

Educational Curriculum for Youth in Closed-Regime Detention: The Case of a School in Talca, Chile

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HOW TO CITE:

Domínguez-Maldonado Julio César (2026). Educational Curriculum for Youth in Closed-Regime Detention: The Case of a School in Talca, Chile. *International Journal of Special Education*, 41(20s), 1544 - 1560

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the educational response at the various levels at which the curriculum is implemented for youth deprived of liberty in closed detention facilities—that is, those who receive their education in the same facilities where they are serving their sentences. To address these issues, we adopted a qualitative approach using ethnographic techniques, such as interviews with professionals working in detention centers, as well as a review of regulations and curriculum documents. The results show that there are low expectations regarding educational opportunities for these youths and their social reintegration, administrative limitations, and educational practices that are out of context. This situation leads us to propose adjustments to the curriculum, training for professionals who work directly with children and adolescents, and more inclusive educational practices.

Keywords: Curriculum, Incarceration, Educational practices, Inclusion.

Introduction

Chile has designed various legal instruments with the purpose of reducing criminal behavior committed by adolescents. One of the relevant legislative changes is the implementation of Law 20.084 of the Ministry of Justice (2005), which establishes the age of criminal responsibility for young people between 14 and 18 years old, defines the crimes, the penalties

and the length of sentences to be served in a closed facility, and establishes access to educational

programs as a baseline for social reintegration.

The National Minors Service (SENAME) is the state institution responsible for administering the centers where young offenders serve their sentences. This entity must coordinate with public or private educational institutions to establish educational units within each of these

detention centers so that the young people can receive an education.

Article 24 of Law 20.084 sets out the criteria for determining the penalty of young law offenders.

Table 1. Scope of the sanction and applicable penalties

From 1 to 60 days	-Provision of services for the benefit of the community -Distribution of the damage caused -Fine -Admonition
From 61 to 540 days	-Internment in a semi-closed regime with a social reintegration program -Assisted freedom in any of its forms -Provision of services for the benefit of the community

	-Repair of the damage
From 541 days to 3 years	-Internment in a semi-closed regime with a social reintegration program
	- Assisted hospitalization in any of its forms
	- Provision of services for the benefit of the community
From 3 years and one day to 5 y	Inpatient treatment in a closed facility with social reintegration programs
	-Internment in a semi-closed regime with a social reintegration program
	-Special supervised release
From 5 years and one day	-Inpatient treatment in a closed facility with social reintegration programs
	-Internment in a semi-closed regime with a social reintegration program

Source: Oviedo (2017:p.115).

It is important to consider this typology, as it defines young people's access to education and the conditions under which they receive an educational response. Indeed, regarding the predominant type of education in centers serving young offenders, it can be said that the curricula are developed at the central level, that is, by the Ministry of Education, and are applied mandatorily in all educational establishments in the country without considering the contexts of each center. This means that whether or not you are incarcerated, you must address the same material, which is highly controversial when incarceration restricts the spaces and relationships required for a common pedagogy.

1.1 Education for Incarcerated Youth. Some Figures

The Youth Social Reintegration Service currently serves 6,734 young people who are serving precautionary measures or sanctions, registering an 11% increase in users nationwide by April 2026. More than 50% of adolescents in detention centers have previously been through the State protection system.

One of the most significant findings is the high concentration of criminal activity among a small number of adolescents. Ten percent of offenders account for 43% of recorded offenses, while one

percent accounts for 12.5% of cases. In contrast, 64% of adolescents committed only one offense during the analyzed period. Furthermore, a group representing 2.7% of adolescents committed 11 or more offenses, demonstrating persistent criminal trajectories that require differentiated responses from the justice system (National Youth Social Reintegration Service, 2026).

Looking at this data and the need to provide educational opportunities for these minors, it's crucial to recognize that it's impossible to separate the educational process from the context in which these young people live. The restrictive environment of prison makes it a particularly challenging setting for educational services whose purpose is to empower individuals to make decisions and take control of their lives, ultimately achieving social reintegration through behavioral change.

1.2 The Educational Response of State Schools and Institutions

There is no doubt that the identity of young people "is the result of the process of symbolic appropriation of the set of experiences they encounter throughout their lives. This process is experienced by the individual as a singular actor within a specific social situation" (Toledo-Jofré, 2012, p. 45). However, institutions act as a support for individual and collective actions. This is not only about an ecological environment, but also about the opportunities and intentions surrounding the institutions in which young people participate. The formal and non-formal education system operates as a political component that either promotes or hinders processes of social inclusion.

Educational institutions are contexts in which young people learn to interact as members of a community and to negotiate their differences with others. In correctional facilities, social reintegration programs are implemented; that is, strategic plans so that, after serving their sentence, young people can rejoin the society from which they were excluded.

Taking into account the nature of the causes of hospitalization (physical and/or psychological abuse, sexual abuse, labor exploitation or others),

young people must follow an educational program that aims to guarantee care, protection and the right to education.

But access to education that is not originally voluntary presents several complexities, the most important being the way in which these young people are expected to be educated under classic models that fail to motivate them.

We can define teaching methods as the way teachers act and the resources they select for this purpose. The approaches underlying teachers' actions are usually organized within a technical curriculum that has a pre-established format and very little room for innovation. This is an approach where the teacher/student roles are hierarchical, the objectives are predetermined, and the assessment aims to control what is expected to be reproduced.

A practical curriculum emphasizes hands-on learning; therefore, the teacher's role is that of a facilitator, while the student constructs their own learning. Context and experience are relevant to a meaningful educational experience.

As the current system of incarceration is structured, the activities of students and teachers are limited to the use of materials defined at the central level, and resources are always scarce. In this sense, it is a pedagogical model focused on teaching rather than learning; that is, it is more important for the student to be able to repeat what the teacher says than to develop their capacity to understand and internalize knowledge.

One of the critical points of this approach is that it doesn't employ the codes specific to each student's context; instead, they are expected to assimilate a common plan regardless of their incarcerated status. This is a critical point because educational models that fail to consider contextual variables tend to fail.

The curriculum the state offers as an alternative for these young people is one thing, but their actual educational needs are quite another. Given that most of them struggle with rules and discipline, it is crucial that these factors be considered in any educational proposal. Indeed, many teachers report that students' behavioral problems significantly interfere with their teaching, generating adverse

effects on their peers.

Furthermore, it is important to consider that the behavior of young people deprived of liberty is shaped by the experience they have had outside of school, for example, with levels of poverty, delinquency of families or friends, lack of opportunities, in addition to learning difficulties associated with cognitive impairments (Solana, 2018).

These young people require intensive support that they do not find in school, individualized interventions and care to address mental and behavioral health problems.

Estéves and colleagues (2007) point out that centers responsible for the care of these minors require diverse adaptations that take into account the needs of the young people. In fact, Gagnon *et al.* (2018) indicate that a high proportion of students have one or more disabilities and/or psychiatric diagnoses, a history of traumatic abuse and/or parental neglect, and require differentiated support and services because they represent a higher risk within the prison population.

The recommendations point to programs that combine different approaches (Solana, 2018), such as mentoring programs, restorative justice programs, conflict resolution training, and drug and violence prevention, among others. From the perspective of teachers and professional support teams, progress should be made toward developing reflective practices regarding biases and power dynamics within educational and juvenile justice systems (Kubek, J. *et al.*, 2020).

This would be an educational approach that fosters a school culture promoting the success of all students and improving equity within the re-entry process. Specifically, school practices that promote positive teacher-student relationships and foster safety and community within the school environment are recommended. Restorative justice practices in all schools should guarantee the safety of all young people.

Based on the aforementioned background, the need for a curricular approach that promotes positive interactions, practical and meaningful knowledge for everyday life, and flexible programs based on the evolving educational needs of young

people is evident. Within this framework, we ask how the State addresses the education of incarcerated youth, what educational mechanisms and strategies it proposes to the centers as mediating units between the State and children and young people, and what educational and ethical principles the official curriculum adopts to respond to the educational needs of these young people.

To address these issues, we are interested in understanding the official discourse at two levels: a) the Ministry of Education, as the institution that sets the guidelines for action and imposes a specific type of education that the State seeks to promote among its citizens; and b) the educational center, as a micropolitical unit that materializes the State's intentions and incorporates into its Institutional Educational Project (IEP) the core elements for providing education to incarcerated youth. Based on this review, we aim to describe the educational opportunities offered to young offenders, their utilization of re-education programs, and the resistance they develop in continuing and completing their studies.

1. Method

2.1 Approach and Design

A qualitative approach is chosen that seeks the empathetic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bisquerra, 2004), which in our case corresponds to the educational response that the State offers to young people deprived of liberty.

In particular, a case study was adopted. Rodríguez (1996) points out that the choice of a case can be supported by multiple reasons; in our case, it has a revealing character insofar as approaching youth detention centers allows us to observe and analyze a particular phenomenon or fact that is relatively unknown in educational research and on which contributions of enormous relevance can be made, especially in the design of public policies or the design of training programs.

2.2 Context and Participants

In the city of Talca is the "SENAME Center-Provisional Internment Center CIP-Closed Regime Center CRC", within its premises is the Aulas de Esperanza Technical Professional High School, the place where the study was carried out.

It was a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling (Cardona, 2002), in which 7 key informants participated (See Table 2).

Table 2. Participants

Informant	Gender	Age	Length of stay in years
Socio-educational professional	H	56	21
Social worker	H	55	15
Network Coordinator	M	36	4
School Coordinator	M	38	5
Psychologist	M	37	1
Mother of hospitalized minor	M	50	Not applicable
Grandmother of minor in care	M	65	Not applicable

Source: Own elaboration

2.3 Data Production Techniques

The techniques used were documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews.

The review incorporated the following documents:

- Decree 257, which establishes fundamental objectives and mandatory minimum content for

adult education (which is the curriculum used with young people) and sets general rules for its application issued by the Ministry of Education of Chile, promulgated on July 1, 2009 and published for implementation on August 19, 2009, still in force.

Institutional educational project of the Liceo Técnico Profesional Aulas de Esperanza in the city

of Talca, which is a penitentiary compliance center under the SENAME.

An interview was conducted with each of the informants defined in Table 2, with the purpose of complementing the categories derived from the document analysis. To understand the trajectories of the young people, we used semi-structured interviews with a flexible format (Mella & Osses, 2015). This technique allows access to the experiences and subjective aspects of the participants.

2.4 Data Analysis Plan

The following steps were followed for the qualitative data analysis:

Stage 1: Structuring the Data; in this phase the information was organized and the material from the interviews and document analysis was transcribed.

Stage 2: Material Analysis; This stage involves the analytical description of the categories, coding, and the development of logical-semantic frameworks that will later generate theory. Initially, the coding was open-ended to facilitate a first systematization of the data. Subsequently, the process shifted towards a more theoretical analysis of the information, supported by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo .

3. Results

3.1 Analysis of the Country's Policy and the Center

To begin, it is important to point out that Decree 257 regulates adult education (the curriculum accessed by incarcerated youth), and this is one of the main barriers, since the curricula do not correspond to their chronological age and are therefore constructed from an adult-centric perspective. This situation creates tension in the

learning process and in the ways in which young people internalize the curriculum.

Furthermore, this decree states that "it seeks to familiarize students with some basic economic concepts, starting from their own experience *as workers and consumers* (p.52).

Similarly, it is indicated that students should "*Identify the place they occupy in the productive structure of the country, evaluating their contribution to the generation of social wealth and the ethical challenges they face in their work* " (p.54).

A critical point is the flexibility of the curriculum. In this regard, it is striking that, despite official documents indicating that it is possible to design and validate its own programs, the center chooses to replicate the official curriculum issued by the Chilean Ministry of Education. Indeed,

"Article 7 states that the Ministry of Education may authorize the application of study plans and programs with a temporal and sequential organization of Fundamental Objectives and Mandatory Minimum Contents different from that established in this decree, in duly qualified and founded cases, such as, that the establishment serves a population of high socioeconomic vulnerability, or subject to a special disciplinary regime and in cases of extreme rurality" (Decree 257, p.3).

It would be expected that, being a population in a situation of confinement, the Center would take into account the particularities of the young people and the conditions in which they are educated in order to give its own stamp to the educational programs.

It is important to note that from the second level onwards, young people deprived of their liberty have the possibility of starting a trade; the rest of the matrix does not differ substantially from the general one.

Table 3. Organization of the Official Curriculum Basic Education (Primary Education)

Level	Sector and subsector	Reference course
First level	-Language and communication	1st to 4th
	-Mathematics	
Second level	-Language and communication Subsector Spanish language and communication	5th and 6th Optional job title

	-Mathematics, mathematics education subsector	
	-Sciences Subsector natural sciences	
	-Social studies subsector social studies	
Third level	-Language and communication Subsector Spanish language and communication	7th and 8th Optional job title
	-Mathematics, mathematics education subsector	
	-Sciences Subsector natural sciences	
	-Social studies subsector social studies	

Source: Prepared by the author based on Decree No. 257 MINEDUC

For its part, secondary education is organized differently since it has two lines of training: Humanistic Scientific Secondary Education and Technical Professional Secondary Education, regardless of which one the student chooses, he

must receive general training that involves traditional disciplines and instrumental training that is transversal in nature and addresses topics for everyday life.

Table 4. General education and instrumental education in secondary (compulsory) education

General education	Instrumental training
-Language and communication Subsector language Spanish and communication English foreign language subsector	-Social coexistence sector
- Mathematics sector, mathematics education subs	-consumption sector and quality of life
- Science Sector, Natural Sciences Subsector	-employment insertion sector
-social studies sector social studies subsector	-information and communications technology sector

Source: Prepared by the author based on Decree No. 257 MINEDUC

The purpose of organizing secondary education in the humanities and sciences is to enable students to continue their professional studies; however, young people prefer to take the technical-professional track, which provides them with a certification that enables them to enter the labor market.

The Differentiated Technical-Professional Training is made up of the specialties corresponding to the occupational sectors and channels of specialization defined for the regular Differentiated Technical-Professional Secondary Education, some of which are forestry, agriculture, sanitary installations, electricity, clothing, childcare, among others.

As can be seen, the curriculum chosen by most inmates links education with work through specializations that promote norms and skills characteristic of the working world, thus replicating the market model. From this perspective, students develop attitudes and behaviors to function effectively in the economic market with intermediate qualifications. Some areas where this is evident are:

"The curriculum considers the needs for updating and reorienting the curriculum of adult education, taking into account the demands of the world of work and society, and the need to offer adults a relevant and meaningful education, which provides them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes

necessary to improve their quality of life and their participation as citizens and workers" (Decree 257, p.7).

"The characteristics of adults, especially those related to employability skills" (Decree 257, p. 8).

"Also, to enable the attainment of certifications equivalent to the title of mid-level technician of regular technical-professional education, and certifications in trades, with programs of shorter duration" (Decree 257, p. 9).

"To promote the employability of adults by emphasizing training in general languages and the incorporation of a curricular space of an instrumental nature that addresses the development of skills to function adequately in specific areas of adult life" (Decree 257, p. 9).

"The Differentiated Humanistic-Scientific Training and the Differentiated Technical-Professional Training are oriented to respond to the demands of productive development within the trends presented by employment, both dependent and independent (entrepreneurship), through a modular curriculum design based on a labor competency approach" (Decree 257, p. 19).

The excerpts reveal the "non-neutrality of the curriculum" as well as a political discourse underpinned by a neoliberal rationale that has permeated the Chilean education system in general and manifests itself in various ways, such as control, the social division of labor, the distribution of resources allocated to schools, and the justification of special subsidies per student, among others. These concerns fueled the so-called "Penguin Revolution" of 2006, in which students took to the streets to express their rejection of the market-driven model of education.

The results also show how Decree 257 promotes a technical approach to the curriculum, emphasizing activities designed to transmit predefined content, which is then assessed. Among the teaching methods, those based on technology stand out.

"Students can choose the type of teaching they want, within a range of different educational options such as distance learning, self-learning modules, knowledge certification, semi-face-to-face and face-to-face modalities, among others (Decree 257, p.10).

As highlighted, the teaching focuses on how to deliver information, optimizing the learning process through the search and selection of effective technological means to produce learning

according to the desired ends. While alternative evaluation methods are considered,

for example, *"in the case of adult education, it is suggested that the teacher use evaluation methodologies that consider and take into account the opinions and voices of the students, that conversations be generated in which they themselves can propose criteria for self-evaluation and peer evaluation, that they be encouraged to express themselves regarding their own performance and how they observe the performance of other classmates, that they develop autonomy and critical and self-critical capacity"* (p. 25), the truth is that teachers have very low expectations of student performance and resort to control measures and learning based on punishment and/or reward, typical of behaviorist psychological theories.

The logic of curriculum construction under this approach focuses on the selection and ordering of content, the choice of learning experiences (ideally repetition) and plans to achieve the optimal conditions to achieve the objectives (based on observable results).

The model requires a specific professional profile: a teacher who engages in dialogue, promotes critical thinking, and builds upon students' prior experiences. The fundamental cross-curricular objectives express: *"Teachers determine the nature of teaching and learning practices in the classroom, decisively defining the type of personal interaction they establish there. Particularly in Adult Education, teachers must foster a pedagogical practice that considers students' prior experiences, encourages them to share experiences from their working lives, promotes participation in debates and arguments about everyday adult life situations, stimulates creativity and reflective capacity, fosters a democratic classroom environment, and encourages respect for differences and the peaceful resolution of conflicts* (Decree 257, p. 24).

In practice, teachers try to emotionally contain the students, and their main concern is the well-being of the young people within the center. Many of them attempt to self-harm or become unstable due to the detoxification processes. Therefore, it is complex to stimulate the development of thought and reflection when

there is an urgent need to repair the violation of rights to which they have been exposed.

Another element of interest in analyzing the

educational opportunities available to young people is the relevance of the curriculum. We understand curricular relevance as the relationship between the curriculum and those aspects of the social environment within which the pedagogical relationship is framed.

According to Pérez (2009) a relevant curriculum is one that is congruent with social conditions and needs, with the norms that regulate social coexistence and with the specific characteristics of students in their different natural environments.

The curriculum to which young people are subjected declares relevance as a basic principle, stating:

“an education that considers the various spheres in which the lives of adults develop, so that the teaching-learning process is connected with their reality, needs and demands through an educational experience that develops, in increasing complexity, the specific contents of each sector and subsector in relation to themes and interests in accordance with the life experience accumulated by adults” (Decree 257, p.7).

The reality we have described shows that young people and their families not only undervalue education but also self-exclude from school; therefore, their life experiences are linked to poverty and marginalization. The mere fact of being deprived of liberty restricts their learning opportunities connected to the experiences of the world around them.

“For the implementation of this curriculum proposal, it is key to develop methodological strategies that promote active learning, incorporating the valuable experience of the adult learner and motivating them to reflect on it within the framework of the topics and problems addressed by the sector. On this basis, students should be invited to develop and channel new knowledge, enhance skills, and develop attitudes that allow them to see that learning is an enriching experience and that it is in direct contact with the world in which they live” (Decree 257, p. 84).

Content analysis is contradictory in this category because, on the one hand, the official curriculum declares the principle of relevance as central to the education of young people, and then incorporates the social problems of the current world into the official content, when it is not necessary to look at the world to recognize these living conditions within themselves:

“Characterization of poverty and hunger, drug trafficking, environmental deterioration, pandemics (for example AIDS), as expressions of global problems, spatial distribution and magnitude. Analysis of some of them considering their social, cultural and economic implications, different interpretations about their causes and about the ways to overcome them, the situation in Chile, study of different international efforts to overcome these problems” (Decree 257, p.88).

This expresses the disconnect between the official discourse emanating from official documents and the reality and life experiences of the young people who enter the centers.

The content has a strong framework and is organized around concepts, attitudes, and procedures. Its priority is to identify skills and knowledge to prepare specific activities consistent with the world of work.

The minimum mandatory content corresponds to the set of conceptual knowledge and practical performance skills (knowledge and practice of procedures) that students are required to learn.

One element that stands out is the explicit incorporation of the content of "conflict resolution", as it puts people at the center and shows ways of relating and managing problematic situations.

“The peaceful resolution of conflicts seeks to train students in a set of social skills and procedures that allow them to face and resolve conflicts peacefully. To this end, they are invited to observe their personal reality and their environment, identifying different conflict situations and ways of resolving them. The focus is not on denying or avoiding conflict situations, but rather on guiding them through the most appropriate channels and avoiding violence” (Decree 257, p.91).

These contents are linked to ethical training that aims to defend the equality of essential rights of all people, without distinction of sex, age, physical condition, ethnicity, religion, or economic or other status. *“It is about fostering a culture of compliance with the law, justice, and respect for others.” (Decree 257, p. 22).*

Understanding culture and its value within official curricula is of interest to the study. We have found two ways of looking at it: one from the perspective of internationalization, which involves highlighting the role of the world, and especially Europe,

through the factors that enabled Western Europe's global hegemony at the beginning of the 20th century and its decline linked to the world wars; and the other from the perspective of cultural diversity, viewed through the lens of the world cultural map, where the opportunities and challenges presented by increased contact between cultures are discussed, along with the most appropriate forms of coexistence for navigating a global context. Evidence of this includes:

"Relations between Spaniards and indigenous people in Chile during the Colony: forced labor, miscegenation, evangelization, cultural syncretism, trade, indigenous resistance. The cultural heritage and institutionality of Spain" (Decree 257, p.82).

"The rise of the international sphere, especially in the economic area, makes it necessary for our students and workers to acquire the skills necessary to actively participate in today's globalized world, have access to better jobs and improve their quality of life" (Decree 257, p.64).

As can be seen, from the institutional perspective there are significant contradictions, especially regarding the relevance of the curriculum, the reproduction of a market model, the role of culture in the social matrix, teaching methods, content and objectives that are related to a technical curriculum.

3.2 Values and principles promoted by the PEI of the Center

In curricular terms, the Institutional Educational Project (PEI) constitutes the second level of curricular specification. At this level, the ideas shared by the educational community and that guide its development are materialized; it is a level prior to the implementation of teaching practices.

The results demonstrate that the PEI of the Liceo aulas de Esperanza has the vision of being a comprehensive benchmark of technical and professional education that seeks to generate spaces for the development of a critical awareness that allows students deprived of liberty to appreciate their own value and capacity to achieve their life project, with a strong environmental focus, autonomy and citizen participation for the integration into society and family.

The mission is to serve young and adult students in detention settings, providing a comprehensive education that dignifies the individual, thereby

effectively contributing to family and social reintegration and fostering the development of cultural, social, and work skills, environmental awareness, and healthy coexistence. The center's objectives explicitly aim to reintegrate these young people into society.

A first element that emerges from the analysis of the PEI is the adoption of a critical educational approach justified by the principles of Paulo Freire's school; the pedagogical model states:

"It is important to emphasize that the institution is inspired by the ontological and social principles of Paulo Freire's educational project, under the motto of dignifying the learner, understanding that the process is dialogical, reciprocal, and inclusive. "No one educates anyone else. No one educates themselves alone. People educate each other, mediated by the world" (Freire pp. 1544-1560). In this sense, it is vital to understand that we are part of a professional work team where the actions or omissions of any one of us determine the failure or success of all" (PEI, p.4).

Paulo Freire (1978) spearheaded an adult literacy movement aimed at critically examining and transforming society. Within this framework, the center strives to provide young people with an education committed to oppressed groups, emphasizing tolerance, universal ethics, coherence, liberation, and educational transformation.

The PEI highlights the inclusive nature of educational practice, *"rejecting all forms of arbitrary discrimination, thus preventing the inclusion of conditions or rules that affect the dignity of the person or that are contrary to the human rights guaranteed by the constitution and the current international treaties ratified by Chile, especially those that deal with the rights of children, young people and adults who study"* (PEI, p.19).

Currently, the educational offering consists of developing a formal program of studies in basic education with the trades of ceramic tile installer on floors and walls, sanitary fixture installer and computer maintenance and repair, while secondary education offers two specialties, namely, electricity and sanitary installations.

As a complementary (and not mandatory) service, the high school also offers support for students who wish to take the university entrance exam.

In accordance with the educational model, the center adopts a concept of dialogic learning that is

expressed in: *"The concept of enabling and democratic education that prevails in the teachers of the establishment and also the professional competencies understood as the mastery of the teaching strategies relevant to this cultural environment"* (PEI, p.7).

In this scenario, the concept of learning is framed within a multidisciplinary and contextualized approach, where young people transcend subjects and are at the service of today's society.

Compared to the official MINEDUC programs previously analyzed, the PEI (Institutional Educational Project) highlights the relevance of the curriculum, emphasizes students' prior experiences, and reflects their expectations. In this sense, it is better suited to the realities and characteristics of the environment in which these young people are educated.

Inclusion appears as a central element in the PEI (Institutional Educational Project), as evidenced by the statement: *"This high school opens its doors and classrooms to anyone who wishes to participate in its formal and extracurricular activities. It is also expressly stipulated that it welcomes any religious, philosophical, political, ethnic, or cultural expression. There are no barriers in the high school based on gender, age, origin, or socioeconomic status. The raison d'être of Paulo Freire's project is precisely to highlight the value of emancipatory and democratic education, which ensures that everyone has the same tools for development and improvement in their quality of life"* (PEI, p. 10).

The various elements that make up the PEI maintain an internal coherence, that is to say, the educational model, mission, vision, values and principles are aligned with a dialogical educational approach.

"We understand the educational process as a dialogical, interactive, permanent and participatory instance, where the Minimum Mandatory Contents are not the end but an instrument to achieve Meaningful Learning, which allows it to be at the service of the development of opportunities for change in the incarcerated student" (PEI, p.11).

Finally, the shift from a traditional approach to a critical/dialogical one requires a redefinition of the roles of educators and students. Such a model places people and their ways of interacting and transforming the educational space at the center.

"The teacher working in our high school must possess certain

capacities and technical skills, such as being able to maintain a constant attitude of resilience, composure, and serenity in the face of violent or restrictive episodes that are frequent in educational establishments located in contexts deprived of liberty. Furthermore, they maintain high expectations regarding the learning and integral development of the students and are willing to create spaces for dialogue, reflection, and contribution with their peers in order to build and be a role model in personal presentation, vocabulary, and attitudes that make them a point of reference" (PEI, p.14).

If we consider the specialized literature, it indicates that the life trajectories of young people are determined by the expectations of professional teams, which in most cases are rather modest; however, in this case, the PEI itself explicitly contemplates the need to maintain high expectations for the learning of young people.

Furthermore, the student's role includes values such as respect, tolerance, self-control, perseverance, and responsibility.

"He is an entrepreneurial student who takes ownership of his educational process. He is resilient in the face of academic situations and the different challenges he has to solve. He maintains an attitude of respect, self-control and tolerance towards others. He strives to be persevering and responsible, taking advantage of the opportunities presented to him to improve himself in life" (PEI, p.15).

As we have seen, the PEI maintains internal coherence, adopts a dialogical educational model, puts the principles of relevance and inclusion at the center, and is better adapted to the reality in which young people receive education.

3.3 Educational Practices

When we investigate the educational practices of support teams, families, and young people, the consensus of all these actors is striking in pointing out that the school is responsible for guaranteeing the right to education and, therefore, is the one that ends up installing barriers that lead to dropping out of the educational system. The participants believe the system (represented by the State) has failed, resulting in constant punishments, a lack of recognition for professional teams, and an inability to motivate young people toward an education that meets their needs. One of the young women points out that her memories of school are

very painful; she felt misunderstood and unheard.

"They thought I was stupid because I didn't learn, they always sent me outside the room and it was cold in the yard so I would jump over the wall and go out into the street, I didn't learn anything, I did badly but I liked going because it was better than being at home" (interview of a minor)¹.

If we review the psychological evaluation of this minor, we can see how her learning trajectory, marked by school failure, has negatively impacted her daily life and the way she establishes relationships with others. *"She presents emotional outbursts, tends to perceive herself with low self-efficacy and feelings of intellectual inadequacy. She presents anxiety, inner isolation, is emotionally cold and has a personality linked to a depressive disorder and presents self-harming behaviors"* (extracted from the Intervention Plan).

Regarding the professional teams, the center's psychologist points out that the school closes its doors to these young people and blames them for academic failure, which is a failure of the system itself, as it does not respond to the specific educational needs of these minors. Poverty and neglect also affect the educational response they receive from the school, which, while already questionable in terms of quality for most young people, is even more pronounced in these cases.

"The education they receive isn't very good because these young people are generally destined to enter public schools or colleges where the quality is poor. Because they have behavioral problems, they aren't accepted just anywhere, and because they come with a history of dropping out and conflicts, they are also turned away from most schools. In the end, they go where they can, not where they would like to be; these places are almost always marginalized" (interview with a psychologist).

If teachers set high expectations for them, the response would surely be different. However, accounts show that these are over-diagnosed young people, most of them diagnosed with "possible" cognitive impairment and significant learning gaps. This situation leads their teachers and professional teams to not expect great achievements from them; they perceive that they have nothing to offer, and thus a cycle that is difficult to break is perpetuated.

"I have students who actually come here and tell me right away -aunt I'm here because I have to fulfill - They know their situation and that they must meet certain objectives to

get out, but it has happened to me that they end up saying - aunt thank you because I really didn't believe in myself and I could do it, I achieved it and I finally finished a first year of high school - a course that I had failed two or three times abroad" (interview with school coordinator).

As young people experience the success of their actions, they set new challenges for themselves and begin to think that if they study and finish high school, they can obtain a profession that will allow them to earn a living once they have served their sentence. Undoubtedly, their self-esteem and self-confidence improve.

Given that the Ministry of Education has focused its plans and programs for young people on their integration into the workforce, providing vocational training to a segment of the prison population seems like a good approach. The issue isn't whether to maintain or eliminate the model, but rather to offer broader opportunities for those who not only want to learn a trade but also pursue higher education at a university or professional institute. Therefore, the curriculum should diversify its objectives and adequately prepare young people who legitimately aspire to this other goal.

"There are many young people who leave here as adults and learn trades. We try to focus on young people who aren't very dedicated to their studies and don't have as many skills as others, or whose intelligence level is a bit lower. For these children, we think it's better for them to have a trade since it will be a tool that will help them not to reoffend. I think most of them don't like to study, and this is the option we give them" (psychologist interview).

On the other hand, we have a national curriculum characterized by its homogeneity and rigidity, a curriculum that is pre-established for all young people in the country regardless of their geographical location, culture or language.

Nevertheless, professionals say they are trying to distance themselves from these guidelines in order to respond to what young people need.

"We have had talks in Santiago where we have met with other centers in the SENAME network and the other centers have the same problem: they are programs that are designed for young people in a context of freedom, they are not designed for young people who are in a context of deprivation and even less so with the cognitive and

pedagogical deficits that they have” (socio-educational professional interview).

The professional teams hold regular meetings to assess the progress of the young people and to analyze the scope they have to adjust the program to their needs.

“So today we are mainly going according to their requirements trying to accommodate all this because the idea is to try to keep it in the system, the idea is that young people see education as a possibility, not as an obligation or as a burden, which many times for them going to school is, because they put it that way, we want to change, to say that deep down they can, that it is possible” (interview network coordinator).

Likewise, the professionals tell us that in the multiple meetings they have with the central and regional teams (decision-makers) they convey these concerns and propose improvements to the curriculum, emphasizing the need to *“Adapt the program of both basic and secondary education for young people who are deprived of liberty, which at this moment is not considered; it is necessary to generate a study plan for this type of young people with the particularities that they have” (socio-educational professional interview).*

Remediation is also part of the curriculum objectives and educational practices. Once the professional teams receive the reports, they jointly design a prioritized work plan. This plan has been disrupted by the pandemic and has had to be implemented virtually. The specialists are clear in stating that it is ultimately their responsibility to bring students up to the appropriate level and address knowledge gaps in the various subjects. *“The thing is, these programs actually help to level the playing field for young people and adults. Generally, in the free environment, these night schools come here to help people level the playing field, whether for work purposes or for professional development. If you think that they have dropped out of the system, you can imagine the educational gaps they have as a result of not having studied for years” (interview with school coordinator).*

The methodologies are recognized as effective. In fact, professionals draw comparisons between the pedagogical relationship they achieve with personalized work (the plan is individualized) versus the education students receive in standardized settings where classes are large and

young people do not receive the specific support they need for their educational needs.

“The thing is, we work with them individually, so I think learning is much easier. They tell us, ‘I learn with you,’ but I’m sure I’m not a super teacher. What we do is individual work; our time and effort is only for that student” (professional socio-educational interview).

Another difference lies in the emphasis placed on content. While the professionals work with the official curriculum, their teaching practices are closely linked to the students' everyday experiences. In this regard, the center's administration has mandated that education should focus on developing life skills and that remedial education is only the first step in ensuring a necessary foundation for future learning.

“It is true that we have to go back in the content, but we always start from the premise that there is a base that they have to have and we have to go back so that they are properly trained and their learning is as functional as possible. I don’t know if you can realize that although we don’t have a PIE (School Integration Project), we try to make sure that everything the child learns is for life beyond content; we try to make sure that everything is useful for their life” (interview with school coordinator).

Based on these results, we believe it is important to discuss the predominance of a psychologized educational model where students are diagnosed and labeled as having “possible cognitive impairment” (in all cases). The relativization of the concept of “possible” is striking, as its implications are difficult to grasp.

This not only generates low expectations but also guides practices under a deficit-centered model, which is manifested in concepts such as diagnosis, intervention, learning difficulties, leveling, among others.

Under this approach, education is understood as a treatment or rehabilitation of people "with deficits," as an activity outside the formal education system. This will be relevant in our subsequent discussion, since this understanding of education, centered on a deterministic conception of development, conditions young people's learning.

Assessment is another central aspect of educational practice, as it reveals young people's educational progress. Furthermore, it is the primary tool for

evaluating performance in the face of punishment. Experts indicate they feel powerless regarding the measurements repeatedly requested by central management. Performance indicators are of interest for validating public policies and justifying the resources used. For this reason, the instruments are standardized and lack significant innovation; this is perhaps the point of divergence from the declared dialogical model.

"The evaluation is exactly the same as in other schools; that is, there is an evaluation that obviously relates to the student's grade, but there is also an evaluation of the young person's progress, and this is the biggest challenge. Here, we monitor their progress from the moment they enroll. It's exactly the same as outside; we have the class register where attendance is recorded, the content is assessed, and the formative process is concluded at the end of the year on a semester basis, exactly like a regular school. Now, although they require this, we have tried to place greater emphasis on socio-emotional evaluation, and this is fantastic because you understand that if the emotional aspects of children who are very damaged are not addressed, learning will be very difficult to achieve" (interview with the school coordinator).

The evaluation lacks alternative mechanisms that would allow for a more holistic assessment of the process, rather than solely focusing on the young person's performance, with the measurement being the primary outcome. This situation presents complexities because decisions regarding the young people and their expected progress are based on this measurement.

Finally, when asked about the program's strengths and weaknesses, the latter were repeatedly cited by all the professional teams: the lack of external support to guide and accompany the young people's reintegration process into the outside world. The teams point out that the effort invested within the center is futile if, upon release, they cannot access school, face discrimination from their peers, and lack the resources to guarantee an education tailored to their needs. This leads to repeated failures; the young people return to the streets and reoffend.

"The external articulation is sometimes where we get a little lost, for reintegration, that is where I think we are failing because we lack incorporation of certain guidelines for action that we are still trying to intertwine, we are trying to train people because there is not the

capacity in the free environment to be able to meet the needs that young people present" (interview coordinator of networks).

Furthermore, the professional teams point out that the limited time they spend with young people, given the various sentences and their mitigating circumstances, interferes with their education, as the processes are often interrupted by external factors. Since it is not a regular academic year, many objectives must be omitted or, conversely, explored in greater depth depending on the length of their stay at the center.

"Many times we don't know whether to set big goals or perhaps some very limited ones because each case is different, also being a medium dependent on the judicial power many times there are processes that prevent us from carrying out classes normally, that in addition to the fact that when they leave we can no longer follow up on their educational processes" (interview school coordinator).

Regarding the strengths of the educational program, the response is consistent in valuing the presence of interdisciplinary teams. *"Our facility is located within a correctional facility, and we have the full support of the many professionals who work within the center. Although we are part of the CIP-CRS (Center for Comprehensive Care for Minors - Social Rehabilitation Center), we are an external program, and there are many external resources that support the process. This means that we also have programs that help us strengthen different areas. We have SENAME (National Service for Minors) with its programs and training, so we are all working on the reintegration or integration of the children, because sometimes these children have truly never been integrated into society" (interview with the school coordinator).*

4. Discussion and Conclusions

To analyze educational support, we have considered the approach of Ander-Egg (2013), who organizes the curriculum into three levels of implementation. The first level consists of the legal and regulatory framework of the Chilean government through the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). Its guidelines are materialized in curricular frameworks and decrees to address the educational needs of the population.

A second level focuses on the operation of the educational center, especially the management of the centers and their leadership teams. The

guidelines are outlined in the Institutional Educational Project, as well as the center's regulations and operating protocols.

The third level of concretion refers to the practical dimension and, consequently, addresses aspects such as content, methodologies, evaluation, interactions, and roles of the educational community.

One of the main difficulties that became evident in the research results is the lack of articulation in these three levels of curricular concretion, essentially, in the understanding of the aims of education.

Curricula and study programs establish criteria and guidelines for adults; however, they are implemented with children and adolescents. According to Sandoval (2014), these plans promote a dominant school culture, reflected in a highly exclusionary hegemonic framework. Therefore, we should not be surprised by the school's failure to address the expulsion of young people and school dropout rates.

Given this adverse scenario for a juvenile offender, adapting to school becomes a source of constant tension and conflict, and on the other hand, the school fails to adapt to the diverse characteristics of this type of young person, precipitating, in some way, school dropout, which "the earlier it occurs, the more likely the adolescent is to exhibit criminal behavior" (Fernández, 2003: p.5).

Our analysis of the school curriculum reveals a series of subjects and courses derived from classical knowledge, leaving little or no room for innovation. Along these lines, Ferrada et al. (2013) point out that schools tend to legitimize certain forms of knowledge, ways of speaking, and ways of relating to the world, which are favored by those individuals with greater cultural and familial capital.

From this perspective, students from lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds can only acquire such elements through considerable effort, competing with the knowledge promoted by the dominant school culture without considering their own cultural capital. Furthermore, our study has observed a strong orientation of education toward the world of work. Bowles and Gintis (1985) developed an explanatory framework for the link

between education and work based on correspondence theory, asserting that the values, norms, and skills that characterize the world of work are clearly reflected in the social dynamics of the classroom. Consequently, education serves to foster in students the attitudes and behaviors necessary to compete effectively in the capitalist economy, providing different skills and values according to the student's social class, race, or gender. Control is also at the heart of the educational model implemented by detention centers; there is constant disciplinary correction of undesirable behaviors, a mechanical and asymmetrical transmission of the curriculum, and the predominance of a curriculum focused on the qualification of minors.

One aspect of interest for the study was the predominance of a highly psychologized tutorial model, expressed in discourses such as diagnosis, intervention, and deficit, among others. Zambrano and colleagues (2004) point out that the understanding of deviance (criminal behavior) is made from the perspective of the prevailing social system's structure and its specific demands. Breaking the norm is considered a dysfunctional act for the system insofar as it alters normal behavior; hence, the emphasis is placed on clinical intervention, and responsibility for the acts is attributed solely to the young people.

This has led to education being organized around a pedagogy of deficit where young people are seen as "incomplete" or "victims," and therefore lacking transformative potential. This results in what Barudy (2001) calls a process of early victimization, where the child or young person is unable to meet their needs, often becoming an "object" for adults. This situation has been identified by specialist teams who have expressed in their reports the need to include a social dimension in diagnoses and even consider intervention with the families or adults responsible for the minors.

The center's professional teams are committed to the young people, but they clearly lack the

necessary autonomy to create experiences that could have a greater impact. In this sense, their work has limitations, even though their intention to advance an educational model that recognizes the complexities of the young people's family, social,

and individual lives is

evident.

Based on the results presented and considering the research questions we posed at the beginning of the study, it is possible to conclude:

- a) Education is directly linked to the world of work through vocational training. The curriculum for young people presents significant contradictions at the central level, where a legal framework promotes access to education, equal opportunities, and educational inclusion. However, official programs have a technical orientation characterized by rigid content, objectives, and methodologies, based on behaviorist learning theories that treat young people as objects rather than as relevant subjects in the teaching and learning process.
- b) While the curriculum emphasizes memorization strategies, the professional teams promote and advocate for a critical curriculum inspired by Paulo Freire's social pedagogy, employing humanistic, inclusive, reflective, and culturally relevant strategies. Assessment presents a challenge that requires attention, as it faces tension between the demands imposed by the central government (MINEDUC) regarding indicators and outcomes for academic promotion, and the need to ensure students' retention at the school.
- c) The fact that students' enrollment at the center does not follow a regular academic calendar hinders educational processes, whether due to interruptions (changes in enrollment) or unscheduled admissions. One of the strengths of the educational system, widely recognized by various stakeholders, is the presence of a multidisciplinary team, which has been growing in recent years.

Recommendations

- Based on the results obtained, it is possible to deliver a series of proposals that aim to contribute to decision-making at the national level:
- To improve the institutional framework surrounding young offenders, we propose establishing effective links between the Judiciary, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Public Criminal Defense Office, who are responsible for the judicialization of cases, that is, establishing types

and times of sentence.

- Strengthening the institutions responsible for managing juvenile care centers for the fulfillment of sentences implies promoting a rights-based approach that ensures the rights of children and adolescents.

To guarantee that the education of young people remains in the hands of the State so that it is not transferred to external public or private bodies (for example, municipalities), in order to ensure full compliance with the regulations.

In the case of the administration of the centers, we propose moving towards a change of personnel, which will allow for the renewal of psychoeducational practices and minimize the vices that have been established over the years in the care of minors.

Improve the programmatic offering within the centers through cultural, educational, and sports initiatives, as strategies to promote change in disruptive behaviors in young people.

It would be appropriate for the Chilean government to initiate a broad public consultation process, starting with the voices of children and young people, to update the policy for young offenders with a rights-based approach that prioritizes the interests and needs of the various stakeholders. This implies (among other things) abandoning the current adult education model in favor of one that recognizes the life cycle of young people and promotes diverse learning experiences.

Implement mental health programs that do not focus exclusively on drug use treatment but also address the psychosocial aspects of young people's personalities, incorporating families and external support networks.

In the field of education, it would be advisable to include specific strategies for working with young offenders in the training curricula of future teachers. In this regard, student teaching could constitute meaningful learning experiences for future teachers.

Establish monitoring mechanisms and/or programs in the external environment to ensure the effective reintegration of young people upon

completion of their sentence

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