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**Digital Literacy and Access to Information in Chilean Prison Libraries**

**Miguel Rivera Donoso,** DIBAM Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos de Chile, miguelrido@gmail.com

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**Introduction**

The following article refers to the strategies that the Direction of Libraries, Archives and Museums of Chile, DIBAM, has implemented to confront the technological gap existing in Chilean prisons, increasing the tools available for the social and professional reinsertion of inmates, as well as the quality of life inside the different prisons and highlighting the new libraries recently installed in the prisons.

**Context**

Through an alliance between DIBAM, which belongs to the Ministry of Education and Gendarmerie of Chile, an institution belonging to the Ministry of Justice and responsible of safeguarding prisons in Chile, libraries are gradually being implemented in prisons throughout the country because this service did not exist, or was limited to some very inappropriate books, mainly derived from donations.

These new libraries have an integral view, but with two major emphasis: the Promotion of Reading and Digital Literacy. It is worth mentioning that in Chile, the challenge of Digital Literacy for all citizens was taken up since 2002 by the BiblioRedes Program, now also belonging to DIBAM, and incorporated in all the State Public Libraries.

As a result of an initiative by the BiblioRedes Program in 2012, digital literacy strategies were adapted to address the particularities of people living in detention.

Thanks to this intervention, which was extended to the vast majority of prisons in the country, the Prison Libraries Program was created in 2015 and is currently being implemented.

**Digital Literacy in Prisons**

Nowadays, the problems associated with the technological gap are almost resolved in Chile, and this has largely been achieved thanks to the work of public libraries. However, there is also the factor of time that has elapsed, more than a decade since many massive processes began to develop digitally. Simple activities such as selling something, searching for an address or telephone, listening to music, sending emails and also other more complex activities such as paperwork, specific job searches, applying for jobs or funds, etc.

However, in prisons this didn’t happen because they don’t have access to internet. Those who get out, especially those who have spent many years in prison, go out into a radically different world. And this is becomes one more factor of exclusion to society, which in many cases results in re-criminalization.

Therefore, the work of libraries inside focus in a thorough work regarding Digital Literacy, with emphasis on two important processes:

First, the process of reintegration or insertion into society. In other words, the provision of competencies and tools to face the most common and significant processes, such as looking for a job, carrying out all kinds of procedures, searching for information, studying, entertaining oneself through videos, music, games, the press, etc.

In second place, digital literacy is also aimed at improving the processes associated with life itself within the prison: supporting schools and inmates to complete their formal education. Training support in the various occupational trades that are also carried out in all prisons. Support in the legal advice received by inmates. Education in first aid, disease prevention and general health. And of course, e-books and various audiovisual, educational and entertainment materials.

To achieve this, the process has been developed in several stages, related to technical possibilities, within a place where the use of the Internet is prohibited:

The first interventions, which began to be carried out in isolation since 2004, were limited to teaching job-related skills, mainly Microsoft Word and basic Windows use. Despite this, attempts were made to teach Internet service and e-mail, through images, screen clippings, PowerPoint, using a lot of wit.

Once the Digital Literacy Program for Prisons was created in 2012, the first Internet simulation was developed. In the computer lab, the computers were networked with each other and connected to a server in the same room, which had different web sites recorded, some simulations of digital procedures, an e-mail service, videos, music, texts and games.

All this was the support to develop the training plan, which consisted of 5 main units:

* Basic computer use
* Search for employment
* Entrepreneurship
* E-government and online procedures
* Leisure and entertainment

It should be noted that the unit called “Basic Computer Use” is the most extensive and always had methodologies to work with those who did not have even minimal knowledge of the computer and digital format.

And finally the third stage, after 5 years of experience in Digital Literacy, and more than 6,000 people trained, began to develop in 2017, and became what today we call Digital Resource Center.

**The Digital Resource Center**

Until the previous version of the computer labs, both the Internet simulation resources and the training plan were totally directed to prepare the inmates for their reinsertion into the free environment. However, during the time this version worked, we realized the importance of providing resources for those who were several years away from leaving, or simply those who were not interested in going out to reinsert themselves.

This, added to the fact that the laboratories were already part of a comprehensive library service, made us reconsider both the nature of the training plan and the resources incorporated. Therefore, we set out to maximize the possibilities provided by computer equipment in prisons.

It is necessary to say that these computers are recycled from the public libraries of the free environment, which are declared obsolete after 4 years of use. Once that period is over, they are formatted and prepared to be sent to jails.

Considering all the above, we created the Digital Resource Center, incorporated into the library, which has the following resources:

* Digital library
* Basic Digital Literacy Certifications
* Training courses in support of work practices in prison
* Materials to complement reading development workshops
* School support material
* PSU Support (University Selection Test)
* Legal support
* Websites and blogs for a wide range of interests
* Entertainment in various formats
* Create accounts and private user sessions
* Usage statistics and certifications
* Communication channel with inmates for questions and suggestions

With respect to trainings, the system has a self-executing process for each inmate, which allows them to obtain a certification if they have achieved the steps designed for it. The system identifies each user and saves their progress, so they can take as long as they want to get the diploma.

In addition to these resources, the system is also designed to constantly receive suggestions from all levels of the prison: inmates, teachers, guards, psychologists, etc. This allows us, if the technical and legal factors allow it, to incorporate the suggestions in the following updates. Updates have an approximate frequency of one each month.

With respect to legal matters, each author or owner of the intellectual property of the digital resource is sent a request or notice that his or her resource will be incorporated. If there is no refusal, the resource is taken to this offline format unchanged.

Technically the laboratory is still offline, with computers connected to each other and at the same time to a server in the room, but unlike the previous model, now there is a remote relationship with the Internet. In short, two fundamental processes are carried out by means of a pendrive or internal hard disk:

Download updates from the Internet and take them to the prison lab

Download usage statistics and training from the prison laboratory and upload them to the Internet.

**Projections and conclusions**

The Digital Resource Centre was created in 2017 and so far has been gradually tested in all prisons.

Although the first versions focused on correcting errors, in the second half of the year it worked properly and by the end of the year there were already around 500 registered users and more than 200 certifications.

In the opinion of inmates, teachers and other prison professionals, it is a great attraction, highlights the word of the libraries and the resources available are a great contribution to the development of inmates.

The plan is to increase the materials, interactivity and develop partnerships with public and private institutions to incorporate their resources for the benefit of inmates.

It is also planned to deliver the system free of charge to networks of prison libraries in other countries interested in implementing a similar system.

**Author:**

Miguel Ángel Rivera Donoso.

Coordinator. Plan of the Prison Libraries. Chile

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