

**"ART AND AWARENESS" WORKSHOP FOR MOTHERS IN PRISON**  
**Asociación Civil TIERRAVIVA.**  
**Project associated with Susila Dharma International**

**REPORT 4 (September 2005)**

Dear members of SD France, USA, Canada, SDI and friends,

We are working on the final report of TIERRAVIVA's Art and Awareness project. This final report will include photographs and a video (these two things depend on an authorisation from the prison service). It will also include a financial report, a daily "field diary" and an evaluation taking into account the objectives we had at the start of the project.

We would like you to take into account the content of previous reports, as we try not to repeat information, and if you would like to know where the field work strategies come from, you have to look at the *processes* of our work. This is how we work; the process of development shows us solutions to obstacles and future strategies. A margin of freedom is necessary in order to adjust the plan to the needs of the group of people we are working with. We are only tools which allow a learning process to take place. Generally we (the teachers) learn to let the "students" *do*.

For example, we started this process because we feel that the usefulness of a project for women bringing up their children in prison was quite obvious. Now that we are doing it, we can not only confirm that we were right, but we realise that we need to bring the attention of official organisations (the ministry of justice and UNICEF, for example) to the project, because there is a lack of respect for many **basic human rights** within the prison. This has been the main success of the project since the Subud world congress. We have been able to open a frank and direct dialogue with the ministry of justice in order to provide institutional replies to the situations of abuse which we have recorded in the prison service. As an example: threats to take children away if the women refuse to change pavilion, threats to take away behaviour points (see report 2, Daily Life, points).

We have agreed with the Ministry to talk about and intervene in these situations. Soon we will be able to send you a letter from the Ministry of Justice thanking SD France, USA and Canada for the financial support given to this project.

This report contains the following sections:

- 1) Prison architecture and its influence in the construction of subjectivity**
- 2) Deepening interaction and symbolic games**
- 3) Finding one's own language (the magic of articulation)**
- 4) Karrin Cheifetz, workshop volunteer**

- 1) Prison architecture and its influence in the construction of subjectivity**

The architecture of the prisons is very particular. Michel Foucault talked a lot about "panopticism", techniques which ensure that that the prisoner is always "in view", that is to say, permanently observed. Generally, there is a circular architecture, or a system of interconnected corridors, where there are strategically-placed control points. Foucault shows (in the book "Discipline and

Punish: Birth of the Prison") how these control techniques have the aim of developing a type of knowledge in the prisoner. To develop a specific kind of knowledge, or "re-educate" the inmate is one of the characteristics of the so-called "Total Institutions". The prison architecture penetrates the body in order to fix guilt to the condemned person, to carve it deeply on her soul, so that she lives with that "stain" all her life. These mechanisms of cruelty exist in other forms. For example, the arbitrary changes of pavilion. There is a phrase which is constantly repeated by the guards: "you come into prison alone, and you leave alone". This means "we will do everything we can to stop you forming relationships within the prison." This is the phrase that justifies the constant transfers. Just imagine the suffering for these women, after months of being with other women and their children - with whom they have formed friendships, related secrets and shared moments - when they are suddenly, and without prior warning, moved to a new pavilion. The children have been brought up together and are like brothers and sisters. The sensation is that the inmate does not have a right to anything, and is a simple object over which the total institution can impose its will.

## 2) Deepening interaction and symbolic games

The fieldwork of July, August and September has been focussed on deepening the quality of the interaction between the mothers and their children, but also on improving, where possible, the quality of the relationships between the women. We start with the reaffirmation that, more than just being condemned by the legal system, they are still human beings with rights. This is something that is mostly forgotten in prisons.

**Interaction and mediated learning:** We have been working around the role of the adult as a mediator in the relationship established by the child in order to get to know the world which surrounds him/her. Our questions have been 1) how can we help these mothers expand the experience these children have of their world, in a world made up only of walls, bars and restrictions? 2) How can we promote activities with positive interactions in the pavilions when the atmosphere in these pavilions is hostile or violent?

Possible strategies: 1) We have encouraged the women to invent fantastic tales which they will tell their children. That is to say, they are going to have to invent a world for their children by using fantasy, which in some way illustrates the real world to them, and which allows the children to realise that there is a world outside the bars.

We consider this point to be one of the biggest challenges of our work, both for the mothers and for us. One of our planned activities is to watch "La Vida é bella" by Roberto Begnini, to help us think of analogous strategies.

2) We have designed strategies using group activities in the pavilions in order to promote positive relationships with the other mothers. For example, cooking something together, drawing with the children. These activities are planned within the group, implemented in the pavilions, and then the results are analysed in the next group meeting.

We have suggested to the ministry the possibility that our workshop could give special "points" to the mothers, with the aim of joining together a certain number who could live together in each pavilion. Ideally, we would like at least five of the women who attend our workshops to be together in each pavilion, even if we only manage to work with four of the eleven pavilions. In this way we could achieve a balance of power-relations more propitious to good interactions between children and the mothers who are willing to try.

**Symbolic play:** Between 15 and 18 months "for the first time, the child can harbour and maintain a desire formed about how reality should be, which contradicts the facts" (Daniel Stern). Herzog in 1980 demonstrates this with an 18 month-old baby sad about the recent separation of his parents, where the child, using dolls, managed to "manipulate the dolls in order to realise the desired representation of family life (parents together), and symbolically repair the real situation" (Daniel Stern).

We have started to experience this in the workshops. The most interesting thing is that now the mothers are aware that this type of game can be played by the children, and they watch out for this. An example: Fabiana (28 months) is the daughter of Ana Pereira (25 years). Fabiana's father is also an inmate, in Magdalena prison (several kms from Buenos Aires). When she started playing with the dolls that we took to the workshop as a present, Fabiana adopted one which she called "Lautaro" (which is the name of her brother who lives outside of the prison with his grandmother). Her mother knows about this and has encouraged her in her games with "Lautaro", and in this way, by means of symbolic play, the little girl has brought her brother into the prison. On another day we took in posters with different landscapes and lots of cut-out figures. The task was to colour them in and put them in one of the landscapes. Fabiana coloured in all her brothers and sisters, among whom figured Carlitos (the son of another workshop participant) – that is to say that Carlitos for her is another brother (they live in prison together). She coloured them all and stuck them on a poster depicting a wood, and said that they were all playing together. Her mother encouraged her to draw the father, and to put him with the brothers and sisters in the wood, but Fabiana answered "no, not daddy!" Then she found another poster depicting the inside of a room, and she put the daddy figure as if he was lying down, and said "daddy sick".

#### **Finding one's own language (the magic of articulation)**

We have started to combine the activities of the Unit 3 ("Estampa") workshop, and the mothers' workshop (Unit 31). The women of Unit 3 are producing hand-made paper which they have given to the mothers of 31 so they can draw with their children. As well as paper, the Estampa members are producing a new collective art work called "Look, what an animal!" This consists of a series of fantastical animals, for example giraffes with sheep's heads, snakes with ducks' feet etc. These animals will be used by the women in 31 in order to write fantastic children's stories. This activity is related to the women's intention to make an effort to keep alive the imagination of these children with serious faces...

Another planned activity is to make a booklet, with photos of the mothers and children, which recommends positive child education practices in a context like that of the prison. It will contain the results and advice from this initial group of mothers who have come through the awareness-raising workshop. We could then use this booklet with other groups of mothers the next year. We also feel that the production of a book is positive, given that many of the basic rights of the mothers are not respected. And this booklet will be like the "voice" of the mothers in prison. Our intention is to distribute this material between the relevant authorities so that they can use it during their interventions in this kind of situation.

### **3) Karrin Cheifetz, workshop volunteer**

It is with great joy that we received the news that Karrin Cheifetz (Daniel's daughter) will come to live for a while in Argentina, from October. Karrin has

offered to work as a volunteer with our project. She has followed cultural studies in the University of New York and run creative literature courses for young people. She will come to Buenos Aires to study the circus and photography, among other things, and we feel that her activities are in harmony with our future intentions.

With no more to say for now, we send greetings to you all. Many thanks.

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TIERRAVIVA