in prison, therefore, has the potential to be a space for ethical reconstruction, but for that, the first step is to recognize the deprived-of-freedom subject as a citizen. Ethics cannot flourish in a terrain where humanity is denied.

Finally, when discussing subjects in situations of vulnerability, our focus falls on those who are already within the prison system. They are individuals who have committed crimes and are paying for them in a closed regime. However, the punishment cannot be the perpetual loss of human condition. These subjects must be recognized as citizens, with guaranteed rights, and access to quality education, grounded in the principles of Social Pedagogy, is the most fundamental of them. It is what can enable true resocialization, understood not as a passive adaptation to an exclusionary order, but as a process of

resignification of the subject, empowering them to return to society as an active, critical, and above all, human agent.

2.3 The right to education as a pillar of emancipation: from the constitutional promise to the reality of prison

The assertion that education is a right for all, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988, is the pillar upon which the ideal of a just and humane nation is built. However, in the Brazilian context, this constitutional promise sounds like a distant echo for a significant portion of the population, especially for those behind bars. The discussion of the right to education, therefore, cannot be limited to an abstract analysis of the law; it must be strained by the concrete reality of those to whom this right is systematically denied, both inside and outside the prison system. Education, as Werner (2022) highlights, has the social function of overcoming inequality. But how can this function be fulfilled when the state itself, the guarantor of this right, fails to provide it, creating a vacuum that is often filled by criminality?

Articles 205 and 206 of the 1988 Constitution clearly establish education as a duty of the state and the family, based on the principle of “equal conditions for access and permanence in school” (Brazil, 1988). This wording reveals an understanding that guaranteeing this right is a collective task. In practice, however, what is observed is an abdication by the state, which delegates to the family, often also marked by social vulnerability, a responsibility that is fundamentally its own. The consequence of this omission is tragic: thousands of young people drop out of school not for lack of will, but out of the urgent need to ensure survival, treading a path that often leads them to marginalization and, ultimately, prison. Ironically, prison becomes the place where the state “reencounters” these individuals, not to repair its educational debt, but to punish its outcome.

This dynamic leads us to the concept of progressivity of social rights, defended by Duarte (2007, p. 700). The author argues that once a right is guaranteed, the state cannot backtrack, as this would compromise the community. In the case of education, regression is the norm, not the exception. The universalization of access, achieved in law, coexists with the precarization of provision and with the persistence of alarming rates of illiteracy and school dropout, especially among the most vulnerable groups, the same

population that overcrowds our prisons. The state fails to use “all available political and economic resources” to ensure the effectiveness of this right, opting instead for policies of containment and punishment rather than investment in formation and emancipation.

It is within this scenario of denial that education, from the perspective of many, becomes the only conceivable path toward achieving emancipation. Considering education as the primary means of transforming the individual, we emphasize that:

Everyone says that education is the constitutive element of the future; that without education we will never be modern; that modern countries have achieved their high degree of development because they invested in education; that the solution to the problems of social exclusion, marginality, and violence lies in education. (Souza, 2009, p. 111, our translation)

This idealization, although powerful, conceals a painful contradiction: education is presented as the way out, yet the social structure itself fails to build the bridge that leads to it. For the deprived-of-freedom subject, this contradiction is even more acute. Education inside prison is often their last and only chance to access a right that was denied to them on the streets. It becomes, literally, as Jucá (2022) points out, an opportunity to achieve freedom itself, even if only symbolically or intellectually.

Kantian philosophy reinforces the centrality of education in the very definition of the human being. Kant (1999, p. 11) postulates that “man is the only creature that needs to be educated,” a process that shapes him, makes him sociable, and distances him from a merely animalistic state. In prison, a dehumanizing environment par excellence, education takes on an almost existential meaning. It is the quintessential instrument for the resignification of the subject, the means through which the individual can reconstruct themselves, reaffirm their humanity, and project themselves beyond the circumstances of their deprivation of liberty. Educating the incarcerated, therefore, is not merely a matter of vocational qualification, but a fundamental act of humanization in a context that operates in the opposite direction.

Nevertheless, the distance between the constitutional ideal and practical reality in Brazil is abysmal. Jucá (2022, p. 427) is emphatic in stating that “the historical debt of the Brazilian state to the population regarding the guarantee of education has not yet been settled, and more seriously, seems to be further from resolution every day.” This debt is particularly visible when analyzing the prison system. Education in prison, where it exists, is often precarious, discontinuous, and under-resourced, a microscopic reflection

of the “major gaps” in the education system as a whole. If the “regular” school already fails to welcome and retain students from the less privileged strata, the school in prison faces even greater challenges: professional burnout, lack of political support, unsanitary environments, and a punitive logic that often overrides the pedagogical one.

Defending education as a right means fighting for access for those who are furthest from opportunity. In this sense, Lima (2010, p. 1, our translation) emphasizes that:

In the Western world, the right to education has long been established as one of the most fundamental rights in the technological society in which we live. Not even capitalist countries, given the revolutionary power that education possesses, forgo generalizing a certain level of schooling to their members.

In the prison context, this struggle is even more urgent. The author observes that even capitalist countries, recognizing the “revolutionary power” of education, guarantee a level of schooling to their citizens. In Brazil, education in prison is treated as a benefit, a favor, rather than the logical extension of an inalienable right. It is, in fact, a profitable investment not only for the individual but for society as a whole, as it represents the most concrete chance to break the cycle of recidivism.

The discussion about the quality of education, therefore, is inseparable from the discussion about rights. As Saraiva, Reis, and Roldão (2006, p. 64) aptly define, quality is linked to effectiveness, efficiency, teacher training, and crucially, to “the pursuit of quality at all levels.” In the prison system, the notion of quality needs to be radically rethought. It is not enough merely to “offer” classes. It is necessary to ensure that the teaching-learning process is suited to an audience with fractured life trajectories, varying levels of schooling, and often deep psychological trauma. Quality education in prison is one that is inclusive by nature, that embraces diversity, and that seeks to rebuild the subject’s self-esteem and autonomy.

In the context of education in Brazil, Codes *et al.* (2017, p. 7, our translation) emphasize that:

The last few decades have opened up new directions for Brazilian education. Since the enactment of the Law of Guidelines and Bases for Education (LDB) – Law No. 9.394/1996, driven by the Citizen Constitution of 1988, a different way of thinking about it has emerged: universalization, quality, and equity have become part of its vocabulary.

The 2014 National Education Plan (PNE) (Brazil, 2014b), with its ambitious goals of universalization, quality, and equity, serves as a thermometer of this contradiction. Targets such as raising the average education level of the population (Goal 8), eradicating illiteracy (Goal 9), and offering integrated vocational education (Goal 10) are, for the prison population, distant mirages. The fact that these goals have not been fully achieved for the general population reveals why their implementation in the prison system is so deficient. If the pursuit of quality education were effective and covered the population in vulnerable situations, the reality of our prison system would undoubtedly be different.

Finally, it is necessary to ask: what is the meaning of this quality? Davok (2007, p. 506) warns us that the concept is polysemic: it can mean mastery of content, acquisition of culture, preparation for the labor market, or, what most interests us here, the promotion of “critical spirit and commitment to transforming social reality.” In the context of Social Pedagogy applied to prison, it is this last conception that must prevail. A quality education for the deprived-of-freedom subject cannot be content with merely training them for the job market. It needs to be emancipatory; it must provide them with the tools to read, interpret, and critique the world that led them to prison and the world that will receive them upon release.

Gadotti (2010, p. 7) offers us the final key to this understanding: “Quality means improving people’s lives, the lives of all people.” Quality education in prison, therefore, can only be measured by its impact on the inmate’s life. It is intrinsically linked to “living well,” even within the restrictions of the environment. It cannot be considered good if the quality of the teacher, the student, and the prison community is poor. As Libâneo (2008, p. 66) states, a school with “social quality” is one that interrelates formal and political quality, with a “high degree of inclusion.” In prison, this inclusion is the starting point. It is ensuring that the right to education, promised in the Constitution, finally reaches one of the places where it is most urgently needed, transforming the sentence into a genuine opportunity for the reconstruction of citizenship and humanity itself.

3 CONCLUSION

Social Pedagogy has proven to be an essential educational approach for inclusion and social transformation, particularly in the Brazilian context, where social inequality remains a persistent challenge. This study has highlighted the relevance of this pedagogy

in promoting citizenship, reducing marginalization, and expanding access to education, especially for those in situations of vulnerability.

The research findings demonstrate that Social Pedagogy is not intended as a replacement for formal education, but rather as an important complement, broadening possibilities for access to knowledge and strengthening the development of historically excluded individuals. Through a theoretical review and contextual analysis, it was found that social education has a significant impact on the resocialization of deprived-of-freedom individuals, the construction of autonomy, and the promotion of human rights. Furthermore, it was possible to understand how public policies aimed at social education are fundamental to ensuring equitable opportunities and fostering a more just society.

Despite its relevance, the implementation of Social Pedagogy still faces structural and institutional challenges in Brazil, such as lack of investment, discontinuity of educational policies, and a shortage of trained professionals to work in this field. Moreover, the absence of stronger regulation hinders the consolidation of this approach as a formalized scientific field within Brazilian education.

Thus, a greater effort is required from the state, educational institutions, and society to strengthen Social Pedagogy as an effective tool for inclusion and social development. Advancing research in this field should consider new methodologies, the expansion of empirical studies on its applicability, and the impact of public policies on its implementation.

Finally, this study reinforces that Social Pedagogy plays a central role in building a more equitable and democratic society. Continuous investment in inclusive educational practices and in the valuing of knowledge as a universal right may represent a significant step toward reducing inequalities and promoting full citizenship for all individuals.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

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