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Author(s): Sallée, N. and Chantraine, G.

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Imprisoned Rehabilitation: Educators, Guards and Jurisdictional Conflicts in a French Youth Prison

Authors

Nicolas Sallée, University of Montreal, Canada.¹

Gilles Chantraine, University of Lille, France.²

Abstract

Whereas in France, youth prisons have long been regarded as anti-rehabilitative facilities, a law passed in 2002 required juvenile justice educators to re-enter prison spaces. Drawing on an ethnography of the “minors’ wing” within an adult prison, we analyse the “jurisdictional conflicts” between guards, primarily responsible for the security within the walls, and educators, intended to bring more rehabilitative soul to incarceration. In particular, we show how professional controversies relating to prison order and the discipline underpinning its construction and reproduction reflect the growing tensions that have been unsettling the French juvenile justice system for at least twenty years.

Key words

Juvenile justice, Youth prison, Jurisdictional conflicts, Prison officers, Rehabilitation workers, Responsibilization, Discipline

Introduction

During the summer of 2017, the key players in the French juvenile justice system—particularly the largest union of employees of the Youth Judicial Protection Service (or PJJ for *Protection judiciaire de la jeunesse*), which fiercely opposes to all forms of youth confinement—alerted the public to the sudden rise in the number of incarcerated minors³: as of 1 August 2017, there were 885 incarcerated minors, compared with 769 in January 2017 and 715 in January

¹ Nicholas Sallée is a sociologist, and Associate professor of sociology at the University of Montreal (Canada). He is scientific director of the Montreal Center for the Study of Social Inequalities (CREMIS), and co-director of the French-speaking peer-reviewed journal *Sociologie & sociétés*. He is the author of *Éduquer sous contrainte: Une sociologie de la justice des mineurs* (EHESS, 2016). nicolas.sallee@gmail.com 001 514 343 6111 # 36887 Département de sociologie, Faculté des Arts et des Sciences, Université de Montréal, CP 6128, succursale Centre-ville. Montréal (Québec) H3C 3J7.

² Gilles Chantraine is a sociologist and Permanent Researcher at CLERSE – CNRS / University of Lille, France. With Jean Bérard, he is the author of *Bastille Nation. French Politics and the Punitive Turn* (Red Quill Books, 2013). With Tomas Martin, he recently co-edited *Prison Breaks. Toward a sociology of escape* (Palgrave, 2018). gilles.chantraine@univ-lille.fr, 00 33 20 33 72 80, CLERSE-CNRS (UMR 8019), Centre Lillois d'Etudes et de Recherches Sociologiques et Economiques, Faculté des Sciences Economiques et Sociales, Université Lille 1, 59655 Villeneuve d'Ascq cedex.

³ See the press release of the *Syndicat national des personnels de l'éducation et du social PJJ* (SNPES-PJJ): “Augmentation de l'incarcération des mineur.e.s : jusqu'où ira-t-on ?”, published on the union's website, 31 July 2017.

2016⁴. One year after this controversy, the number of incarcerated minors had risen to 893⁵. This increase had been feared ever since the creation—provided for by a law of 9th September 2002—of new prisons for minors (or EPMs for *établissements pénitentiaires pour mineurs*), exclusively dedicated to the incarceration of minors. The stated goal of these new prisons was to improve incarceration conditions for minors, while addressing a longstanding concern for keeping them physically separated from adult prisoners so that they would avoid all contact with them. This was supposed to lead the possibility of “rehabilitative” prisons: in addition to the place reserved for healthcare and teaching services, the operation of EPMs is based on the presence of a large number of PJJ educators who, alongside the guards, are supposed to get involved in the management of the prison’s everyday life and its group activities, which should contribute to the moral and behavioral rehabilitation of the young delinquents⁶ (Chantraine and Sallée, 2013).

Although these new prisons provided a showcase for the prison administration, demonstrating its ability to reform and modernize, their creation was immediately the subject of significant criticism and controversy. Their detractors, whose fears might be in the process of becoming a reality, condemned the risk that the incarceration of minors could become commonplace, in the broader context of a significant increase in the number of minors arraigned by the police and the gendarmerie since the early 1990s⁷, this being the principal manifestation of a punitive turn that first and foremost affected young racialized boys from disadvantaged working-class districts (Bonelli, 2007, Terrio, 2009). If “good” rehabilitative care is guaranteed in prison, judges might be less scrupulous in handing down a prison sentence instead of a sentence that could be served on the outside or within housing systems that, though restrictive, are not prisons: residential centers, semi-closed educational centers, closed educational centers, etc.⁸

However, this plan for rehabilitative prisons should not mask the fact that in reality, these new prisons only very partially replaced previous forms of youth incarceration. Out of the 885 minors in prison on 1 August 2017, only 305 (34%) were held in EPMs. The majority of imprisoned minors (66%) were still in “minors’ wings” within adult prisons. Although the operation of these minors’ wings varies from one prison to another, their detention conditions are generally reputed to be much harsher than those of EPMs. Seeking to address

⁴ In France, Article 2 of the edict of 2 February 1945, which defined the penal procedure rules applicable to minors, stipulates that only minors over the age of 13 can be subject to criminal penalties (adjusted according to “the attenuation of their criminal responsibility”), including imprisonment (“after having specially justified this choice of penalty”). Minors aged 10 to 13 can only be subject to rehabilitative penalties.

⁵ This number represented 1.3% of the total prison population, which was 70,408 in France, to which one should add the nearly 12,000 people sentenced to electronic monitoring.

⁶ As we explain below, these educators should not be confused with the teachers working in prisons, who make up a separate professional group.

⁷ While it rose from 82,000 in 1977 to 98,000 in 1992 (+20.4%), the number of ‘arraigned’ minors increased by 79% between 1992 and 2001, reaching 177,000 in 2001. Since the early 2000s, this number has continued to increase, albeit at a slower pace: in 2013, there were 234,000 minors arraigned, making for an increase of 25% since 2001.

⁸ Still today, the vast majority of criminal sentences handed down to minors are served outside of prison. In 2016, 3000 prison sentences were handed down to minors, whereas 5700 sentences were ordered to be served at residential centers, including semi-closed and closed (but non penitentiary) educational centers, and 63,425 sentences—or almost 90% of the total ordered by juvenile courts—were assigned to open custody centers, which do not house any youths (the minors occasionally go there to meet educators responsible for their “remote” supervision as part of various measures: suspended sentence, probation, court supervision, community work, etc.)

this criticism, the law of 9 September 2002, passed as new EPMs were being opened, required the PJJ to assign educators to these minors' wings, to work in collaboration with prison guards. This article examines that collaboration, in prisons that were not originally designed to be "rehabilitative".

In the first half of the 2000s, this reform of minors' wings rekindled old tensions within an institution that was partly created *in opposition to* prison. It is important to note that in 1945, when the PJJ was created as an autonomous division of the Ministry of Justice, the aim was to put an end to handling deviant youths through prison, as had been practiced in "children's penal camps" in the early twentieth century. Although this raft of reforms did not abolish the incarceration of minors, it was nevertheless placed outside of the legitimate sphere of rehabilitative action. This tendency sharpened in the 1960s and 1970s, marked by the increasing dominance of an "open custody" model of rehabilitative action (Jurmand, 2012). In 1978, PJJ educators, with the backing of their largest union, were allowed to leave the last incarceration spaces in which they had still been working. Incarceration was supposed to remain a matter for the prison administration, as highlighted by a ministerial circular issued in 1980 that contained a more general reminder that rehabilitation missions should not be confused with public order missions. In this context, the desire to (re)connect prison and rehabilitation constitutes a challenge to the historically established identity of PJJ educators (Sallée, 2016, 2017).

Professional identity is here considered in its links to the "boundaries" of the work activity⁹. In our view, a group of workers only acquires a professional identity when it is able to delimit the boundaries of its activity, to justify this delimitation by reference to specific knowledge, and thus to claim—in relation to other groups of workers, and to society as a whole—a certain monopoly over a field of activity, which Andrew Abbot has termed a "jurisdiction" (Abbott, 1988). In this theoretical framework, the history of professional groups—and of the vicissitudes of their identities—is that of the expansion, contraction or displacement of their jurisdictions, these being constantly subject to disputes, controversies or challenges. Therefore, by (re)introducing prison within the boundaries of their jurisdiction, the law of 9 September 2002 directly confronted PJJ educators with their identity, and therefore with the meaning of their profession.

While EPMs constitute a laboratory of these tensions affecting the education of young delinquents (Chantraine and Sallée, 2013), minors' wings intensify them in a sense: the proximity of educators' work to the security imperatives characteristic of the management of an "inert" prison order (we will return to this notion) constantly forces them to justify their presence. By studying the professional configuration in a minors' wing, we will analyze: *i.* how educators establish boundaries within the prison, so that in the face of the guards, they can sustain their own conceptions of work with youths; *ii.* the arguments advanced by certain guards claiming to be the "real educators" day-to-day in prison; and *iii.* disagreements within the team of educators, which we suggest mirror the growing tensions that have been affecting juvenile justice for at least twenty years.

⁹ On a theoretical level, our work is based on relatively recent knowledge produced by a sociology of professional groups, which takes seriously the "contents of work activity" (Vézinat, 2010).

Field site and methodology

This study is based on a series of direct observations of everyday life in a minors' wing, conducted weekly, one or two days per week. Located in one of the buildings of a prison complex built in the early 1990s, the minors' wing in Blagnet¹⁰ is made up of 40 cells spread between two detention wings: the north wing and the west wing. According to the prison's assistant director, the building's two other wings are occupied by working adult prisoners: the "most peaceful ones" in the prison, he adds, as if to forestall any criticism of the proximity between minor and adult prisoners at a time when this is prohibited in EPMs¹¹. Aside from an exercise yard and games room, there are not many common areas in the Blagnet minors' wing. The youths take their meals in their cells and stay locked up there for around twenty hours per day. For 30 to 40 prisoners, the vast majority of whom are from working-class districts in the Paris region, the minors' wing has a team of seven guards called "minor officers". One teacher and one psychologist from the prison's healthcare service are also assigned there. In 2005, following the application of the law of 9 September 2002, six PJJ educators joined this team: they work in the minors' wing in the context of a "rehabilitation mission in prison" (MEMA for mission éducative en maison d'arrêt), a rehabilitation service administratively attached to the open custody center of a neighboring town (we will return to this). To avoid any misunderstanding here, it should be remembered that these educators have no teaching mission. Their core mission is to draw up a reintegration plan with the youths, and instill into them the behavioral standards and moral values assumed to be necessary for their rehabilitation. To this end, each educator is assigned several youths, and he or she is said to be their "referring educator". Since prison work is considered difficult and it challenges the very identity of the educator's profession, turnover is particularly high: in four years of operation, no less than 16 educators have passed through the MEMA. In addition to observations of an ethnographic nature, we conducted semi-structured interviews with most of those working in the minors' wing. For purposes of anonymity, the first names of all of the youths and professionals mentioned in this article have been changed.

Their heads on the outside? Educators on the margins of the prison space

Radically breaking with the "overactivity¹²" conceived and planned under the original EPM specification sheet, the youths of the Blagnet minors' wing spend an average of twenty hours per day locked in their cells. In this context, the day-to-day reality in the minors' wing in many respects looks like a bad caricature of what happens in adult wings: the primacy given to security objectives justifies the implementation of a prison routine that confines prisoners to *inertia*. Yet the difference between the two systems is one of size: in adult wings, the grouping of several hundred prisoners about whom the prison staff know almost nothing creates a permanent state of defiance that is then used to justify security measures (Chauvenet et al.,

¹⁰ In order to anonymize the collected data, the town name used here (Blagnet) is imaginary.

¹¹ On the porosity of the areas reserved for minors and adults in a minors' wing, see the work of Alice Jaspard and Laurent Solini (2016). Although their article deals with a different minors' wing, the dynamics it describes strongly resemble those we observed.

¹² To borrow Laurent Solini's expression (2012).

2008), whereas the small number of prisoners in minors' wings could give rise to a significantly different kind of prison management.

Yet this is hardly the case. Placing emphasis on the unpredictability and immaturity of the young prisoners, the guards primary aim is to minimize the risk of misbehavior. This management of order is especially visible in the organization of the prisoner flows that punctuate day-to-day life in the prison. Attempting to take account of the various tensions that pepper the group of youths both inside and outside of prison, guards displace them in small groups of no more than 5 or 6, whether it be for trips to the showers¹³, outings in the courtyard (commonly known as "walks"), appointments in the prison's medical unit, the few hours of teaching they receive, or various interviews requested by their educators. Superimposing this chopping-up of the prisoners' time and groups is an informal differentiation between the two detention wings. After a first week of detention spent in a cell reserved for "new arrivals", the guards must divide up the prisoners. Although this work involves a whole range of factors intended to protect certain youths and to avoid reproducing the outside interconnection dynamics on the inside¹⁴, the guards try as much as possible to reserve the north wing for the "best" prisoners, who were described as "the ones who don't bother us" during an interview with Catherine, who has been a guard in the minors' wing for two years. By contrast, the west wing is supposed to house the "nuisances" or "brats", to borrow the term used by Mounir, who has been working with Catherine in the minor's wing for two months. This differentiation is not random: the north wing houses the guards' office, which is a hub for minors' wing personnel, where they discuss work, take a break or drink a coffee. This management of order is therefore inseparable from management of the group of youths, the detention space, and the guards' peace of mind at work.

In the Blagnet minors' wing, the educators' exteriority with regard to this management of prison order is very strong and institutionalized. On site daily from 9am to 5pm, educators are little involved in the everyday organization of prison days. In fact, they spend much of their work time in one of their two allocated offices. Although they have an office in the west wing, this is rarely occupied, except for an occasional small-group activity or a rehabilitation interview with one of the youths. The office they primarily use is located inside the prison, but outside the detention area, just before the double-entrance security door that provides access to it. Educators go there to read their files and organize their day, to chat with colleagues over a coffee and discuss the situations they are dealing with, to write rehabilitation reports for judges, to find accommodation before a release from prison, and to phone people who will play key roles in the youth's outside care, such as his parents and his open-custody educator. These tasks, which are central to the educators' "arc of work"¹⁵, enable them to understand the young people's trajectories beyond the prison walls, by working on their past, and on what they believe led them to prison. But they also work on their future, and on what they believe should be offered to the youths upon their release.

¹³ Unlike EPMs in particular, where youths have a shower in their cell, showering is done in groups in the Blagnet minors' wing.

¹⁴ On the (re)production of interactional dynamics in prison, see the ethnographic work done by Léonore Le Caisne at the Centre de jeunes détenus (CJD) in Fleury-Mérogis (Le Caisne, 2008).

¹⁵ We borrow the "arc of work" notion from Anselm Strauss who, building on his work on the organization of hospital work, and the specific "project" constituted by the control of "an illness trajectory", saw this as "the totality of tasks arrayed both sequentially and simultaneously along the course of [any] trajectory or project" (Strauss, 1985: 4).

This exteriority of educators in the prison space, directly identifiable by the absence of uniform, can also be inferred from the objects they use: they have their own files, which they keep out of the guards' reach, and their only key is the one to their office, which they alone possess. And the youths are quite aware of this office, knowing it is where their educators can be found. To the great displeasure of the guards, as the youths regularly pass the office on the way to their "walk" or to other parts of the prison (the visiting room, infirmary, gym, etc.), they almost always try to stop in and ask their educators for information on their situation, or to steal a few more precious minutes outside their cells.

For the educators, this exteriority is simultaneously endured—since it is imposed by the prison structure—and employed, when they use it as a resource to protect their professionalism. From the latter point of view, it has both practical and symbolic meaning: practical because within the wings, given that the telephones are only connected to the prison's internal communication network, the core of their mission—to understand the youth's trajectory beyond the prison walls—would otherwise be impossible; and symbolic because, although they are "invited"—even if reluctantly by some guards—to work in a space that is not their own, most educators go out of their way to make sure this does not become "home". Since the prison is located on the margins of their jurisdiction, these material boundaries act as reminders of a symbolic boundary historically rooted in their professional group's identity. As another reminder of this symbolic boundary, their direct hierarchy is exercised outside the prison: as mentioned above, the minors' wing's educators work in the administrative context of a rehabilitation mission in prison (MEMA for *mission éducative en maison d'arrêt*), a rehabilitation service attached to the open custody center of a neighboring town. Therefore it is with *their heads on the outside* that educators put *their feet inside* every day. It is not unusual for educators to go and work in the "annex", as they call the open custody center to which they are attached. Cyril, a young educator whose employment in the minors' wing is his first job, even stressed the "vital" aspect of this configuration: "We're in the prison but anyway, just being able to go to the annex, knowing you can go there to work whenever you want... yeah it does you good". Evoking the particularity of a prison framework that always risks psychologically engulfing someone who enters it, Kader—who has been working for the PJJ since 1999 and is the only educator who has been around since the MEMA opened—stressed the need to "draw on your external sources":

In what sense can this have an effect, the fact that—as you say—you're locked up with the youths?

"Well, in fact you can be totally disconnected from the external reality. You can take the "prison" laboratory and everything that happens there as an absolute reality, and simply forget to put things in context, getting caught up in the game yourself. And that's dangerous, really dangerous. You always have to draw on your external sources. When you go back in... you state your number at the entrance—it's written in a register—then you take a key, and already in a way you're leaving part of your identity outside... Then you go through quite a few doors to get into the prison, and the deeper you penetrate it, the more you become someone else, because you're going to have to adapt to the prison framework" (Kader, educator).

Thus legitimizing their exteriority with regard to the prison space gives educators a way to protect the boundaries of their professional space, while enabling them to think of the young people's time in prison as a "borderline case" or an "exception", and their work in the minors' wing as something that offers a "last chance" or "lesser evil" to the young people they are responsible for supporting.

Educators and guards: towards a jurisdiction conflict?

Simultaneously endured and employed, a necessity and a constraint, this exteriority is seen by educators as a way to protect their work from invasion by the guards' security preoccupations. It was in order to avert the risk of a "confusion of roles" that in 2005, when the MEMA opened, educators refused to hold keys to the young prisoners' cells. This refusal reflects the issue of professional boundaries described above. It also more prosaically reflects the issue of everyday interactions between educators and guards, and the concrete forms that the division of labor assumes within the minors' wing.

Educators and guards cross paths every day. The educators regularly go to the guards' office (the reverse is quite rare), sometimes to discuss one of the youths or to plan the day, but more often to request access to a cell for a rehabilitation interview. This dissymmetry in the day-to-day movements of the two professional groups, which makes the guards' office their preferred meeting place, exemplifies an essential point: although educators need guards for the smooth running of their everyday work, the reverse is not true. Some guards even describe educators as a "burden" and "a constraint". Guards often present a "good work day" as a day "without any fuss" (as Catherine put it), or "without unforeseen events", even "with few movements" by prisoners and professionals.

Furthermore, guards regularly complain that educators show a lack of respect for their work. One recurring debate between educators and guards concerns the structure of groups assembled for the few collective activities organized by educators. Whereas educators try to get as many youths as possible to participate, guards oppose them by imposing security criteria, specifically taking account of the supposed tensions among the group of youths: "We have to take disturbances into account" explained Lucie, a guard in the minors' wing for four years, who incidentally lamented that educators are "always negotiating". Eric, who was present during the discussion, added that "if there's an incident during an activity, we're the ones who are responsible", concluding with an air of disillusionment: "We're always the last link in the chain in any case". These statements combine practical considerations relating to the pursuit of their objective (preventing trouble in the prison), and symbolic considerations relating to their exposed, subordinate position ("we're always the last link in the chain"), which is one of the foundations of their feeling that they belong to an unvalued and unappreciated occupational group (Crawley and Crawley, 2007).

These standpoints—which take us to the heart of the practical problems faced by even the most motivated educators when they try to organize activities for the youths—also tell us something about the nature of the cooperation issues between educators and guards. These problems at least partly reflect the social identities of the two professional groups. In fact, the educators' role as listeners whose connection with the youths is about trust and rehabilitation always threatens to remind the guards of their own role as "keyholders". As the guards perceive it, this moral division of labor, which causes them to remember the indignity of their "dirty work" (Hughes, 1971), reflects the social distance that separates the two professional

groups: whereas PJJ educators are Category B state employees¹⁶, most of whom come from middle-class backgrounds and have two years of university education, guards are Category C state employees, mostly from working-class backgrounds and recruited on the basis of a college diploma.

The sociology of prison guards shows how every day, they distance themselves from the strict application of formal rules and from their role as “bureaucrats”, instead putting their efforts into a “people worker” role (Lombardo, 1989), placing controlled relations with the prisoners at the foundation of their order-production mission (Carter, 1994). The “quid pro quo” practice in which guards grant privileges day to day in exchange for calm in prison is one paradigmatic example of those relational skills that act as central instruments of the guards’ discretionary power over prisoners (Sykes, 1958, Chauvenet, 1996, Liebling, 2000).

In the specific socio-professional configuration in juvenile prisons, these relational skills are also resources that help guards deal with the indignity of which their everyday interactions with educators remind them. In particular, they regularly draw attention to their close relationship with youths they see every day. This became visible during a moment of tension when educators, noticing the flagging motivation of youths taking part in the weekly “Chinese martial arts” activity, criticized the guards for not doing enough to motivate them. A guard joked about the situation with one of the youths involved:

Lucie (guard): “Hi Antonin.”

Antonin (young prisoner): “Hi.” [said very quietly, head lowered]

Lucie: “You’re having a hard time saying hello. Are you annoyed?”

Antonin: “No no.”

Lucie: “And what about martial arts?” [laughs]

Antonin [laughs]: “Nah, I had a headache this morning”. [laughs]

Lucie [to me, after Antonin had gone to the showers] “It makes me laugh.

Those activities annoy them. The educators are disconnected.”

As we have observed in an EPM (Chantraine and Sallée, 2013), some guards claim to be the “real educators”, believing they know the youths better than educators do. In those situations, rather than considering one of the professional groups to be “educating” and the other to be “guarding”, we should see a clash between two conceptions of rehabilitation. The PJJ educators’ rehabilitation, based on addressing deficiencies in the youths’ social and family environments, is opposed by the guards’ behavioral rehabilitation, precisely based on the “tit-for-tat” principle: “knowing how to say no” to a youth, allowing him to earn favors by having the right attitude, and quickly punishing him when he “goes too far”. This particular form of denial of the pains of imprisonment (Scott, 2007), through the use of a rehabilitation rhetoric that masks the brutality of prison¹⁷, is advocated by Éric, who is the most senior guard on the team, having worked in the minors’ wing for eight years:

You have to know how to say “no” to the youths. That’s my guiding principle here. If you say “yes” to everything they ask for, you’re always necessarily giving

¹⁶ In France, public service employees are classed into three categories (A, B and C) depending on their positions in the hierarchy and/or the level of education they require for recruitment through external competitions.

¹⁷ Here we find idea, developed by Stanley Cohen, of the development of a lexicon—which he calls “controltalk” (Cohen, 1985: 276)—designed to mask the brutality specific to penal institutions through a series of euphemisms.

them what they want, and then they won't piss you off. [...] But when it comes to rehabilitation, saying "yes" to everything is pointless. You have to show them it's not a bed of roses, that you have to do at least the minimum to earn the things you can get. (Éric, guard)

In response, some educators say that the management of order in the prison leaves little room for the possibility of a rehabilitation process. Exteriority is then perceived as a constraint, as explained by Hocine, who has been an educator in the minors' wing for two years:

"[In my view] we don't really rehabilitate in prison. We just offer consolation, a sympathetic ear... Ok, we prepare a rehabilitation plan, but we don't rehabilitate. In a residential center there are life skills, there's communal living, but you can't do that in a prison. First there's the framework that stands in the way, through detention. We're not the ones who rule over the kids here, the guards do that, and to them it's all about security. In a residential center you're alone, or at least the educator confronts the kid's limitations all by herself." (Hocine, educator).

The two professional groups also do not perceive conflict in the same way. Educators can turn the act of making a youth "break down" into a positive event in his evolution:

One morning at 9:30, two youths, though separated from one another, insult each other from a distance. The educator Cyril, who has just come on duty, intervenes to calm down one of the youths, who responds with a threat: "Don't touch me or I'll smack you". This is followed by a control maneuver that is routine for the guards, and then the youth is placed back in his cell. The guards were then surprised that the educator wouldn't sign an incident report [CRI (*compte rendu d'incident*), a document that is liable to trigger disciplinary action], saying that the youth will "think everything is allowed after that". Later in an interview, Hocine explained:

"In their view, I should have already taken him in hand and corrected him physically; but it's their own job to take care of supervision and security. So no, I didn't do a CRI. On the other hand, I went to see the youth through the spyhole and said: 'I won't come and see you as long as you haven't reflected'. Conflict provokes things, eh? That happened on Monday. I didn't go see him until Friday, and he broke down in the interview, something he'd never done before (...). We experienced what you might call a 'moment' together. And after that I could bring up subjects that I never would have dared bring up before." (Cyril, educator)

This conflict management specific to PJJ educators reveals how they defend the jurisdiction link they have historically maintained with the problem of juvenile delinquency. In educators' day-to-day exchanges with guards, this link is challenged, defended and denied. While educators claim a certain monopoly over the rehabilitation of young delinquents, guards can contest this jurisdiction by advocating a different meaning of prison punishment, and by getting their own tasks to correspond with the legitimate boundaries of problem-resolution activity:

“We’re the ones who suffer for their failures. We’re the last link in the chain. You can’t do anything about it. Because already they’re... I won’t say lax, but anyway... An educator will always say “you shouldn’t generalize”, but the problem is that almost all of the youths follow the same pattern: escape, alternatives to prison, residential center, escape, prison. So they can say prison is useless, but I’d answer that residential centers are useless.” (Éric, guard).

In this jurisdiction conflict, the question of control of authority appears to be central. If some educators find the power relationship with guards painful, this is because in prison, they are deprived of the authority they exercise over youths on handling sites that are not prisons (particularly residential centers). In fact, insofar as they give a specific meaning to authority on those sites, in accordance with what they consider to be “proper supervision”, one can say that they play a guard’s role there—even if this means guarding differently from how the prison guards do it. Therefore, the question that educators and guards are systematically asking themselves is whether or not the act of rehabilitating can be separated from the exercise of authority and the imposition of a “framework”. As we will see below, other educators believe that they are all the more able to devote themselves to their profession in a prison insofar as they are spared day-to-day management tasks. Then they expose themselves to the guards’ claim to being the “real educators”, since they impose the “framework” specific to the operation of the prison.

Divisions within the rehabilitation team: the vicissitudes of a relationship with the profession

Disputes over what the “act of rehabilitating” encompasses do not just bring educators and guards into conflict, they also occur within the rehabilitation team itself. Day-to-day, these disputes arise in connection with specific situations, particularly those which reflect the instability of that boundary educators try to establish between the inside and outside of the prison (see part 1). Over several weeks, educators were engaged in lively discussions on the “rehabilitative” use of incident reports (CRIs, for *comptes-rendus d’incidents*) that, as mentioned earlier, trigger an investigation that could lead to the prisoner being brought before the prison’s disciplinary committee. The discussion began after a youth repeatedly insulted three educators, and then verbally threatened one of them. After consulting one another, they all decided to sign a CRI. The personal-safety argument put forward by one of them (Sabrina, who has been working in the minors’ wing for two years, said “when I’m in danger, the social element doesn’t count anymore”) is at the same time interpreted as a rehabilitative means of reminding the youth of the prison “framework”. As Hocine explained: “To us it’s also a token gesture that tells the youth ‘you messed up, I’m doing a CRI, and now you’re going before the disciplinary committee’. It sets limits, it reminds him of the framework, and it also means we’re an integral part of the team in the broad sense of the word, within the prison”. The director of the MEMA—supported by Kader, the most senior educator in the minors’ wing—sharply criticized her colleagues, stressing that it jeopardized the PJJ’s independence when its members started using prison software without prior agreement from their own superiors. This formal point of view is coupled with a basic problem. Kader believes it is crucial to avoid any “severing of the link” with the suffering youths:

I'm a PJJ educator. I have a professional identity. I have a way of thinking about the world and way of thinking about rehabilitation [...]. Guards have their prerogatives with regard to security and I respect that, but in parallel I try to exist according to my way of seeing the world. So there were CRIs written up by PJJ educators using prison software. Well that's not part of my professional culture.

– *Is that the problem? Professional identity?*

– Yes, and he's going to be brought before the disciplinary committee. You insulted your educator because you weren't well, you threatened him, that educator wrote up a CRI, you get days banned from activities or get sent to the QD [disciplinary wing], and the link is broken, even though our mission is to maintain that link with the kid at all costs. We have to stay on that course, because we have no security mission. We're there to bring a little freedom into incarceration. If we get drawn into that, personally I don't recognize myself in it" (Kader, educator).

Kader's standpoint illustrates the stance that consists in always wanting to keep one's "head on the outside" (part 1). If all educators agree on the importance of that boundary, the debates concern its "outline". Kader's colleagues sharply criticize him for importing an anti-prison ethos into the heart of the prison. They believe that it is instead necessary to "establish the meaning" of the prison reality, a process liable to inspire reputedly "out of control" youths to reflect on the path that led them into prison. It is ultimately about stimulating a responsabilization process that is based on the youth reflecting on the moral meaning of his deviant behaviors. Within the minors' wing, this conception of responsabilization is most explicitly advocated by Anne, who has been working there for two years. Evoking attacks she suffered at the residential center in which she used to work, she proves to be very critical of the way some of her colleagues "excuse" the youths' behavior: "At some point you also have to work on their actions, on why they ended up there, on the notion of victimhood. [...] Prison has to serve some purpose. If not, there's no use incarcerating them. Just stick them in a residential center and let them live their lives".

Of course, the differences between educators' practices should not be exaggerated: the opposition we are sketching here should be seen as the tension between two rehabilitation-work ideal-types, a tension that does not prevent a continuum of practices. Revealing these ideal-types is relevant because they enable us to understand that one of them is gradually supplanting the other, in the broader sociopolitical context of social state transformation, marked by a transfer of risk management towards the individual (Kelly, 2001), who is increasingly required to take responsibility for "everything that happens to him" (Martuccelli, 2004, p. 479). In the context of "a rise of uncertainties" (Castel, 2016), particularly linked to the job market crisis and the precarization of working-class living conditions, criminal justice becomes a vital tool for controlling—and "responsabilizing"—the most marginalized populations (Wacquant, 1999), the majority of whom are descended from post-colonial immigrants in the case of France. The welfarist foundation of the juvenile justice system, in the name of which society collectively assumed responsibility for juvenile deviance and delinquency (Trépanier and Rousseaux (eds.), 2018), is being increasingly undermined by the assertion of neoliberal principles requiring youths to take responsibility for their failures, especially their school and work failures, and to suffer the consequences of their mistakes.

Although this paradigmatic shift is not limited to the prison grounds—as shown by the increased supervision weighing upon juvenile delinquents monitored on the outside, who are required to prove that they are putting effort into an active process of taking control of their own lives—it finds the conditions for its most caricatural expression in prison. The debates it generated within the team of educators crystallized particularly in connection with the situation of seventeen-year-old Jonathan, sentenced to six months in prison for violent theft. Two months after his incarceration, following a series of incidents (repeated refusal to return to his cell, insults, etc.), the guards and most of the educators were considering a disciplinary transfer (to another prison). Since his “referring” educator Kader was on a two-week holiday, Anne temporarily took over tracking Jonathan’s case. During this period, Anne was delighted that the judge rejected the “exit pass¹⁸” Kader had requested in order to give a “breather” to that youth “totally disturbed by the prison context” (as he explained to us in an interview). During a team meeting at that time, Anne expressed the opinion that the youth had never become conscious of the “grave nature” of the path he had taken: “It seems to me he’s understood absolutely nothing. It’s a catastrophe”. Kader was much less categorical in the report he sent to the judge a week later. Although he mentions the youth’s ambivalent relationship with the crimes for which he was sentenced, he nevertheless stresses that the “detention factor” was exacerbating “the youth’s attitude”¹⁹, and that it was necessary to prepare a sentence reduction that could prove to be a “springboard on the cusp of adulthood”:

An educator colleague took over rehabilitation tracking in the prison because I was on holiday. Jonathan had a hard time coming to terms with the rejection of his exit permit. During the interviews in prison, the youth started viciously insulting the colleague in question [...]. The youth is working very hard to challenge himself. The work on his crimes is still very sensitive and it can get Jonathan into states of irritation that come with insults. [...] The youth’s attitude is likely exacerbated by the detention factor. His adaptation to the prison system has gone hand-in-hand with a certain resurgence of anxiety. The youth’s involvement in an integration plan that he requested before his imprisonment could be a stabilizing element. [...] The preparation of a sentence reduction that he requested could serve as a springboard on the cusp of adulthood. (Rehabilitation report by Kader).

This rehabilitation stance is increasingly in the minority among educators who, like Anne, fiercely criticize the “angelic spirit” of what they call the “old team” of the minors’ wing. The director of MEMA more prosaically points out that the prison framework, which enables

¹⁸ An exit pass is a temporary absence authorization given to a prisoner.

¹⁹ This idea that a youth’s behavior can be distorted by the prison reality is very dominant in more general critiques aimed at rehabilitation work in prison. In a manifesto entitled “The Clinic in Danger at the PJJ”, published by the *Syndicat national des personnels de l’éducation et du social-PJJ* (SNPES-PJJ), it is pointed out that “taking into account the young prisoner’s psychological life” and the “clinical work targeting the problems affecting the youths and their families” are “necessarily distorted” by the psychological disturbances created by incarceration. In fact, “in order to struggle against the stressful movements that they have already experienced in their history, which are duplicated in prison: broken links, power relationships, the negation of the value of language”, the adolescents implement specific defences. “So there is a great risk of undermining these psychological readjustments, which are indispensable for resisting attacks linked to confinement, if they are tackled under those conditions and at that time”.

educators to have the youths “in hand”, provides a rare opportunity to work on their “relationship with their acts”. Some educators like Romain even believe that the everyday management of order in the prison allows educators to concentrate on “the essentials”:

“Here there really is rehabilitation work to be done [...]. Compared to a youth placed in a residential center, where we’d have more trouble working on the crimes, on the victim’s place... when it comes to that positioning, here you’re really at the heart of the action. [...] This is much less the case in a residential center because you have to manage day-to-day things—getting-up time, bedtime, meals, monitoring their schooling—and you have the group to manage. Often there are disturbances in a residential center, you really spend more time playing the cop than doing rehabilitation. Because rehabilitation is a kind of support. It’s getting the youths to understand that reality isn’t necessarily what they’ve experience in their everyday life or it isn’t what they imagine, and that you can behave differently in society, by not breaking the law, not being violent, not insulting people, using proper language.” (Romain, educator).

There is no doubt something mysterious about describing “reality” as respect for the law. A transgression would then be the product of a lack of conscientization, and rehabilitation work would consist in getting the youth to “return to reality”, which in this case would assume the form of an individual responsabilization whose actualization would prevent recidivism. This quote takes on meaning once again in discussions revolving around the link between authority and rehabilitation. As it is understood here, this conception of rehabilitation work—as work on penal and individual “responsibilization”—is not in itself more “authoritarian”. It is rather based on a strict division of labor that consists in leaving it up to the prison administration to exercise authority, and devising a rehabilitation parallel to this. Although as we have seen, for some educators, it is therefore only a matter of compassionate support (see part 2), for others it is an opportunity to deal with the real problems, by getting away from the “cop” role and thus abandoning the sensitive issue of the authority content. Then it is the guards’ responsibility to define and impose the “framework”, a portmanteau word whose intensive use masks a variety of usages: to each definition of “framework” corresponds a certain type of rehabilitation work.

Conclusion

Much has been written about the law of 9 September 2002, which officially sent PJJ educators back into prisons. Some observers saw it as the twilight of the rehabilitative aims historically connected with the handling of deviant youths in France (Bailleau, 2010). But we have to admit that it contributed to broadening the legitimate sphere of rehabilitation action. The stir it caused at the PJJ primarily concerned the fact that there was a desire to make incarceration (back) into one rehabilitation tool among others, against the backdrop of a significant transformation of the French juvenile justice system’s rehabilitation philosophy, marked by the growing influence of a neoliberal moral doctrine of responsabilization (Sallée, 2017).

For many PJJ educators, this situation presents a moral dilemma that is difficult to resolve: given that prisons for minors did not disappear after their professional group departed from them in the late 1970s, the promotion of rehabilitation work within the walls could constitute a “least-worst” policy, a possibility of humanizing spaces that would otherwise be left in the less friendly hands of prison guards. However, the most critical educators, whose stance is close to that of their largest union, wonder what remains of their professional identity when they are working in spaces they consider to be inherently anti-rehabilitative. This dilemma extensively affects the rehabilitative intervention in new prisons for minors (EPMs), created in 2007. As we suggested in the introduction, in many respects these constitute an advance in terms of prison conditions: the youths, who participate in a variety of activities (schooling, sports, or sociocultural activities), spend much of their day outside their cells. Although some of the most conservative commentators have taken advantage of the controversies surrounding their opening to compare these new prisons to “placement services”, even to “holiday resorts” or “five-star hotels” (Chantraine (dir.), 2011), our own research (Chantraine and Sallée, 2013) shows that educators must constantly negotiate the legitimacy of their role in spaces where the structure and internal organization leave no doubt as to the fact that they are prisons. However, in the shadow of these new prisons, which attract media attention and crystallize controversies, this dilemma presents itself even more sharply in minors’ wings in adult prisons, where the separation from adults is sometimes only short-lived, and youths can spend nearly twenty hours per day in their cells. It should be remembered that minors’ wings contain over 60% of the total population of young prisoners.

This article has highlighted the deep tensions experienced by educators who, in minors’ wings more than anywhere else, find themselves on the margins of their professional space. When they assume a position of exteriority in relation to the prison space, they expose themselves to the guards’ claim that their own order-production work has a “rehabilitative” character. Conversely, when they try to get involved in the prison’s everyday life, they always risk being confronted with the ultimate primacy of security constraints in prison. Caught as they are in this impasse, educators oscillate between passive condemnation of penitentiary supremacy and a logic of renewed involvement with the intention of “establishing the meaning” of the prison reality by means of a responsabilizing conception of rehabilitation. At the heart of this logic, the rehabilitative aspect of incarceration always risks being reduced to the idea of confronting the youth with the prison order, which is supposed to act as a reminder of his faults and responsibilities. One of the most caricatural expressions of the prison myth consequently emerges, presenting distress and submission to the prison system as constituting a lever for normalizing deviant behaviors.

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