



Lifelong Learning: artistic expression as a pedagogical aspect

One traditional way of focusing on education is to divide it into three types: the formal, the non-formal and the informal. Attempts have been made with marginalised groups such as illegal immigrants and prisoners to develop these three areas with various success. The belief is that if inmates develop formal education, such as basic Literacy and Numeracy, with some IT skills, they would find employment and thus keep away from crime. The confirmation that education in prison is a success is considered to be a reduction in recidivism: if they do not come back – then education has been a success.

This ideal does not always hold: in an era of mass unemployment and economic difficulties, those at the margins, especially the deskilled ones, find it practically impossible to find work. Also, it seems that those who did not do well at school for various reasons, will similarly not do well in an environment similar to traditional school.

Educational authorities are now more than ever realising the importance of non formal and informal education in settings similar to prisons. The philosophy is that, by means of subjects like the arts one achieves more than an education/skill in that area, for example in painting, drama, art, design and dance. It is by means of these subjects that the self is developed, especially the self within a group – skills so fundamental to the world of work. Issues like self-esteem, team work, anger management, self expression etc are best developed by means of the arts.

Drawing from some Maltese and European examples (video), the presentation shows how teachers of art manage to create a supportive environment inside the prison where inmates can explore their creative talents and personal voice. It shows how art is used not only as a means of entertainment and occupation of time, but as a means to bring about change, in the individual, as well as in society at large. The inmate uses his/her knowledge and experience to write the 'text' – giving us an opportunity to read into that which most of the time is marginalised by society in general. Visibility becomes possible.