JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

Vol. 7 | No. 1 | 2021

Artwork Courtesy of Performing Statistics

Journal of Prison Education and Reentry

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2021

FEATURE

JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

A Note About the Cover Art

Artwork: Displayed with Permission from Performing Statistics

Artist: Chanya

Performing Statistics is a national cultural organizing project based in Richmond, Virginia that uses art to model, imagine, and advocate for alternatives to youth incarceration. They work directly with youth impacted by the juvenile justice system to make art about their vision for a world without youth prisons and connect that to youth justice organizing across the country. www.performingstatistics.org

Correspondence: Trey Hartt Email: trey@performingstatistics.org

(Accepted: 29 April 2021) ISSN: 2387-2306 doi: https://doi.org/10.25771/aq12-wq15

Journal of Prison Education and Reentry

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2021

FEATURE-EDITORIAL

JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

Lead Editor's Welcome

CORMAC BEHAN

Welcome to Volume 7, Number 1 of the *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry.*

In this abridged issue of the *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, we examine a number of key issues around higher-level pedagogy in penal institutions. We begin with Magic Wade's paper 'What Can be Taught in College in Prison? Reconciling Institutional Priorities in Clashes Over Incarcerated Students' Access to Instructional Materials' which was inspired by allegations of censorship of college curricula in an Illinois state penitentiary. If disagreements arise over what students in prison-based college programs are permitted to read and learn, Wade asks important questions about how these issues are resolved and how relationships between colleges and prisons can be developed.

Rod Earle and colleagues' paper on 'The Open University and Prison Education in the UK – the first 50 years' argues that while the Open University has been providing education in prison for 50 years, "there is much to celebrate and still more to learn". Drawing on a collection of essays and reflections on prison learning experiences by OU academics and former and continuing OU students in prison, it examines the prospects for higher education within prisons in the UK which they argue are demonstrating "an escalating preference for carceral punishment". Nevertheless, they conclude that: "a silver lining to the carceral cloud can be found in The OU's pioneering work with imprisoned men and women".

Mark Jones and Debbie Jones' paper, 'Understanding Aspiration and Education Towards Desistance from Offending: The Role of Higher Education in Wales,' argues that despite policies to 'widen access,' "universities continue to be an unwelcoming place for those with a criminal record". Their paper adopted a Pictorial Narrative approach which found that the benefits of attending a higher education institution can be "outweighed by a distrust of the 'institution'". There was a fear that the stigmatisation experienced through the "criminal identity" would be hard to avoid which may leave students "vulnerable to judgement and exclusion".

Kimberly Collica-Cox's paper 'When 'Inside-Out' Goes 'Upside-Down': Teaching Students in a Jail Environment During the COVID Pandemic and Implications for the Use of Correctional Technology Post-Pandemic' examines the challenges of maintaining prison education during the COVID-19 pandemic in institutions that do not allow Internet-based technologies, such as Zoom. Based on an *Inside-Out* class conducted during the first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, this paper again demonstrates the resilience and innovation that characterises pedagogy in penal settings.

Cormac Behan teaches criminology at the School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences, Technological University Dublin. His research interests include penal history, prisoners' rights, comparative penology and prison education. Prior to taking up this position, he taught criminology at the Centre for Criminological Research, University of Sheffield. From 1997 to 2011, he taught politics and history in Irish prisons. Cormac has served on the executive boards of the Correctional Education Association and the European Prison Education Association. He was the founding chairman of the Irish Prison Education Association.

Correspondence: Cormac Behan, Email: Cormac.Behan@tudublin.ie

(Accepted: 04 September 2021) ISSN: 2387-2306 doi: https://doi.org/10.25771/02jr-vx93

Journal of Prison Education and Reentry

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2021

RESEARCH PAPER

JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

What Can be Taught in College in Prison? Reconciling Institutional Priorities in Clashes Over Incarcerated Students' Access to Instructional Materials

MAGIC M. WADE
University of Illinois Springfield, USA

Abstract: *This research was inspired by allegations of censorship of college curricula in an Illinois state penitentiary. This example highlights the confusion and controversy that may ensue when disagreements arise over what students in prison-based college programs are permitted to read and learn. Following this, my research considers these relevant questions: First, do many programs and prisons encounter disagreements over certain instructional materials? Next, to what extent are these rooted in clashing institutional values and priorities? And finally, what can be done to quell controversy, reduce confusion, and strengthen relationships between colleges and prisons? To shed light on these questions, I surveyed over forty practitioners from Higher Education in Prison (HEP) programs based in state penitentiaries across the United States. In particular, I asked about security clearance protocols for instructional materials, as well as institution-specific restrictions on modality and content. I report and discuss the findings and implications of this survey in the analysis that follows. As such, the intended audience for this report includes stakeholders in both academia and corrections, and others interested in strengthening relations between colleges and prisons that partner to educate incarcerated students.*

Keywords: *higher education, censorship, curricula, policy, administration*

Allegations of Censorship at an Illinois Prison

This research was inspired by allegations of censorship of books and other instructional materials used by the Education Justice Project (EJP) at an Illinois state penitentiary. According to reporting by multiple media outlets including *NPR Illinois*, the *New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune,* personnel at the Danville Correctional Center (DCC) removed hundreds of library books and instructional materials from the prison that they construed to be "controversial" and/or "racially motivated" (Gaines, 2019; Gaines & Herman, 2019; Kendall, 2019; Nickeas, 2019; Zaveri, 2019). The resulting controversy serves as a prime example of the often opaque and inconsistent policy environment in which college in prison programs operate. Furthermore, it calls attention to the importance of examining what can be taught in college in prison—as well as the practices, policies, and actors that dictate this.

Housed in the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's (UIUC) College of Education, EJP has offered for-credit courses to incarcerated students at DCC, a men's medium security prison located in Danville, Illinois, since 2009. EJP instructors selected from an applicant pool of predominantly UIUC faculty and PhD candidates have taught dozens of humanities, social sciences, and STEM courses to incarcerated men at DCC. In line with undergraduate courses in literature, history, sociology, ethnic studies, etc., taught on the UIUC campus, EJP's offerings at the Danville prison frequently address political, religious, ethnic, and/or racial top-

Correspondence: Magic Wade, Email: mwade7@uis.edu

(Accepted: 03 February 2021) ISSN: 2387-2306 doi: https://doi.org/10.25771/3fbs-bh36

ics.[1] Nonetheless, disputes between EJP and DCC staff over instructional materials have been historically rare, minor, and resolved with little fanfare.

This changed during the 2018-2019 school year, when DCC officials repeatedly clashed with EJP members over what could be taught and read inside the prison. In particular, books and articles with "race-related themes" were a focus of heightened scrutiny (Nickeas, 2019). For instance, of 25 books submitted for EJP's Spring 2019 courses, prison security prevented four from being reviewed, including Pulitzer Prize winner, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Rothstein, 2017). Of the remaining books that were screened, nine were denied, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs (1861), submitted for an American Literature course (Nickeas, 2019). Instructors were also asked to remove pages from course readers that contained visual or written depictions of racial content, although such materials had previously been approved through the security screening process (Nickeas, 2019). Additionally, security staff removed over 200 books on various subjects, particularly race and religion, from the library maintained by EJP within the prison. Titles included *Race Matters* (1994) by Cornell West and *Colored People: A Memoir* (1995) by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Nickeas, 2019).

A corrections lieutenant reportedly told EJP program officials that such titles were problematic because they were "racial," when explaining why particular reading materials had been removed from the library or denied for use in EJP classes (Nickeas, 2019). An email from this lieutenant to the DCC prison warden verified that they had removed books deemed "racially motivated" from the library (Nickeas, 2019). An additional email revealed that the prison warden had further directed prison staff to remove books of a "controversial nature" from the library (Nickeas, 2019). No advance notice, explanation, or appeals process was offered to EJP program staff regarding the book removal. National media outlets, including the *New York Times*, soon picked up the story, adding its details to a broader conversation on prison book bans across the United States (Zaveri, 2019).

Surrounding this media blitz, members of the Illinois General Assembly convened a public hearing on July 8, 2019 to discuss allegations of prison censorship with a panel of expert witnesses from the Education Justice Project, Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), and American Civil Liberties Union-Illinois (ACLU-IL). Consequently, IDOC Director Rob Jeffreys instructed authorities at the Danville Correctional Center to return all of the divisive books to the EJP prison library (Ramirez, 2019). Then, in an effort to prevent future clashes between Illinois state prisons and their college partners over contested instructional materials, IDOC revised an administrative directive to formalize a publication review process and establish a centralized appeal process to resolve disputes (Illinois Department of Corrections, 2019). At the time of writing, the effects of such policy changes are unknown.

Nonetheless, this example highlights the confusion and controversy that may ensue when disagreements arise over what students in prison-based college prisons are permitted to read and learn. Following this, my research considers these relevant questions: First, programs and prisons often disagree over appropriate and permissible instructional materials? Next, to what extent are these rooted in clashing institutional values and priorities? And finally, what can be done to quell controversy, reduce confusion, and strengthen relationships between colleges and prisons?

To shed light on these questions, I surveyed over forty practitioners from Higher Education in Prison (HEP) programs based in state penitentiaries across the United States. In particular, I asked about security clearance protocols for instructional materials, as well as

[1] EJP courses offered since 2009 include: *Social Movements of the 1960s*, *The Holocaust in Postwar Literature and Popular Media*, *A History of Race in the United States*, *Race and Place in 20th Century American Fiction*, *The Black Freedom Movement, 1955-75*, *The Regency and the Harlem Renaissance*, and *Language Varieties, Cultures and Learning*, (Education Justice Project, 2019).

institution-specific restrictions on modality and content. I report and discuss the findings and implications of this survey in the analysis that follows. As such, the intended audience for this report includes stakeholders in both academia and corrections, and anyone interested in supporting the expansion of quality higher education in prison.

Overlapping and Clashing Priorities

Among credit-bearing, prison-based higher education, there exists significant variation in the size, scope, and curricula of programs. Nonetheless, these programs share common values. According to the *Alliance for Higher Education in Prison*, a national network that supports the expansion of quality higher education in prison, the following guiding principles inform this work. First, a conviction that higher education is a public good and a right of citizenship. Secondly, a belief in fundamental human dignity for everyone, regardless of their background. And finally, a belief in and commitment to the transformative potential of higher education to improve the lives of incarcerated individuals, their families, and their communities (Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, n.d.).

American prisons are not bound by any formal commitment to higher education, since beyond Adult Basic Education, General Education Development, vocational, and technical training, no state or federal laws mandate that higher education be provided to incarcerated people (National Institute of Justice, 2015.) Rather, colleges and universities must court the approval of local wardens who perceive positive benefits to the partnership such as maintaining carceral order, reducing recidivism, or improving public relations. In line with this, an analysis of HEP programs in New York state found that corrections administrators valued their facilities' college in prison programs as "assets" (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019).

Therefore, when colleges and prisons partner to educate an incarcerated population, they maintain overlapping, yet potentially conflicting priorities. Presumably, their priorities overlap when prison personnel agree with the *Alliance* that higher education is a right of citizenship and a public good, and that extending incarcerated people's access to it benefits the facility, students, and society-at-large. Conversely, priorities may clash when providing educational opportunities is perceived as unfair, ineffective, or subversive to carceral order. When priorities are at odds, conflicts are likely to arise, especially if clashing institutional values manifest in restrictions or censorship of instructional materials.

The John Jay College of Criminal Justice's analysis of New York State's Postsecondary Correctional Education System offers some insight into this. According to their report, ideological differences between colleges and prisons present a clear barrier to collaboration:

> One of the major challenges of higher education in prison is balancing of the mission of higher education and the realities of the corrections environment... DOCCS' [Department of Corrections and Community Supervision] emphasis on security and control is hard to align, and is sometimes incompatible, with the fundamental principles of higher education and academic freedom. (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019, p. 48)

This proves to be a delicate balancing act, with correctional facilities prioritizing order and security, while HEP programs strive for intellectual rigor and academic freedom.

> Academic freedom means that faculty members and students can engage in intellectual debate without fear of censorship in materials used in coursework or fear of consequences for speech and writing associated with classes. In correctional institutions, some speech and writing might be construed as a risk to safety and security. (Jacobs & Weissman 2019, 48)

Moreover, when disagreements arise over the rank ordering of these priorities, college program staff lament that the burden of compromise usually falls upon them (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019; Craft et al., 2019.) Related to this, HEP instructors typically submit their instruc-

tional materials for approval through security clearance processes that have been characterized as ill-defined, loosely followed, or altered on short notice. A report by the *Rockefeller Institute* also notes that the rigorous process for getting physical materials into the prison is "taxing," "time consuming," and "constantly changing," creating frustration and uncertainty among faculty. They must also capitulate to restrictions on course materials that are deemed threatening: "As higher education programs are essentially 'guests' in prisons, college programs must conform to DOCCS' and facilities' policies and practices" (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019, p. 48).

This capitulation may also manifest in instructors self-censoring their curriculum by modifying syllabi, altering course titles, and redirecting classroom discussions when they veer toward controversial issues like race or the criminal justice system. According to Cornell's Prison Education Program director, Rob Scott, instructors might omit, "topics likely to incite unrest or anger in the student population, such as issues of racism, policing, or economic inequality" from their curriculum (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019, p. 48-49). Scott's comments indicate that instructors self-censor in anticipation of institutional restrictions. The *John Jay College* report comports with this: "While this action was not required by DOCCS, it was an experience shared by the instructor with the researchers and is indicative of the uncertainty of what might be considered to violate DOCCS' standards" (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019, p. 48-49).

Underlying this uncertainty are clashing institutional perspectives on the undertaking of higher education within a prison. Further, "While college staff express frustration over what they consider to be overly restrictive criteria regarding curricula and materials, DOCCS staff consider college program staff to lack awareness or respect for the safety measures required in the facility" (Jacobs & Weissman, 2019, pp. 48-49). In sum, while HEP college staff are invested in extending the transformative potential of higher education to the incarcerated, corrections personnel are vested with running safe and secure prisons. Moreover, decisions regarding what incarcerated students may read and learn rest largely on the shoulders of prison management, who make the rules, and prison staff, who implement them.

Who Controls What is Taught in Prison? Powerful Managers and Shirking Bureaucrats

The American prison system is decentralized under federalism, with state departments of corrections housing the vast majority of incarcerated adults in penitentiaries managed by on-site wardens who oversee daily operations (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Therefore, local prison authorities, their assistants, and subordinates wield significant control over the routine functioning of programs operating within their facilities. Further, prison management styles informed by views about social control and criminal offenders have shifted throughout American history. Presumably, such views inform decisions regarding permissible academic pursuits for incarcerated individuals.

For instance, Barak-Glantz (1981) observes four different models of prison management in the American penal landscape. In his schema, an "Authoritarian Model" of prison management dominated 19th-century carceral institutions. Its chief characteristics were centralized power and one-man rule, asserted though time-regimented movement, corporal punishment, and repressive social control. Under this model, "prisoners had virtually no rights beyond that of physical survival" (Barak-Glantz, 1981, p. 44). Treated minimally as human beings, incarcerated people were not regarded as citizens during this era.

Over time, the authoritarian model was supplanted by various prison management styles, including a "Bureaucratic Lawful Model," which seeks to constrain would-be authoritarian wardens through formal chains of command, transparent, centralized policies, and enhanced oversight by state departments of corrections. Additionally, an "Inmate Control Model" in which prison gangs rule, and a "Shared Powers Model" exemplified by rehabilitative and democratic ideology, were identified (Barak-Glantz, 1981, pp. 44-45).

Today, American prisons run the gamut of management models. Pelican Bay State Pris-

on in California, for instance, remains notoriously controlled by gangs to exemplify Barak Glantz' Inmate Control Model (Wood, 2014). Other facilities are propped up as "models of rehabilitation," like San Quentin, also in California, which is featured in the popular *Ear Hustle* podcast and renowned for its relative peace, openness, and extracurricular offerings (Neumeier, 2019). Most state-run prisons, however, exemplify a combination of bureaucratic and authoritarian management styles, with state lawmakers seeking to enshrine the former and constrain the latter (Barak-Glantz, 1981).

Bureaucratic Lawful models of prison management, where they do prevail, may or may not clash throughout the implementation of a prison education program. According to the *Prisoner Reentry Institute,* there are several ways that state departments of corrections can promote higher education in their facilities. These include providing information to facilities on their benefits, promoting formalized agreements and rules for HEP operations, and building ground-level relationships between college programs and prison staff. Related to this, acknowledging the increased workload that HEP programs create for prison staff was deemed of particular importance:

> Providing college in prison is "extra work" for correctional staff. In addition to supervising daily activities, enforcing prison rules and regulations, and maintaining order in the facility, correctional officers are told to set up classrooms, check for call outs, fingerprint students, and coordinate their movement to and from the school. (Craft et al., 2019, p.16)

The *Prisoner Reentry Institute* suggests including such responsibilities in correctional officers' job descriptions, making expectations for their contributions to HEP programs explicit, and acknowledging these in performance reviews (Craft et al., 2019).

Cultivating a bureaucratic environment in which corrections staff view facilitating the operations of HEP programs as part of their job, rather than an additional burden on their time and resources, seems of the utmost importance. This is informed by Lipsky's (1980) theory of the "street-level bureaucracy." In particular, so-called street-level bureaucrats are expected to exercise discretion over policy implementation for two core reasons. First, they possess relative autonomy in carrying out the daily functions of an organization, and secondly, they must manage expanding caseloads and paperwork with finite time and resources (Lispky, 1980; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). Resultantly, government employees possess the ability to engage in "bureaucratic shirking" by intentionally neglecting their duties or actively working against the goals of the organization (Brehm & Gates, 1997).

Scholars disagree, however, about the propensity of bureaucrats to shirk their duties (Pierre & Peters, 2017). This is because most government employees are socialized into an organizational culture and thereby "intrinsically motivated" to happily perform their duties (Bell & Cantarelli, 2015; Buelens, 2017). However, corrections staff positioned at the nexus of a partnership between a college and prison are presented with a conundrum when supporting the priorities of the former may undermine those of the latter. Prison staff may also hold punitive ideologies and fundamentally oppose incarcerated people receiving tuition-free college. Consequently, if prison staff willfully neglect tasks that support HEP programs through informal censorship, foot-dragging, or obstruction, they may be deemed shirking bureaucrats.

Further, any propensity to restrict questionable curricula is widely protected under federal law, since the US Supreme Court has ruled that authorities in corrections may restrict access to materials deemed (by them), "detrimental to the security, good order or discipline of the institution," or that "might facilitate criminal activity" (Blackmun, 1989). Research and reporting on book bans and censorship in US prisons examines formal policies and informal practices stemming from this authority.

Prison Books Bans and Relevant Policies

Conrad reviewed 25 states' policies on prison libraries and found that 20 of them included general warnings against materials that might threaten prison security. Additionally, restrictions on specific content were prevalent and included instructions for crafting bombs, weapons, or drugs, guides to criminality, prison escape, or rioting, and sexually explicit materials (Conrad, 2016, p. 35). The *New York Times* and *Dallas Morning News* have drawn further attention to "banned books" lists maintained by state departments of corrections (Haag, 2017; McGaughy, 2018). Some states, however, do not maintain such records because books are instead denied by correctional officers working in the mailroom on an ad hoc basis (PEN America, 2019).

Undergirding this, Arford (2013) found that in prison libraries, informal censorship prevails. This includes correctional officers removing items from prison library shelves for any reason, including personal opposition or distaste. Prison librarians also reported engaging in extensive "self-censorship" to avoid clashes with security personnel (Arford, 2013). With such latitude to restrict publications containing questionable content, clear patterns emerge. In particular, prison wardens and custodial staff tend to restrict the following: sexually explicit and/or obscene materials, depictions or encouragement of violence and criminal activity, encouragement of anti-authority attitudes or rioting, and materials deemed to promote racial animus or hatred of particular groups. While such restrictions arguably align with correctional priorities, proponents of intellectual freedom note that they preclude incarcerated persons from engaging in deeper learning about important issues:

> Perhaps most controversially, prisons systems frequently place bans on literature that discusses civil rights, historical abuses within America's prisons, or criticisms of the prison system itself, often on the grounds that such titles advocate disruption of the prison's social order. (PEN America, 2019, p. 5)

Clearly, various formal and informal processes dictate what imprisoned people can read and learn. Nonetheless, there have been few systematic examinations of how these impact instructional materials used in HEP programs, although they are sometimes cursorily mentioned. For instance, a comprehensive study of North Carolina's prison education system notes that instructors were irritated by, "procedures for approval to bring in course materials," but does not enumerate these procedures (Davis & Tolbert, 2019, p. 30). The report also describes instructors frequently making, "mistakes in terms of knowing what they could and could not bring into a prison and what classroom materials were appropriate for prison-based students" (Davis & Tolbert, 2019, p. 30). Similarly, another study noted that instructors experience obstacles, "Even bringing analog research materials [like books and journal articles] into the prison...since all resources are subject to extensive security screening protocols" (Wilson et al., 2019). Again, the security screening procedures are not described, leaving the reader to wonder who performs them, how long they take, and what constitutes them as "extensive" compared to routine front gate checks that all civilians undergo when they enter a correctional facility (Wilson et al., 2019).

To gain insight on the various policies, practices, and lines of authority that dictate what instructional materials college in prison programs are permitted to use, I asked practitioners from HEP programs to report and reflect upon their experiences with prison security clearance procedures.

Survey Methodology and Descriptive Statistics

Potential HEP program members were identified using the all-conference attendee email list from the 2018 annual conference organized by the *Alliance for Higher Education in Prison*. Attendees were invited to participate in the survey, which I created and disseminated using Qualtrics. Because the conference was open to various HEP stakeholders situated outside

of college programs (like formerly incarcerated students, scholars, activists, vendors, and corrections staff), I first asked respondents to affirm their affiliation as an HEP program member and willingness to participate in the survey. Of roughly 300 email invitations, I received a response rate of 13%. While a higher response rate would have been ideal, I attribute this to my initial pool including a large number of ineligible persons who did not meet the HEP program affiliate criteria.

In sum, 41 respondents including 21 self-identified HEP program directors, eight administrators, eight instructors, and four unspecified "others" participated in the survey. Programs from 19 states were represented, plus the District of Colombia.[2] Respondents reported serving in their roles from five months to over 20 years, with an average tenure approaching four years. Participants were first asked descriptive questions about their higher education institution, correctional facility partner(s), and academic programming (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

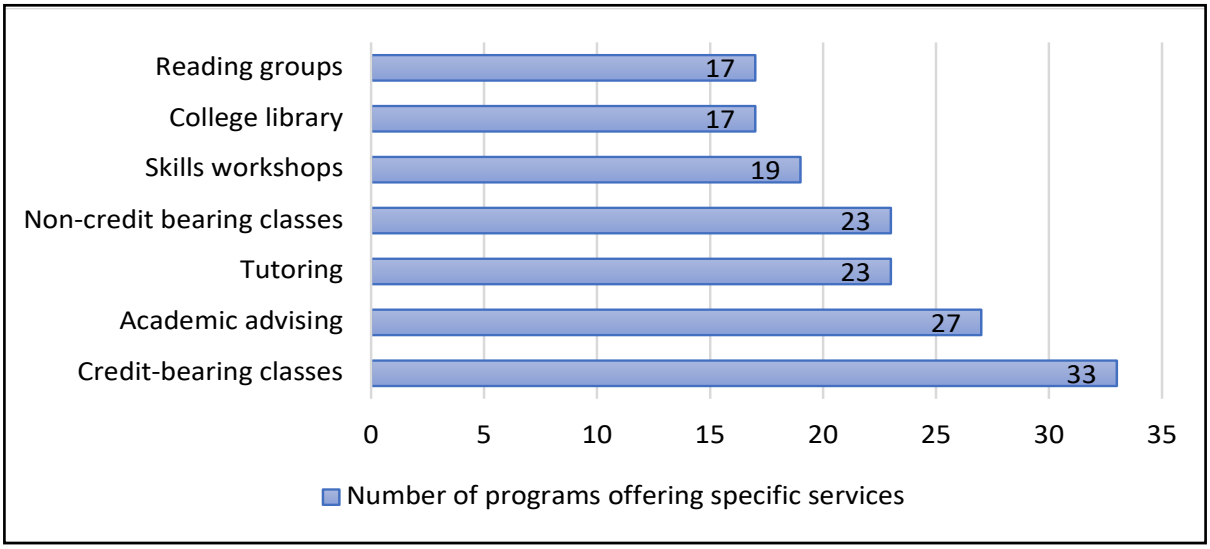
Table 1

HEP Program Characteristics by Numbers of Programs Reporting

College Type		Facility Type		Security Level		Census Region		Gen. Population		HEP Participants	
Priv. 4 yr	17	State	38	Min.	4	Midwest	12	1 to 1000	10	0-50	13
Pub. 4 yr	11	Federal	0	Med.	23	Northeast	4	1001 to 1500	7	56-100	13
Priv. 2 y	2	Local	3	Max.	12	South	13	1501 to 2000	13	100-300	8
Pub. 2 yr	10			N/A	2	West	8	2001 to 5000	11	Over 300	6
Unsp.[3]	1					Unsp	4			Unsp.	1
Total Responses: 41											

Figure 1

Academic Activities Supported by College in Prison Programs



I next asked respondents to report and reflect upon the security screening protocols and content rules set forth by their local prison or state department of corrections (DOCs) for instructional materials used by their programs.

Survey Results

First, I asked respondents if their program's instructional materials were required to undergo a security screening process before being permitted inside their partner prison facility.

[2] States represented: Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, plus the District of Columbia.

[3] Some respondents did not provide answers for every question, so blank responses are reported as "unspecified" or "Unsp."

I also asked respondents to estimate the length of time it typically takes to receive decisions (if applicable). I report responses to these questions in Table 2.

Table 2

Security Screening Procedures, Revisions, and Wait Times for Instructional Materials

Screening required		Overseen by		Frequency of changes		Avg. approval times	
Yes	27	Wardens	27	Never	11	< 1 week	8
No	8	Security Staff	12	Once	8	1-2 weeks	2
DK	4	State DOC	10	2x or more	20	2-3 weeks	12
		Review Board	4			4-5 weeks	7
						> 6 weeks	0
						DK or N/A	10
Total Responses:39							

The vast majority of programs submit materials for security screening, with prison management and staff most frequently overseeing this process. Notably, state departments of corrections were four times less likely to be involved with security screening than prison personnel, while independent review boards only rarely participated. This comports with the expectation that local prison authorities wield the greatest day-to-day influence over which HEP program materials are approved, as well as the timeline for decisions. Security clearance processes were also often altered, lending support to the observation that procedures are "constantly changing" (Craft et al., 2019). Additionally, the modal wait time for security clearance of instructional materials was two-to-three weeks, but almost as many (seven) programs expected to wait a month or longer for materials to be cleared as those (eight) that could expect decisions within a week. This finding raises questions regarding the source of such variance across facilities and how it might affect program quality and implementation.

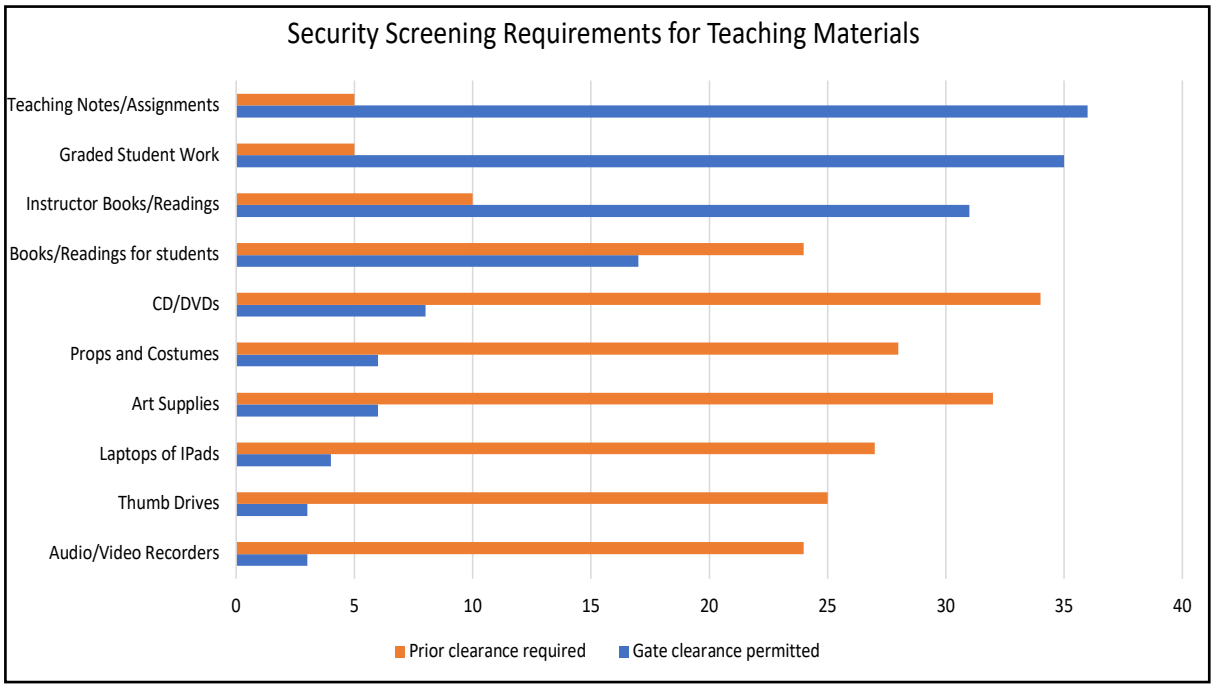
To explore how the functioning of a college program might be impacted by these procedures and wait times, I next asked respondents to list which materials were permitted, both with prior security approval (through the process described above), or through a routine "gate check" by staff at the entrance of the prison (See Figure 2). According to respondents, frequently utilized materials like graded student work, assignments, teaching notes, and instructor copies of readings are almost always reviewed at the facility entrance. This should enable a conventional academic workflow in which instructors distribute materials to students with regularity, and teach lessons using instructor notes and readings cleared at the front gate.

Conversely, when such items must be previously cleared through security screening, excessive wait times may interrupt the pacing of an academic course. For instance, when instructors are required to submit teaching notes and/or graded student work for a formal review before bringing them into the facility, they must tack on the additional time it takes for these materials to be approved into their instructional workflow. This may potentially cause delays in students receiving feedback on tests or assignments, or additional prep work for an instructor who must plan their lessons out multiple weeks or more in advance. Or, as observed in the *Rockefeller Institute* report, "Failure to plan ahead or communicate changes in instructional materials well in advance to prison officials can result in faculty being turned away or classes being cancelled," (Craft et al., 2019, p. 12). In light of these observations, the academic workflow is presumably least impacted when certain materials are permitted to be approved at the gate.

Moreover, the HEP program administrator suggests that security screening protocols indicate the potential threat level associated with various instructional materials. For instance, students' books are among the most closely monitored items, with 95% of prisons requiring prior security approval, compared to just one-quarter for instructors' books. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Programs Reporting Items Requiring Prior Security Approval Versus "Gate Clearance"



This aligns with research on prison book bans and library censorship suggesting that books available to incarcerated people tend to draw the most scrutiny. The results of the survey also indicate that while modality and school supply bans exist, content restrictions are far more prevalent, with half of respondents saying that content bans existed. (See Table 3).

Table 3

Policies Dictating Permissible Modality and Subject Matter

Modality Restrictions		Content Restrictions		School Supplies Banned	
Yes	12	Yes	19	Yes	12
No	25	No	19	No	25
Unspecified	1	Unspecified	0	Unspecified	1
Total Responses: 38					

Then, when asked to explain what types of content were restricted, three respondents noted that books including sexual, abusive, and/or violent content were disallowed, seven mentioned that a state law/DOC decides what is permitted, and four explicitly mentioned a state-maintained banned books list. When asked to elaborate, one respondent commented that, "all sorts of things" were not permitted, while another noted that an entire course on "peace and justice studies" was not permitted. Then, one described the review process as such, "The warden alone approves or rejects. The process appears to be surface-level," while another observed:

> The state has asked that our program refrain from discussing capital punishment in our coursework. However, there is no formal approval process for the content the program brings into the prison in our courses. There is an approval process for the types of materials (no hardcovers or spiral notebooks, etc.), but the content is not reviewed.

On the subject of banned content, one respondent remarked, "There is a list of books that are not permitted, or so I've been told, but I'm not sure that it actually exists." They provided the example of the book, *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) being initially banned by local prison authorities, but then permitted upon appeal.

Such findings indicate that a patchwork of policies, practices, and correctional actors, especially wardens and prison security staff, dictate permissible content of HEP program curricula. While respondents commonly acknowledged that sexual and violent content are generally disallowed, and that in some cases lists of banned material exist, they expressed limited knowledge of what is formally banned. Moreover, several comments highlight informal restrictions by prison authorities in the form of being told not to address a particular topic (capital punishment) or having a specific book denied security clearance (*Between the World and Me*). Such observations raise questions about how decisions regarding acceptable versus inappropriate content are made.

To explore this, I asked administrators to identify subject matter that had been either formally restricted through a categorical ban, state law, administrative directive, or banned book list, or informally restricted through security screening denials, removals, redactions, or other ad hoc restraints. I provided respondents a closed set of topics and invited them to select all that applied. I derived this list from research and reporting on prison books bans and library censorship (Arford, 2013; Craft et al., 2019; Nickeas, 2019). I report my findings in Figure 3.

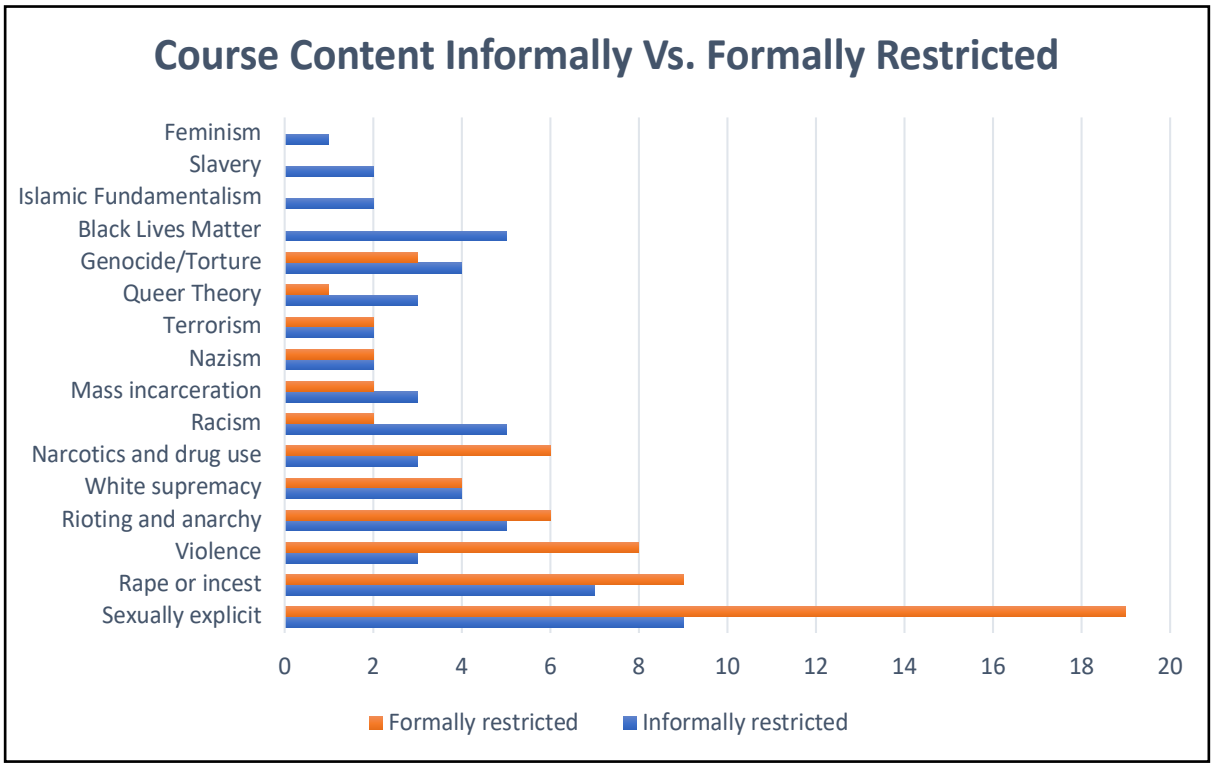
The most noteworthy finding is that while many programs reported the expected bans on content related to violence, sex, and drugs, respondents also reported informal restrictions imposed on content related to mass incarceration, rioting, racism, and gender and sexuality. The prevalence of informal restrictions on topics directly related to race like Black Lives Matter, slavery, and racism was especially noteworthy and aligns with an observation by Rob Scott, director of Cornell's Prison Education Program, quoted in the *Rockefeller Institute* report:

> They [prison officials] don't want us to come in and rile people up to start fighting back against the basic operation of day-to-day life in the prison...a book that raises issues of the searing legacy of racial discrimination in America might be taken as provocative of … resistance in a given prison. (Craft et al., 2019, p.12)

Moreover, overall, there were simply more subjects that were informally restricted compared to those that were formally banned. This suggests that prison managers are less heavy-handed in their policy and more reliant upon "street-level bureaucrats" to implement policy, and that prison staff may informally restrict particular materials from being taught in prison, even if there are no stated policies barring such material from being used. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3

Subject Matter Historically Restricted through Policy or Practice



Discussion: Reconciling Clashing Institutional Priorities to Strengthen Partnerships

My study highlights variation, as well as noteworthy patterns, in the experiences of HEP programs situated across the United States. These are valuable contributions, especially as more American colleges and prisons form partnerships to deliver higher education to incarcerated persons. Disagreements over what can be taught in college in prison are a potential locus of conflict that warrants the attention of scholars, practitioners, and other HEP stakeholders. Establishing and maintaining such partnerships therefore requires actors from corrections and higher education to reconcile their overlapping, yet potentially clashing priorities.

In particular, the survey sheds light on the subject matter that draws heightened scrutiny from prison personnel. Materials engaging topics related to race, criminal justice, and gender and sexuality were more often subject to informal restriction, while sexually explicit, violent, or drug-related materials were more frequently banned by a formal policy. Such findings comport with previous accounts of disagreements over and censorship of library materials and college curricula about racism, civil rights, Black history, and Black thought (Arford, 2013; Gaines, 2019; Gaines & Herman, 2019; Kendall, 2019; Nickeas, 2019; Zaveri, 2019).

By expanding the scope of analysis to a larger subset of HEP programs, rather than concentrating on a single program or allegation of censorship, I have shown that informal interference with curricula often happens in a patterned way. However, some HEP administrators describe highly restrictive environments in which prison authorities are perpetually leery of their curricula, while others describe relatively permissive environments where course materials are expeditiously approved. Given this, what explains such variation in experiences?

One might look to formal policy differences, since prisons follow facility rules or state laws restricting books about drugs, sex, and violence. However, the central conflict illuminated by the survey, then, is not a preponderance of overly burdensome, unreasonable content bans. Rather, it is the prevalence with which such restrictions occur outside the bounds of formal policy. This is evidenced by the frequency of HEP programs reporting informal restrictions over

their curricula. In particular, institutional priorities and values apparently clash when prisons seek to restrict HEP curricula engaging questions of race and racism. Understanding the apprehensions that guide such decisions is essential to the proper functioning of HEP programs. For instance, why might classic American Literature texts like Stowe's (1852) *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Twain's (1885) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* raise security concerns at one prison, but not another? Prison authorities are sanctioned to restrict access to materials deemed "detrimental to the security, good order or discipline of the institution" (Blackmun, 1989). Does this explain why books about slavery and racism are sometimes locked out of the curriculum, because prison staff worry this might encourage insubordination, subversion, and/or violence among the general population? And if so, what beliefs about incarcerated persons, criminal justice, and higher education undergird such concerns?

I conjecture that such beliefs have enormous potential to inform decisions made by prison authorities regarding what incarcerated students should be permitted to study. This is informed by Lipsky's (1980) observations about policy implementation in bureaucracies. The beliefs of so-called "street-level bureaucrats" may influence the implementation of security policy in the prison bureaucracy setting in the following ways. First, prison wardens and security staff exercise considerable autonomy from their state Department of Corrections in carrying out the daily functions of the prison, which are centered around maintaining carceral order and security. Next, when an HEP program is introduced into the bureaucracy, prison staff bear the additional responsibility of carrying out HEP program functions, including but not limited to security screening of curricula. Finally, street-level bureaucrats are expected to find creative ways to manage their expanding workloads in a context of finite time and resources (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014).

When an increased workload arises from assisting a higher education program, I argue that the likelihood that prison staff will engage in "bureaucratic shirking," i.e., willfully neglecting their duties or working against the goals of the HEP program, is related to how prison staff feel about the endeavor (Brehm & Gates, 1997). There are good reasons to expect some prison staff to feel ambivalence, if not outright hostility, toward the presence of an HEP program in their midst. The endeavor of extending higher education access to incarcerated persons has been hotly contested in American society, politics, and public policy for decades. For instance, Federal Pell Grant eligibility rules illustrate fickle political support for the expansion or retrenchment of prison-based higher education.

When the federal Pell Grant was established in 1972 as a need-based college aid program, incarcerated people who met the income qualifications were eligible to receive the grant. Such monies were used to establish college in prison programs in prisons across the United States. For roughly two decades, these programs flourished. In the 1990s, however, the national political climate took a punitive turn. Primetime television news programs *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* aired sensational segments, *Prison U* and *Society's Debt?* which served to inform (and enrage) the American public about the countless "criminals" receiving a taxpayer funded college education from prison (Page, 2004).

Congressional Republicans quickly demanded that people in prison lose their Pell Grant eligibility, and made adding this provision a sticking point in their support for the omnibus Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. According to Page's analysis of Congressional debate on this issue, members of Congress offered five core rationales to justify barring people in prison from receiving the Pell grant:

> (1) Convicted felons diverted federal educational dollars from the people that the politicians believed the grant program was designed to serve.
>
> (2) Most prisoners were incapable of rehabilitation and were cheats.
>
> (3) The Government already funded enough rehabilitation programs.
>
> (4) [G]iving convicts a free education increased crime, for it made prison a

viable alternative to the streets for potential criminals.

(5) The "rewarding" of prisoners with a college education was unfair to crime victims and their families. (Page, 2004, pp. 363-366)

In the immediate aftermath of passing the 1994 Crime Control Bill, including the Pell reform, most HEP programs were shuttered because they had been funded through Pell. Resultantly, enrollment in postsecondary education in prison programs decreased 44% in 1995 to just over 21,000 incarcerated students, and by 2004 only 7% of incarcerated persons in US prisons took college courses, down from a high of 14% in 1991 (Tewksbury et al., 2000). This was the intended outcome, as lawmakers sought to bring federal policy in line with the public's hostile attitudes toward "prisoners" receiving free college.

Rationales similar to those made by lawmakers who supported restricting the Pell Grant could easily be proffered by prison staff to justify restricting certain HEP program curricula. Moreover, skepticism about the usefulness of college courses generally, and certain topics specifically, is arguably rooted in beliefs about the capacity of incarcerated persons for rehabilitation, critical thinking, and emotional maturity. Related to this exist concerns that certain ideas might create agitation, violence, or unrest. In other words: *What are they going to do with these ideas...And what are these ideas going to make them do*?

I contend that security clearance policies for HEP program curricula—and their implementation—are unavoidably influenced by the attitudes of street-level bureaucrats, i.e., the prison personnel making such decisions. Following this, future studies of security clearance processes and disputes over instructional materials should examine how societal and individual attitudes about criminal offenders, criminal justice, and higher education factor into such policies and their implementation. Examining national policy changes is a good starting place to locate such attitudes.

For example, changing sentiments toward college for people in prison began to materialize in federal policy in 2015, when the Obama administration initiated the *Second Chance Pell Grant*, a pilot program that reinstated Pell for incarcerated people at select prison sites, and then again in 2018, when the Trump administration reauthorized the pilot. Then, in December of 2020, a provision to broadly reinstate Pell eligibility for people serving sentences in state and federal prisons was quietly folded into a $900 billion Covid-19 stimulus package. At the time of writing, hopes for the expansion of federally-supported, prison-based higher education have been bolstered by the restoration of Pell eligibility.

In the meantime, I contend that understanding and countering any attitudes that compel some prison managers and staff to subject particular books or ideas to informal restrictions is important to the flourishing of higher education in prison programs. Being socialized into an organizational culture that motivates staff to fulfill their duties has been identified as key to preventing bureaucratic shirking (Bellé, 2015; Buelens, 2017). Corrections staff at the nexus of a partnership between a college and prison may feel conflicted if asked to carry out functions that support the former while undermining the latter. They may also harbor punitive ideologies that lead them to oppose the benefits of college being extended to incarcerated people. Such views may also inform their security clearance decisions. Recognizing the role of street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation is therefore essential to the success of the project.

HEP programs and their correctional partners share overlapping, yet potentially conflicting priorities. Given the inordinate discretion that prison authorities exercise over security screening protocols for HEP program curricula, ideological clashes between college and prison staff present a potential barrier to collaboration in the endeavor of providing high quality HEP. To sustain support for college in prison programs, the project must be undergirded by a shared set of beliefs regarding the humanity of incarcerated people, their intellectual capabilities, and their capacities for ethical behavior and critical thinking when confronted with complex, controversial—even "threatening" ideas in the classroom. In acknowledgment of this, as well as

the observation that most exercises of censorship occur informally rather than through outright bans, prison education stakeholders should advocate for higher education as a public good with transformative potential. Educating the broader public (and prison staff) with success stories arising out of HEP programs is an important starting place. Books, documentaries, interviews, and promotional materials that humanize incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons are one way to demonstrate the importance (and relative harmlessness) of incarcerated people being able to study the same complicated, controversial topics as college students at traditional campuses.

In the absence of a widespread shift in attitudes, some prison managers and staff will continue to censor books and instructional materials with impunity. The proponents of higher education in prison must identify and challenge arbitrary exercises of power, while advocating for fair and transparent procedures. Nonetheless, even when policies are enshrined, street-level bureaucrats are responsible for implementing them, and they take their cues on higher education in prison from the broader society. Shoring up public support is therefore essential to minimizing conflict, strengthening partnerships, and expanding the set of shared institutional priorities so that college in prison programs may flourish.

References

Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. (n.d.). *Prospectus*. Retrieved November 1, 2020 https://www.higheredinprison.org/guiding-documents

Altimari, D. (2015, October 19). Connecticut decreases use of solitary confinement in prisons. *Hartford Courant*. Retrieved from https://www.courant.com

Arford, T.M. (2013). *Captive Knowledge: Censorship and Control in Prison Libraries*. (Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University, Boston, United States) Retrieved from https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:1905

Belle, N. & Cantarelli, P. (2015). Monetary Incentives, Motivation, and Job Effort in the Public Sector: An Experimental Study With Italian Government Executives. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *35*(2), 99–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X13520460

Blackmun. (1989). *Richard L. THORNBURGH, Attorney General of the United States, et al., Petitioners v. Jack ABBOTT, et al.* Majority Opinion. Supreme Court of the United States. Retrieved from https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/490/401

Brehm, J., Gates, S., & Clingermayer, J.C. (1998). Working, Shirking, and Sabotage: Bureaucratic Response to a Democratic Public. *The Journal of Politics*, *60*(2), 530–532. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647925

Buelens, M., & Van den Broeck, H. (2007). An Analysis of Differences in Work Motivation between Public and Private Sector Organizations. *Public Administration Review*, *67*(1), 65–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00697.x

Castro, E. L., & Gould, M. R. (2018). What is Higher Education in Prison? Introduction to Radical Departures: Ruminations on the Purposes of Higher Education in Prison. *Critical Education, 9*(10), 1-16.

Conrad, S. (2016). *Prison Librarianship Policy and Practice*. McFarland & Company.

Craft, T., Gonzalez, N., Rose, M., and Takor, O. (2019). A Second Chance: College-in-Prison Programs in New York State. *Rockefeller Institute of Government*. https://rockinst.org/issue-area/a-second-chance-college-in-prison-programs-in-new-york-state

Davis, L. M. & Tolbert, M.C. (2019). Evaluation of North Carolina's Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education Program, Santa Monica, Calif. *RAND Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2957.html

Ear Hustle Podcast. (n.d.). *Radiotopia*. Retrieved from https://www.earhustlesq.com

Education Justice Project. (n.d.). *Welcome to EJP*. EducationJustice.net http://www.education-justice.net/home

Education Justice Project. (2019). 2018-19 EJP Handbook. http://www.educationjustice.net/home/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/EJP-handbook-2018-9_digital_11.12.2018.pdf

Erzen, T., Gould, M. & Lewen, J. (2017). Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison. *Prison University Project and the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison* https://www.higheredinprison.org/publications/equity-and-excellence-in-practice-report

Gaines, L. (2019, May 29). Illinois Prison Removes More Than 200 Books From Prison Library. *Illinois Public Media*. Retrieved from https://will.illinois.edu

Gaines, L. V. & Herman, Christine. (2019, August 15). The Reason Why Hundreds Of Books Were Removed From An Illinois Prison Library. *NPR Illinois.* Retrieved from https://www.nprillinois.org

Gates Jr., H. L. (1995). *Colored People, A Memoir.* Vintage.

Gehring, T. (1997). Post-Secondary Education for Inmates: An Historical Inquiry. *Journal of*

Correctional Education 48(2), 46–55.

Haag, M. (2017, December 7). Texas Prisons Ban 10,000 Books. No "Charlie Brown Christmas" for Inmates. *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com

Illinois Department of Corrections. (2019, November 1). Publication Reviews. *AD 04.01.108*. Retrieved from https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc

Jacobs, A. & Weissman, M. (2019). Mapping the Landscape of Higher Education in New York State Prisons. *Prison Reentry Institute of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594766.pdf

Jacobs, H. (1861). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Kendall, H. (2019). Censorship in Prison Libraries: Danville and Beyond. *Illinois Library Association*. *ILA Reporter 37* (4). Retrieved from https://www.ila.org

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services.* Russell Sage Foundation.

May, P. J., & Winter, S. C. (2009). Politicians, managers, and street-level bureaucrats: Influences on policy implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *19*(3), 453-476.

McGaughy, L. (2018, January 11). What should Texas inmates read? Banned book list under review. *Dallas Morning News*, Retrieved from https://www.dallasnews.com

National Institute of Justice. (2014). "Corrections-Based Adult Basic/Secondary Education." Report. Retrieved from https://www.crimesolutions.gov/PracticeDetails.aspx?ID=21

Neumeier, G. (2019, April 27). Marin Voice: San Quentin offers a model for rehab programs. *Marin Independent Journal*, Retrieved from https://www.marinij.com

Nickeas, P. (2019, August 15). It's the racial stuff': Illinois prison banned, removed books on black history and empowerment from inmate education program. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from https://www.chicagotribune.com

Page, J. (2004). Eliminating the enemy: The import of denying prisoners access to higher education in Clinton's America. *Punishment & Society*, *6*(4), 357-378.

PEN America. (2019). How Prison Book Restriction Policies Constitute the Nation's Largest Book Ban. https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/literature-locked-up-report-9.24.19.pdf

Pierre, J. & Peters, B. G. (2017). The shirking bureaucrat: a theory in search of evidence? *Policy & Politics 45*(2): 157-172.

Ramirez, K. (2019, July 9). Danville Prison Books Returned to Shelves. *WAND/NBC Channel 17*. Retrieved from https://www.wandtv.com

Rice, D. (2013). Street-level bureaucrats and the welfare state: Toward a micro-institutionalist theory of policy implementation. *Administration & Society*, *45*(9), 1038-1062.

Rothstein, R. (2017). The Color of Law: A forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America. Liveright.

Stowe, H.B. (1852). *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Tewksbury, R., Erickson, D. J., & Taylor, J.M. (2000). Opportunities Lost: The Consequences of Eliminating Pell Grant Eligibility for Correctional Education Students. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation 31*(1), 43-56.

Tummers, L., & Bekkers, V. (2014). Policy implementation, street-level bureaucracy, and the importance of discretion. *Public Management Review*, *16*(4), 527-547.

Twain, M. (1885*). The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

West, C. (1994). *Race Matters*. Vintage.

Wilson, M., Alamuddin, R., & Cooper, D. (2019). Unbarring Access: A Landscape Review of Postsecondary Education in Prison and Its Pedagogical Supports. https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.311499

Wood, G. (2014, October). How Gangs Took Over Prisons. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/10/how-gangs-took-over-prisons/379330

Zaveri, Mihir. (2019, September 27). Prison Book Bans Called "Arbitrary and Irrational," *New York Times,* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com

Journal of Prison Education and Reentry

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2021

RESEARCH PAPER

JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

Understanding Aspiration and Education Towards Desistance from Offending: The Role of Higher Education in Wales

MARK JONES
Higher Plain Research and Education, United Kingdom

DEBBIE JONES
Swansea University, United Kingdom

Abstract: *There has been a growing recognition of the value of education in facilitating desistance from offending. Yet, despite a determined push to "widen access" universities continue to be an unwelcoming place for those with a criminal record. To better understand the role of higher education in raising aspiration towards desistance, this paper draws on findings from a study in Swansea, Wales. Adopting a Pictorial Narrative approach the findings suggest that, whilst the participants identified potential benefits of attaining a higher education, those aspirations were outweighed by a distrust of the "institution" and a fear that the stigmatisation experienced through the "criminal identity" would be hard to avoid and may morph into the "criminal/student identity", thus leaving students vulnerable to judgement and exclusion. This paper makes recommendations about how higher education might be remodeled to support those who wish to desist and in doing so, truly "widen participation" to all.*

Keywords: *desistance, higher education, widening access*

> *"The conviction sticks to you forever and they only see the crime. They [universities] don't want people like me."* John

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) for funding this project. We are also very grateful for the support and advice offered by Professor Liz Thomas, Edge Hill University who was appointed by the SRHE as a critical friend.

The project adopted an emerging approach to data collection and analysis – a Pictorial Narrative Approach – and without the skill of Eleanor Beer, that element of the project would have been lacking.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the Include Hub, who worked with us to explore this issue. Their expertise and advocacy in representing the voices of the marginalised shaped the study. We are also grateful to the practitioners who took part in the second engagement event who gave their time and their knowledge willingly and with great enthusiasm.

However, the most important acknowledgement is reserved for the members of the Include Hub who shared their often personal and distressing experiences of education to help us to better understand how higher education needs to adapt to be a truly inclusive environment for effective learning.

Correspondence: Mark Jones, Email: higherplainresearcheducation@gmail.com

(Accepted: 22 March 2021) ISSN: 2387-2306 doi:https://doi.org/10.25771/jpwq-2x33

It is often the case that when people get into a pattern of offending or are at risk of offending, it is increasingly difficult to stop the cycle. Moreover, factors such as stigma and discrimination, make it difficult to maintain aspirations and secure opportunities towards positive change (Ministry of Justice, 2010; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; Dufour et al., 2015). However, previous studies have identified that education, and in particular studying within a higher education environment, can be a powerful and significant 'hook for change' (Lockwood et al., 2012; Runnell, 2017) as it supports the development of personal agency through exposure to new positive social networks, new communities and individuals with 'non-offending' identities as well as knowledge and skills (Weaver & McNeill, 2015; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Abeling-Judge, 2016). Emphasising this point, the Coates Review (2016, p. i) found that "If education is the engine of social mobility, it is also the engine of prisoner rehabilitation."

However, whilst the benefits of a higher education as a route to desistance are promising, the Prison Education Trust (PET) (2017) highlight that universities are not always welcoming or appealing to those with a criminal record and that the sector could do more, stating: "To be truly inclusive, universities must help prisoners feel they belong." Moreover, in their research on patterns of participation in higher education, Evans et al. (2017) found that whilst widening access to higher education has become a global endeavour, within a Welsh context, the internal culture and narrative of the widening participation agenda has become entangled. Evans et al. (2017) suggest that there are now mixed messages between the pressures of market-led policies, university league tables and other ranking systems and the Welsh 'all-age' approach to widening access from Welsh Government and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales which is often lost in translation. Therefore it is not surprising that there has been a dramatic reduction in part-time learners in the UK which is disproportionately affecting adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (Butcher, 2020). This has resulted in re-enforcing the status quo of inequality and hierarchy with the focus remaining on the more traditional and profitable young student demographic at the expense of developing non-traditional student participation such as adult learners (Evans et al., 2017).

The catalyst for this project came from the community through an organisation called the Include Hub who raised the possibility of exploring the role of higher education in supporting desistance. The Hub is a project working with those with offending histories or adults who are considered at potential risk of offending. The aspiration to attend university had been discussed amongst their members, but the prospect remained daunting and unachievable to them. Moreover from our initial scoping of the literature on the role of education in facilitating desistance, we had identified that previous research on this topic had focused on the role of education within a prison setting with less attention given to considering the role of higher education within the community (Bradley, 2017). Therefore, set against this backdrop, the project sought to address the following questions:

1. What are the aspirations of those at risk of offending/reoffending to study within higher education?
2. What barriers/problems/challenges do those at risk of offending/reoffending envisage in engaging with higher education?
3. What support would those at risk of offending/reoffending need to engage with higher education?
4. How might higher education support diversion/desistance from offending?

A further overarching aim of the project was to develop a methodological approach that would be both scientifically rigorous but also designed to be an inclusive and empowering process for those taking part. To achieve this, we adopted a Pictorial Narrative approach which is discussed later in the paper. The remainder of this paper begins with a discussion of the existing literature on the relationship between education and desistance and then outlines the

methodological approach adopted by the study. In presenting the findings, the paper argues that higher education could be a powerful vehicle for transformative change in those that are at risk of (re)offending. However, the findings also suggest that universities need to adopt a proactive approach to marketing and the transition to higher education to break down the barriers experienced by members of marginalised and stigmatised communities so that their aspirations can be supported and their student experience enhanced through engagement with education that is free from stigma and judgment.

The Desistance Journey

> There has been a growing body of research that seeks to understand the process of desistance. Simply put, desistance is considered as a process of preventing or of abstaining from crime as well theoretical understandings of "how and why people stop and refrain from offending" (Weaver & McNeill, 2015, p. 95).

One of the overriding themes of previous research has been that desistance can be supported if there are positive competing discourses within 'offenders' social relations and if there are 'relational goods' such as positive group interaction and mutual social conditioning (Weaver & McNeill, 2015). Factors such as stable relationships and employment that offer both personal and external motivations and controls have been shown to not only support desistance, but also facilitate the formation of new identities and positive adult social ties (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). However, whilst Dufour et al. (2015) conclude that it can be difficult to shed a criminal identity because of both internal and external influences and constraints, the opportunity to develop alternative and positive social experiences supports the growth of social capital and greater social mobility (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) and thus helps in the formation of the 'new self'. Additionally, the maintenance of such positive social relations can support the development of reciprocal trust, solidarity, and loyalty which are all key elements of supporting desistance (Weaver & McNeill, 2015).

However, as Nugent and Schinkel (2016) point out, to succeed in this transition to a new self, often people will experience challenges which can be considered as the 'pains of desistance' summarised as isolation and loneliness, goal failure, and lack of hope. For example, the difficulties in finding secure accommodation and employment on leaving prison have been well documented (Edgar, Aresti & Cornish, 2012; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). Moreover, Senkans et al. (2015) also note that often ongoing mental health issues and substance use (McSweeney, 2010) can constrain the desistance journey. It seems therefore, that the path to desistance is rocky, often fragmented and requires an integrated approach that requires a personal transition, relational stability as well as support at a structural societal level (Dufour et al., 2015).

To understand the potential role of higher education in supporting desistance, Dufour et al. (2015) provide a useful framework to explore three stages of desistance. In the first stage 'structural openings' such as an opportunity to study, to find employment or build personal relationships with family and life partners provide 'hooks for change'. Second, to effectively flourish and be accepted within new structural opportunities new social identities must be developed and old identities discarded. In the final stage, an individual must recognise their contribution to society and to the group(s)/community they now want to belong to. Therefore, in facilitating individuals to create a new 'map of society' and transform their identity (Dufour et al., 2015 p. 495) it is clear that the role of higher education as a learning platform and also as a process of personal and social transformation can be something that supports those seeking to desist from offending.

It might also be argued that higher education can support the 'theory of cognitive transformation' proposed by Giordano, et al. (2002). In their four-stage analysis of the desistance process, Giordano et al. (2002) identify strong commonalities to the three stages set out by

Dufour et al. (2015). Both outline the need for opportunity for a 'hook(s) for change' and that this supports identification with and motivation to develop a positive alternative social identity or as Giordano et al. (2012) term it, a 'replacement self.' The two views also capture a transformation in the way the individual views deviant behaviour and not seeing themselves as a criminal anymore. The main difference between the two perspectives is that Giordano et al. (2002) place significance on an initial need for the individual to have an openness to change before cognitive transformation can be successful. Indeed, this view has been supported by others who suggest that there must be some intention and motivation for a future positive self and that individual agency is the starting point for this change (King, 2012). However, other studies have challenged this view stating that desistance often occurs with no intention and that people can desist simply from reacting to events and turning points which offer positive opportunities (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Vaughan, 2007). Therefore, whilst there appears to be a lack of agreement about whether the desire to desist stems from a thought-out cognitive shift or is indeed stimulated by opportunist events or tuning points, there appears to be support for the argument that the need for an opportunity to visualise or perceive a future alternative self is important to achieving desistance (Behan, 2014; King, Measham, and O'Brien, 2018; and Szifris, Fox and Bradley, 2017). In this respect, it is clear to see how the aspiration to study within higher education might help to provide the opportunities and motivations to reinvent oneself and develop positive social capital.

Nugent and Schinkel (2016) support the need for analysing desistance from multiple interrelated perspectives and found the strong interdependence of act-desistance, identity desistance and relational desistance which if not present would mean desistance was unlikely or short-term and fragile. A key finding was that hope was a foundation from which all positive change could develop and therefore strong positive recognition within relational desistance at the micro, meso, and macro levels were needed. However, the development of such relations and positive recognition from them were often a significant challenge especially at the meso and macro levels within the wider community, organisations and institutions. This is an important perspective in relation to this research and the implications for higher education and its role in supporting desistance.

However, the work of McNeill (2018; 2019) provides arguably the most insightful analysis of understanding how higher education as a holistic transformative process can support desistance. McNeill (2018; 2019) believes that desistance and rehabilitation is possible only through mutual recognition and respect of the individual, the citizen, civil society, and the state. Therefore, real and meaningful liberation and integration into the community for a person who is at risk of re-offending is reliant on four interconnected dimensions of rehabilitation – personal, social, judicial and moral and political. The personal relates to personal agency, values and beliefs supporting the transformation to a new identity and self. The social dimension refers to the need for a positive and expanded social network to support the development of social capital. The judicial element states a need for the structural 'de-labelling' of and from the previous crime. Finally the fourth area relates to the need for moral and political rehabilitation and societal integration at all levels of society often seen as the most difficult (McNeill, 2018; 2019).

Higher Education, Widening Access and Desistance

It is clear from McNeill's (2018; 2019) model that higher education may provide many of the four proposed elements of rehabilitation. Certainly, the personal, social and moral rehabilitation can be facilitated and supported through higher education as it offers a learning environment rich with new skills, knowledge, and self-directed learning (personal) within a culture, community and social setting full of new social opportunities and positive social networks. Yet, perhaps the stumbling block towards desistance when using higher education as the 'hook for change' might be the process of casting-off the offending past. Until recently the requirement to disclose previous convictions via UCAS to universities may have been a step

too far for those individuals concerned with the associated stigma the label offender carries (Weale, 2018), therefore the judicial rehabilitation might remain a problematic area for higher education integration. As highlighted earlier the UK higher education sector is not particularly welcoming of those with a criminal record and clearly more could be done to include, support and motivate those with offending backgrounds. Within a Welsh context universities need to untangle the messages to better support non-traditional student participation such as adult learners by creating a positive culture for those who do not fit such traditional higher education student identities (Evans et al., 2017).

The Coates Review (2016) also found that a major barrier to accessing higher education was the perception of not wanting increased debt on release from prison. Darke and Aresti (2016) highlight the need for more appropriate advice, information and support services with applications to higher education to be provided by prisons. It is therefore likely that when released from prison, people are still not readily provided with a full range of guidance and support services relating to the opportunity to enter or continue in higher education, and when they are directed to education provision it seems it is predominantly aimed at securing employment and practical upskilling (Costello & Warner, 2014) often through the further education sector. However, it might be argued that this approach does not facilitate the aforementioned components needed that better support desistance. For example, employment focused education does not usually offer opportunity for self-discovery and the more holistic educational experience characteristic of higher education with its focus on critical thinking skills within an educational environment that offers diverse social networks (Behan, 2014; Costello & Warner, 2014).

Indeed, the Coates Review (2016) found that those who had been involved within the criminal justice system often had negative previous experiences of formal education and this is a common experience captured and reported in the literature (Warner, 2007; Czerniawski, 2016; Torlone & Vryonides, 2016; Wood, 2020). Therefore, despite the evidence that exalts the benefits of higher education, past experiences of education can impact on future successes. Moreover, the level of educational achievement can also be an indicator for desistance. For example, those that achieve post-secondary education are more likely to experience more positive desistance outcomes than those who do not (Bloomberg et al., 2011; Lockwood et al., 2012). Furthermore, those that progress onto higher education within prison tend to desist more frequently than those that have education experiences below this level (Zgoba et al., 2008; Ford & Schroeder, 2010; Meyer & Randal, 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2013; Stern, 2014; Bozick et al., 2018).

Students that experience higher education also seem better able to develop greater self-confidence and skills to use upon release (Allred et al., 2013). Indeed, Lockwood et al. (2012) and Runnell (2017) found that studying within a higher education environment was not only linked to a decrease in re-offending behaviour but an increase in positive development of greater personal agency and self-awareness, social capital; and increased opportunity and access to new positive social networks and relationships (also supported by Maruna, 2011). Therefore, it is proposed that higher education should be considered a useful approach for crime avoidance and the transformational power it offers students to desist (Pike & Adams, 2012; Clark, 2016; Wilson & Reuss, 2000).

It seems therefore that the value of higher education in supporting desistance is worthy of further exploration. To this point however, the studies that have examined the relationships between engagement with higher education and desistance from offending have been largely focused on the USA and in England and Wales within the confines of prison environments (Pompa, 2013; Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016) with less research on how higher education might support desistance after release and/or those at risk of offending (Runnel, 2017). Therefore, this gap in the literature offers a useful opportunity to explore whether higher education is viewed as a 'hook for change' by adults outside of the prison environment and in particular within a community project that seeks to support those wishing to desist from offending.

Methodology

This study was underpinned by a hybrid framework of participatory action and community engagement and learning. The project worked alongside people who had a criminal conviction or who had been identified as at risk of offending as partners – thus seeking to empower and encourage aspiration by carrying out research through 'doing with' rather than, 'researching on' participants. Such approaches have been highlighted as indicative features of successful desistance intervention processes which support inter-personal, group, community and societal engagement to bring about positive change by building trust, supporting the development of positive social identities, self-determination and personal agency alongside of a reduction in negative labelling (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016).

Research Partners – The Include Hub

This project built on a long history of successful collaboration between the university and Include. Previous projects had examined a range of issues focused on supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups. Include, a third sector organisation, has been working with those at risk of offending and other vulnerable groups in Wales, for over fourteen years and are well embedded within the community and the criminal justice sector. The Hub (one of a portfolio of projects managed by Include) was launched in 2017 and funded by a Lottery grant. It aims to give members:

> An increased sense of belonging and control through participation in positive activities, chosen by them; increased skills and opportunities through training and volunteering; improved opportunities to access more generic support, particularly those outside of scope of existing services; aspiration about their futures by increasing confidence to express their needs, by accessing advice support.

A key strength of the Hub is that its members have the autonomy to shape and run the project – this has manifested in terms of deciding the colour scheme of the building through to designing activities. At the time of the project, the Hub had approximately five hundred members with a daily drop-in rate of about twenty - fifty members.

Methods

Offering a rich understanding of crime and the criminal justice system, qualitative methods have become a mainstay of criminological research. Such methods can include narrative approaches such as interviewing, ethnographic and observational accounts. Indeed, as Sandberg and Ugelvik (2016) point out, storytelling is nothing new and is in fact a facet of our humanistic behaviours that help us to make sense of the world we inhabit. However, the past fifty years has seen the emergence of Narrative Criminology. This form of scientific inquiry formally emerged through the work of scholars such as Sykes and Matza (1957) who used narrative methods to provide an understanding of the behaviours of 'juvenile delinquents'.

Since that time, cultural criminologists have increasingly adopted this narrative approach and in more recent years have started to explore the role of visual methods as a way to enhance knowledge and engagement with research; to provide a break with the taken for granted view of social reality; and to 'democratize' crime control (Francis, 2009; Brown, 2014; Carr et al., 2015; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016). The use of narrative and visual methods was an approach utilised during this project.

Pictorial Narrative Mapping

The project set out to explore the use of Pictorial Narrative Mapping as a method of data collection and an analysis tool that has the ability to provide a holistic, nuanced account of the phenomena under study (Lapum et al., 2015) and as an empowering tool for those taking part in the research. The use of 'Pictorial Mapping Analysis', enabled participants to discuss

their lived experiences and see their responses drawn in real-time by the artist/analyst present. The analyst was given the schedule of questions/themes at the start of the data collection phase and was then able to capture what was discussed in the moment by focusing on a key phrase or response to a question from one of the researchers. These key themes were then narrated in real time to directly capture the discussions of the group.

Whilst many studies have used creative means of data collection such as drawing, poetry or photography to enable those with limited confidence, linguistic or literacy capacity to participate fully (Glaw et al., 2017), some have pointed out that not all participants have the capacity to be creative (Brown, 2014). Therefore, adopting a narrative approach created an inclusive environment that enabled all the participants to become immersed within a creative process and have their views represented even if their artistic ability was limited.

Analytical Framework

This research used a Grounded Theory framework which offers an approach that supports theory development through constant comparative analysis and construction of knowledge that is grounded in empirical research within practice and real-world settings (Denscombe, 2014; Harris, 2014). Importantly for us, the focus on developing knowledge within practice with the participants aligned well to the value base of the project in supporting members to work alongside us and let their voices be heard and captured clearly and accurately and acknowledged the expertise of the practitioners. Indeed, this approach was both therefore inductive and deductive in that we questioned the data within the existing literature. In this way the project utilised an open-minded grounded theory approach with 'theoretical sensitivity' as we were aware of the literature and past research but let the members speak for themselves thus creating new understandings (Denscombe, 2014).

At the conclusion of the data collection events, we independently cross checked our notes with the narrative illustrations to establish a set of themes. We then discussed our individual thematic analysis to ensure that, collectively, the themes we identified were an accurate representation of the data. This approach led to the immediate triangulation of the data analysis – something that has been identified as bringing about increased trustworthiness of the findings (Glaw et al., 2017).

The outcome of this layered approach to data analysis not only resulted in a detailed and rich capture of the lived experiences and expertise of the participants but also supported the empowerment of the participants who fed-back that it had been a positive and rewarding experience to have "*really been listened to*" (focus group one participant) and "*what a great way to show what we have talked about*" (focus group two participant).

Data Collection Process

The project began in March 2019. Ethical approval was granted by the Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law, Swansea University. A literature review provided context for the development of a question schedule which was then developed in partnership with staff from the Hub. This process ensured that the questions were aligned to the aims of the project and were appropriate for the participants of the study.

Engagement Event One

The first stage of the project involved data collection through an engagement event with members of the Hub. The participants were provided with lunch and a £10 thank you voucher for their participation. The engagement event took the form of a flexible focus group and enabled the participants to have an active voice in the direction the discussion took.

In total, sixteen people took part in the engagement event which lasted for two and half hours. The participants were encouraged to leave and re-enter the discussions as and when they needed. We acknowledge that the research literature generally agrees that the best practice

size for focus groups is five-eight with a maximum suggested threshold of ten (Stewart et al., 2014; Ochieng et al, 2019) so that the discussions are manageable and coherent and therefore ethically practised focus groups (Sim & Waterfield, 2019), but this was simply not possible for this research. Placing limitations on the number of participants that could take part at any one time would have contradicted the values the research and the mission and ethos of the partnership organisation. Given the inclusive, open access provision of the Hub outlined previously, it would have been unethical and discriminatory to limit the focus group to only ten members when sixteen turned up to be part of the discussion and share their very personal and sensitive life stories. This decision was fully supported by the Hub and was clearly the right choice for this project with an immediate positive impact on members as well as the rich tapestry of narrative produced.

The demographics of the sample composed of thirteen males and three women; all were white; and aged between twenty and sixty. All participants were living in the local area and all had a criminal conviction and were at risk of future offending. The majority had served a custodial sentence with offences ranging from arson, assault, drug use, drink driving and fraud. Twelve of the male participants also reported current issues with substance misuse including drugs and alcohol. All the participants stated that they had mental health issues that included anxiety, depression, stress and two had an atypical personality diagnosis. It should be noted that we did not directly ask the participants to provide this data, it was something that emerged during the group discussion.

Engagement Event Two

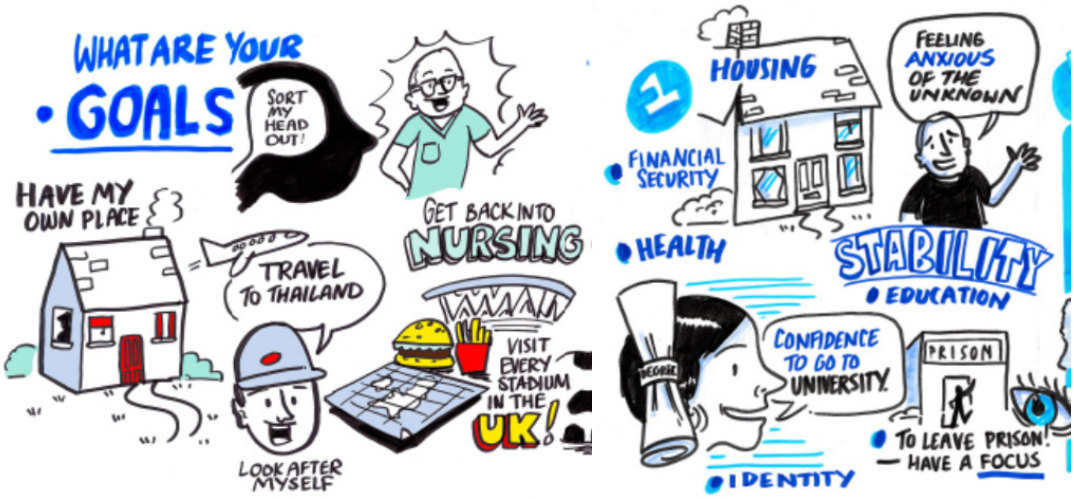
The second engagement event also took place at the Hub. The focus of the session built around the themes from engagement event one by involving those that have been involved in education within prison environments. There were eight participants in this focus group. Two participants (both male) were current or previous "prison students". One was serving a prison term (former solicitor now studying for a PhD); the other was completing an undergraduate degree (both in Welsh universities) and was also working with a third sector project that sought to support desistance. This group also included two managers (one male and female) from third sector organisations working to support those at risk of offending as well as two members of prison staff (male and female) one teaching and one in a supervisory capacity; and two female members of university widening access staff.

Findings

The forthcoming discussion is based on the findings from the engagement events. The analytical process identified three over-arching themes: aspirations; educational experiences; and barriers and challenges to engaging with higher education. Throughout this section examples of the narrative analysis are presented as illustrations of the data. The full narrative mapping outputs can be found in Appendix A.

Aspirations

Illustration 1



Given their lived experiences, the aspirations of the participants of the first focus group were diverse and consequently, it was at times, challenging to discuss aspirations of higher education. Therefore the discussion initially sought to identify the more immediately identifiable aspirations of the group and used these as starting points to later build in the notion of higher education. What became apparent, was that despite the participants having a variety of short term but important and personalised aspirations - visualised in Illustration 1 - there was one common vison for the future that connected them all and that was the need to be "*safe, secure, happy and being able to look after myself.*" The analysis of the data revealed four interconnected sub themes that are discussed below and shed light on the aspirations of the participants.

Mental Health and Substance Misuse

Many of the participants had experienced significant trauma within or throughout their lives and so mental health was a common factor in their daily lives. For example, one participant reported just wanting to "*survive*" – this participant was female to male transgender and survival for them was focused on getting an appointment with a psychiatrist and pushing on with their transition. A further example in the variance in aspirations was illustrated by a male participant with serious mental health issues who said his aspiration was to eat a McDonalds meal outside all the football stadiums in the UK (see Illustration 1).

Despite such variation, there was a general consensus that mental health was an ongoing challenge and that participants were at different points on their path to recovery. It was agreed that if mental health could be effectively supported then this would provide stability to explore other positive directions in life such as education, employment, family and more social connections. This, for this group of potential future students, getting to a place where they had positive mental health was the aspirational door that would open up all other opportunities. Therefore, this finding adds support to the views of Senkans et al. (2015) who found that ongoing mental health experiences often disrupt the path to desistance.

In addition to pressing mental health concerns, for the majority of the participants in focus group one, managing their use of substances was an ongoing challenge. Interestingly, when exploring the literature on trauma, substance use and desistance there is little research linking the three in relation to an overarching framework or approach to desistance despite it appearing common that those that have been within a prison environment have experienced significant life trauma (childhood, adolescent and or adult) and have experience of substance misuse (Bradley, 2017; McSweeney, 2010).

In order to support potential learners with complex needs, as identified in our sample,

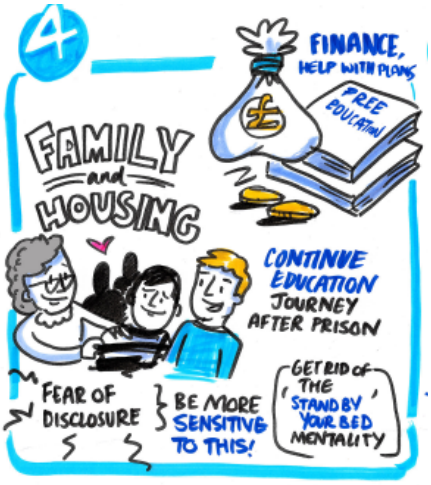
within a higher education environment, the concept of 'recovery capital' is worthy of exploration. Cloud and Granfield (2009) break down recovery capital into four components - Social, Physical, Human, and Cultural. Social refers to the need for positive support systems of friends and family and wider social groups. Physical relates to adequate assets like money or property to support moving away from substance use context. Human capital encompasses the gaining of new skills, new education and developing hope and positive aspirations for the future and these are often created through higher educational experiences. Finally, cultural capital is the ability of the person in recovery to be able to form new views, values and attitudes that support positive behaviour change that conforms more readily to societal norms.

Through this analysis, it is clear that there is potential for higher education to support those wishing to desist who have multiple and complex needs. Higher education has been shown to help individuals develop new notions of self through confidence and raises social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). However, despite there being a push to develop university services that seek to support students' health and well-being, it remains the case that these services are often under resourced. Therefore, harnessing the support of external organisations with the expertise to support those with complex needs may offer the 'meshing' of recovery capital (Best & Laudet, 2010) to provide practical and long-term avenues to those universities who are truly committed to widening access. Indeed, our analysis of barriers and challenges to accessing higher education evidence the views of our sample who called for the diversification of higher education (Illustration 10).

Securing Employment

Employment for our sample was seen as an anchor and platform that would provide them with the means to succeed in other aspirations such as having a home and a future with a family both of which are seen as powerful in supporting desistance (Senkans et al., 2015) and can be seen below in illustration 2. However, as Shapland and Bottoms (2011) point out securing employment and access to a regular income are often significant barriers to desistance.

Illustration 2



Despite the recognition by the group of how a criminal conviction can hinder future employment opportunities, some participants cited their aspirations. For example, one male with a drink drive conviction was a former nurse and wanted to get back into employment as a health care professional. Another male in his early twenty's had a history of repeated prison sentences and wanted to get a job and believed he would be able to achieve this.

Furthermore, as visualised in illustration 9, some of the group articulated the notion that employment could be a way of giving back. For example, one male participant with a seventeen-year history of substance use wanted to harness and share his experiences of addiction to support others experiencing similar issues. However, when the topic of gaining employment

through a higher education was discussed, it became apparent that our participants were sceptical about the ability of higher education to provide this and this seemed to be due to a general mistrust of universities as can be seen from illustration 3.

Illustration 3

Motivation for Positive Change

Amongst the group, positive futures were constructed as an ideal combination of having a home, a job or an education, feeling healthy and that this would also include a wife, life partner and or a family (for some this was reconnecting with family). It was clear from the discussions that all of the participants reported that they wanted to improve their current situation, therefore identifying hope and aspiration to desist. The self-recognition of a desire for change is identified within the literature as the first phase of desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; King, 2012) thereby providing an opportunity for intervention. It was very clear from the narratives shared that the members knew what they needed but not necessarily how they would be able to secure all of their aspirations despite being motivated and passionate in discussing them. There was a common narrative that emerged during this discussion thread that despite their best efforts to desist 'the system' did not support them and this was the main barrier to their desistance. In many ways the notion of structural barriers seen as systematic failure by the participants is reminiscent of McNeill's (2018; 2019) explanations discussed previously about the rehabilitative factors necessary for desistance to occur.

Indeed, data from the second engagement event supported the views of the first group in that the overriding need for security and stability had to be the first challenge to be overcome before consideration could be given to any form of education. Once these had been met, then the idea of developing a new identity through education was considered as a main motivation and outcome which again supports the previous research in this area (Giordano et al., 2002; Dufour et al., 2015; Abeling-Judge, 2016). The words 'new identity' were not used by the members but there were phrases such as "*it would give me a new me*" and "*would change my mindset"* and offer me a "*new peer group*" and "*give me greater confidence*" as can be seen below in illustrations 4 and 5.

Illustration 4

Illustration 5

Aspirations and Higher Education

A number of participants in the first focus group and all of the participants from the second group identified that education was indeed an aspiration for many people with a criminal conviction. Reflecting the views of the PET (2017), however during both focus groups, the idea of higher education was discussed in relation to negative perceptions that universities are not places for "*people like me*". There were also associated feelings of a lack of confidence to pursue higher education because of the perceptions of the university environment (see illustration 6 below). Such views raised the question about how higher education can reach out to this marginalised group of adult learners.

There was a strong theme that higher education did not really "*want people on courses with problems*" like them in relation to their previous convictions and current mental health and or substance use issues. There also remained for some, an inherent suspicion of universities. One participant expressed that he felt he had been lied to by the university about the programme of study and that it did not support or contain the learning opportunities it advertised. This meant that this male had a distrust of universities and their motives being focused on income generation and this was agreed as a view across the wider group of the member's focus group in the first engagement event.

Illustration 6

However, there were some positive responses about the ability of university to enrich lives. For both of the participants in the second focus group who had served a custodial sentence, leaving prison with a focus and trying to forge a new identity or one that was aligned to a better future was seen as a priority,

> *"I have been lucky, my wife stood by me, but I can't return to my old life as a solicitor but what I am hoping for is that with the support of my family and staff at the prison I can get this PhD and start a new career within academia."* – Tony, first year PhD student

Both participants from the second group who were currently studying within higher education discussed how it was the motivation they needed to "*do something positive*" and start a "*change within me*" and that,

> *"It worked and slowly I started to change and didn't want to hang around with the same people anymore as I was different*." – John, level five undergraduate student

In the first focus group there were four (three male, one female) participants who had been to university. One male had completed a drama degree, a female an unspecified undergraduate degree, a further male began an engineering degree but failed to finish the course and then went onto nursing but not degree based. The fourth participant started an educational programme in prison which led to a place at university on release and completed a degree in engineering. This participant also took part in lecturing but following the suicide of his daughter and death of wife his life spiralled back into substance use and depression.

Importantly, however all of the participants who had been to university expressed that the impact on their lives at the time, had been positive. It had raised their self-esteem, social capital, and their confidence and skills factors associated with desistance (Allred et al., 2013; Lockwood et al., 2012; Maruna, 2011; Meyer & Randall, 2013; Runnel, 2017; Zgoba et al., 2008).

It was clear that higher education was not one of the first aspirations for many of the members involved in the focus groups or seen as one for those that worked alongside such people within support services. There was however strong agreement that with the right support and delivery higher education could be a positive experience providing a 'hook for change' (Giordano et al., 2002) in supporting the formation of new identities and opportunities towards desistance and positive life outcomes (see illustration 9). It is clear that the university environment has excellent potential to offer recognition, hope, and self-esteem and worth to adult learners offering strong relational desistance at the macro level as described by Nugent and Schinkel (2016) which was acknowledged by those members that had been to university and could be a key factor for other such learners.

Educational Experiences

Illustration 7

In order to understand the participants' suspicions about university and for some even the idea of re-engaging with education we sought to explore their previous experiences of education. Overwhelmingly and illustrative of the previous literature (Warner, 2007; Czerniawski, 2016; Torlone & Vryonides, 2016; Wood, 2020), for the participants in group one, education had not been a positive experience, therefore seeking to raise their own aspirations of attending university appeared a challenge. Most participants (twelve) reported issues with primary and secondary education. One male participant used the metaphor of feeling like a "*fish in a bowl throughout school*" to express the sadness, isolation, and vulnerability that he felt. Represented in illustration 7, this visualisation captured the consensus within the group.

Ten out of the twelve participants identified learning difficulties as a barrier to education and reported that their behaviour within formal educational environments led to exclusion. Bullying was also a common theme with this group from peers and worryingly from educators. Feelings of alienation were commonly reported as was a lack of recognition by educational establishments of their wider challenges such as family trauma, behavioural and mental health issues. Overall, primary and secondary school was generally constructed as exclusionary, intimidating and a negative and damaging experience. School was also constructed as part of the 'system' that further ostracised them from being able to feel happy, secure, and valued.

However, somewhat ironically, for those participants who had been to prison, the education provision within that context offered hope and aspiration arguably reflecting some of the more positive and innovative research into prison education (Warner, 2007; Wood, 2020). Indeed, this group reported that prison had been the beginning of their education, offering opportunity to develop some basic skills such as reading and writing and for one participant as highlighted above; it offered the chance to engage in a higher level of educational attainment which they pursued at university on release from prison.

Those that had studied within the prison environment also believed that it was the "*right time*" for them and they were now "*ready to learn*" in the prison environment and could appreciate the values of education as it could "*open up doors*" for a positive future in employment and/or further or higher education. It was explained by many that they were simply not ready during primary and secondary education which was often negative and along with significant other family and social challenges meant they could not engage and find value in learning at this time. Those that had been a student within prison also reported they gained greater self-respect and were often treated more like students; this reflects Warner's (2007) view that prisons can and should be rehabilitative environments utilising an education model that focuses on a person's humanity and citizenship.

Illustration 8

Data from engagement event two, wholeheartedly supported the experiences of education from the participants in group one. From the narratives of the practitioners, exclusion from school was a common experience for prisoners and those with a conviction in the community. A poor experience of education was likely to put people off thinking about education as the hook for change. To overcome this challenge the focus groups felt that there needed to be support to develop a change of mind-set in those with a criminal record to better understand the opportunities and positives experiences that education can offer using taster sessions and engagement of education providers within community settings.

There was also a consensus that support services and academic staff should be better informed about how to support this marginalised group of learners. Identifying a key mentor/service within a university that had been trained to understand the unmet and complex needs of offenders/ex-offenders was strongly suggested to help to bridge this gap (see illustration 8) and that this service could also be part of a community outreach approach to engage such potential students.

Barriers and Challenges to Engaging with Higher Education

Illustration 9

As already shown, the narratives around both the environment and the potential outcomes of higher education were conflicting. However, there was a consensus within both groups that identified university as marketing itself as a vehicle for gaining employment. Yet, the participants from group one felt that the level of debt acquired during the course of attaining a degree was excessive and there were no guarantees that it would lead to a job which as was

presented earlier was seen as a bedrock for successful desistance. There are obvious financial commitments to studying either part or full time and Wales has student finance for both routes to support studying within a higher education environment. It was clear that despite the student finance available the people from engagement group one did not know of or fully understand the financial support that was available to them and therefore assumed it would cost a lot of money and be in debt. The idea of taking a student loan and having to pay it back was not something that the group viewed as a positive step in their rehabilitation. It could be argued that there needs to be much more appropriate community engagement with marginalised groups to explain the benefits of higher education especially from a financial perspective and to more clearly provide accessible student finance information to such people and communities. It was suggested that such work could be achieved through a university's approach to promoting higher education to such groups ensuring it was based within a community setting.

There was recognition however that university could help people to gain confidence and improve their well-being and "*open the door*" to a positive future. One participant reported,

> *"I applied for University but they rejected me because of my conviction – only drink related offences mind you – but they rejected me anyway but even when I walk across the campus now I feel proud and it makes me walk with my head held high – the University has a good vibe about it."* – Jack, male, mid 40s

Participants in engagement event two highlighted that universities offered the chance for those at risk of offending to develop critical thinking skills which may help with self-reflection - a necessary dynamic for a positive desistance journey (Behan, 2014; Costello & Warner, 2014). Aside of the academic progression and attainment, it also opened access to new friendships and circles of support and influence (King, 2012) and an opportunity for some form of redemption by making families proud.

Illustration 10

The data from engagement event two, identified that higher education should fulfil the aspirations of those at risk of offending if it could develop 'clever hooks for change' and there was general consensus that this should be small higher educational experiences to build interest and confidence (Runnel, 2017). Calling for this "*diversification*" (see illustration 10) the participants identified that this might include reaching out to local community organisations located within grass-roots movements who work with those seeking to attain desistance so there is a within community experience that embeds the learner within local networks, and civic life and

society (McNeil, 2018; 2019).

There was also agreement that the university should be accountable and responsible for reducing any barriers by "*bridging the gap*" thus making higher education attainable. Within a Welsh context, the new policy for Adult Learning in Wales was released in 2017. Introducing the term "Adult Community Learning" (ACL) - which is defined as flexible learning opportunities for adults, delivered in community venues to meet local needs - the ACL strategy supports the vision outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). One of the key overarching well-being goals prescribed in this piece of legislation, is to create a more equal Wales where there is a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances. In adopting an inclusive outreach approach through the aims of ACL it might be argued the higher education provision in Wales would be closely aligned to meeting the needs of those with aspirations to desist as it states that provision should ideally offer introductory 'hook' courses. The policy context and narrative in Wales therefore offers hope and direction for the development of appropriate higher education pathways for those with a criminal record and at risk of offending.

Whilst these policy shifts are encouraging, the focus groups pointed out there was a significant need to ensure that the wider university support services and learning environment were equipped to meet the wide range of needs of "*students like them*". Aside of standard services such as well-being, health services, and student finance, the group also called for specialised non-judgmental services that could support their transition to university life. In addition to the issues identified above, both events identified a number of specific barriers to accessing higher education that focused on sourcing funding, judgment and stigma. These sub themes are discussed below.

Illustration 11

Funding

Aside of the practitioners in group two, all of the participants reported financial hardship. Their income was derived from state benefits and the majority had no access to transport so simply paying public transport fares was often a challenge. Therefore, as discussed earlier university was perceived as something that was financially unattainable and that the debt associated with going to university outweighed the benefits. Participants were unaware of the funding available for part-time adult learners following the implementation of the Diamond Review recommendations in 2018 regarding higher education and student finance in Wales and so it is clear that there remains the need for appropriate and accessible information for potential stu-

dents with complex social backgrounds. Such accurate information would help in the informed decision making process and reduce the perception of barriers relating to funding and costs of studying within higher education.

Judgement and Stigma

The participants reported that they felt their convictions would prevent them from going to university. One participant reported that he had been told that he needed to be,

> *"clean from drugs for two years before I can start doing courses, it's really fucking hard."*- Trevor, male mid-30s

Another participant articulated the views of the group when he said,

> *"if you have the money, they'll take you but not if you have a conviction.*"- Sam, male late-20s

The expression of isolation and the stigma associated with having a criminal conviction was overwhelming for this group as can be identified in illustration 6 above. One of the group stated that if you have a conviction you are marked and it "*sticks to you forever*" and that they (higher education and potential employers) "*only see the crime*"; this was clearly upsetting to the participant and he expressed a view that there was little future opportunity due to his criminal record.

Students in the UK who submit their higher education course applications through UCAS do not now have to declare convictions (spent or otherwise) unless it is a certain type of course that works with children, young people or vulnerable adults (UCAS, 2020). Unfortunately, this is not always the case for part-time programmes as universities can require disclosure within their own policy and practice. Given the desire of some participants to support others in similar situations to themselves, it is likely that degree programmes that would support such aspiration would be within the 'working with vulnerable people' group such as youth and community work, housing studies, social work, and broader health and social care programmes and still require criminal record disclosure. This could be a significant limitation to supporting a desistance journey (Bradbury, 2017) and a needed consideration for inclusive change within higher education institutions that offer such programmes and the sectors that they work in partnership with.

Illustration 12

A further finding of this research was the identification of stigma experienced at all levels and in all environments by those who were studying whilst serving a prison sentence. Both participants in group two explained that whilst they appreciated the opportunity to study, their student experience had been hindered by the prison process. For example, where students were given release to attend lectures, but transport failed to turn up, the consequence was missed lectures. The participants also reported that they were often excluded from student groups and not allowed to go to social events due to restrictions imposed by the prison. However, this isolation and experience of stigma continued within the prison environment as well.

Both participants spoke of feeling both physically and emotionally isolated from other

prisoners and that this contributed to negative outcomes including; jealously and envy, perceptions of hierarchy with a "*you think you are better than us*" narrative (visualised in illustration 12) and this was from both other prisoners and the prison staff. This meant that people in prison who were in education felt isolated and had no safe space or identity. Participants identified that they needed transition support within the prison and outside the prison environment to stop any relapse towards cycles of offending and to positively support their choice to engage with education not stigmatise it and negatively challenge it. It was suggested that a role such as a key worker who would support people transitioning from prison to the community would be beneficial and that this would be different to a parole officer or social worker and more focused on development of education and transition to education in community and institutional settings such as further and higher education. It was also suggested that prison staff needed further and ongoing training to highlight the positive benefits of prisoners engaging with education and the supportive and rehabilitation role that prison staff should all take to create supportive environments for positive change. This is a significant finding that has not been identified within the current literature and despite being a perspective from a small group of people does suggest that prison environment can be negative and stigmatising to those that chose to engage with education and act as a further barrier to desistance and so needs further exploration to see if this is a more common experience within prison contexts.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the role of higher education in supporting aspiration towards desistance in a localised area, Swansea. In addressing the primary aim of this research, it suggests that for higher education to be considered as a meaningful 'hook for change', the basic needs of potential individual students have to be addressed. The needs of this group, like many people who have a conviction and/or have been within the prison system, were complex and multi-layered with mental health, substance misuse issues, stable accommodation and relational insecurities common. Therefore, understanding how universities support potential learners with their aspirations to attain a higher education requires a renewed vision to alleviate the 'pains of desistance' (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016).

A key finding of this study was the role that prison plays in providing the positive exposure to education. For many of the participants their positive experience of education began during a prison sentence. This therefore lends support to the growing number of university-prison partnership initiatives discussed in previous volumes of this journal (Turner et al., 2019; Gray, Ward & Fogarty, 2019). However, in listening to the voices of our participants a renewed model of delivery was envisaged.

There was a clear sense that the existing models of university-prison delivery might be built upon within a community setting (Gosling & Burke, 2019). However, such projects should not be exclusively focused on the 'inside-student' and opening up the opportunity to those wishing to desist within the community, whether they had served a custodial sentence or not, would provide more equitable access and support this community in meeting many of the same challenges and experiences in their desistance journey as those within prison. The focus on the 'inside-student' is logically more dominant because such learners are within a controlled and easily managed system and there are policy and practice drivers ensuring prison education is a key focus for rehabilitation and desistance (Coates Review, 2016). There also seems to be a greater focus on employment for those leaving prison or those that have offended within the community both in the literature findings (Senkans et al., 2015) and within the participants of this research. There needs to be more support through all stakeholders to better engage within the community setting to ensure the message that higher education is a useful and powerful experience for desistance.

The data from this study suggest that for models of higher education within the community to be appealing to this group of potential learners there needs to be recognition of the

specific needs of this cohort and recognition and relations built with such learners (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). Therefore, as a starting point those tasked with widening access might need to consider reaching out to organisations that work with those at risk of offending. This would call for a commitment from the university to work in partnership with the external organisation (in this case the Include Hub) to develop a programme of learning similar to that of the existing prison – university courses. The programme would need to be supported by external practitioners who understood the background and specific needs of the students. This expertise might be utilised as upskilling training for university staff or indeed bespoke support to students so that they did not feel threatened or exposed (and therefore did not feel "*stupid*" and "*out of place*" like they believed they would within the university setting). It could mean that such a partnership approach and support delivery is in place for the first few years of education and then university services maintains and completes that support until graduation. This model means that people from offending backgrounds have initial familiar community embedded support whilst also engaging with the university support services as their confidence, trust and new social networks are established and consolidated. The student is then much more likely to effectively transition to a new student identity with confidence and better able to use and engage with support from the university. This model also ensures that the university and its support staff are appropriately educated and trained in developing their expertise and still have a knowledgeable expert in the community to support this marginalised group of students with complex needs. The findings also suggest that introductory, free taster sessions would facilitate confidence building by seeking to erode past negative educational experiences and engender a dialogue of trust that moves away from the deeply held mistrust of universities as elite neo-liberal institutions that focus on exclusion and monetary gain.

Critically however, the study also highlighted the issue of stigma for this potential group of learners. Whether real or perceived, stigma was experienced by those studying at university whilst serving a prison sentence at every level. Exclusion from student events and discrimination from prison staff indicated that the path to desistance is fragile at every point when feelings of alienation and not fitting into either environment are present. Therefore, in learning from these negative experiences, it is vital that any community education programmes or integrated university courses seek to address the stigma experienced by this group of learners. This might begin with a review of admission process which still require a conviction to be disclosed through to the development of policies that recognise the contribution this group of learners can make to the educational environment in terms of diversity and inclusivity.

In this respect, any new models of delivery might use the 'recovery capital' (Cloud & Granfield, 2009) model as a framework for pedagogical structure and delivery. Adopting such an approach would support the views of McNeill (2018; 2019) and his idea of integrated factors necessary for successful long-term desistance. According to this vision desistance and rehabilitation is possible only through mutual recognition and respect of the individual, the citizen, civil society, and the state. Therefore, real and meaningful liberation and integration into the community for those wishing to desist is reliant on a successful journey of the four aspects of desistance which are; personal rehabilitation, social rehabilitation, judicial rehabilitation, and moral and political rehabilitation (McNeill, 2018; 2019). It is clear that personal rehabilitation of the learner could be well fulfilled by engagement with higher education and all it can offer in the development of new knowledge and skills and exposure to new values and beliefs and this was supported by the members of this research. Social rehabilitation within the context of higher education is also obvious with the positive opportunities and pathways to engage with diverse and positive social networks supporting the development of social capital and also within a community support project that would offer further engagement 'back into' the community with its citizens and other opportunities. Judicial rehabilitation within such a higher education and community delivery project would need positive collaboration with the criminal justice system and within a community setting the probation service would be integral. The

probation service would need to ensure that the criminal label, language, and stigma is dropped and the re-labelling to citizen and recognition of a non-criminal identity is important. Finally, moral and political rehabilitation could be supported through engagement with the partner community project and in this way support reintegration into the community with reflective dialogue on their past criminal activity and the reasons and conditions that facilitated such choices and actions.

In this way the individual is supported in all four areas resulting in the development of personal agency to make positive and informed life choices and it is clear that such a higher education approach could play a significant role in the desistance of learners. Indeed, if developed and supported this approach could increasingly be seen as an innovative widening access role of universities across the UK and increase their civic mission and community education engagement. In this world higher education would be about supporting people from all walks of life in their transition from a non-university student to a citizen of the globe who is educationally attractive to prospective employers and a positive role model for others.

Therefore, it is clear from this pilot study, that higher education can be part of the desistance framework within a community setting. However, there is still has a long way to go. Exposure to institutional and society personal stigma, mistrust of corporate institutions and an internalising of negative past educational experiences are powerful challenges which need to be overcome. It really is a question of whether universities can put the needs of those at risk of offending above the reputational risk that goes alongside innovative projects that truly seek to make a higher education accessible to all and support the path to sustained desistance.

To conclude, what was abundantly clear from this project is that listening to the voices of the marginalised can provide clear solutions. Indeed, in the true sense of putting the voices of the participants at the centre of this research, we would like to finish with a quote from Fergus, a male in his mid-50s from group one, who expressed the impact of the narrative mapping experience in enabling those at risk of offending to transitioning to their new identity whatever that may be:

> *"This is great, can we have a copy?* [of the narrative mapping poster] *and then we can go back every couple of weeks and think about what we said today and see if we are getting to where we want to be."*

Appendix – Narrative Focus Group One and Group Two

Debbie Jones Associate Professor in Criminology, Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law, Swansea University Deborah.a.jones@swansea.ac.uk
Mark Jones Associate Professor in Education, DACE, School of Education, College Arts & Humanities, Swansea University, M.A.C.Jones@swansea.ac.uk

Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe SRHE

Debbie Jones Associate Professor in Criminology, Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law, Swansea University Deborah.a.jones@swansea.ac.uk
Mark Jones Associate Professor in Education, DACE, School of Education, College Arts & Humanities, Swansea University, M.A.C.Jones@swansea.ac.uk

References

Abeling-Judge, D. (2016). Different Social Influences and Desistance from Crime. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, *43(9)*, 1225-1241.

Allred, S. L., Harrison, L. D., & O'Connell, D. J. (2013). Self-efficacy an Important Aspect of Prison-based Learning. *The Prison Journal*, *93*, 211-233.

Armstrong, R. and Ludlow, A. (2016). Educational partnerships between universities and prisons: How learning together can be individually, socially and institutionally transformative. *Prison Service Journal, 225*, 9-17.

Behan, C. (2014). Learning to escape: Prison education, rehabilitation and the potential for transformation. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry, 1*(1), 20-31. doi: 10.15845/jper.v1i1.594

Best, D. and Laudet, A. (2010). *The Potential of Recovery Capital*, Available at: https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/blogs/a4-recovery-capital-230710-v5.pdf

Blomberg, T. G., Bales, W. D., Mann, K., Piquero, A. R., and Berk, R. A. (2011). Incarceration, Education and Transition from Delinquency. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *39(4)*, 355-365.

Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L. and Turner, S. (2018). Does providing inmates with education improve post-release outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 14*(1), 1-40. doi: 10.1007/s11292-018-9334-6

Bradley, A. (2017). *Trauma-informed practice: Exploring the role of adverse life experiences on the behaviour of offenders and the effectiveness of associated criminal justice strategies.* Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University. http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/5460/

Brown, M. (2014). Visual Criminology and Carceral Studies. *Theoretical Criminology, 18(2),* 176-197.

Butcher, J. (2020). Unheard: The Voices of Part-Time Adult Learners, *Higher Education Policy Institute,* Oxford.

Carr, N., Bauwens, A., Bosker, J., Donker, A., Robinson, G., Sucic, I., and Worrall, A. (2015). Picturing Probation: Exploring the Utility of Visual methods in Comparative Research. *European Journal of Probation, 7*(*3*), 179-200.

Clark, R. (2016). How education transforms: Evidence from the experience of prisoners' education trust on how education supports prisoner journeys. *Prison Service Journal, 225*, 3-8.

Cloud, W. and Granfield, W. (2009). Conceptualising recovery capital: Expansion of a theoretical construct. *Substance Use and Misuse, 42*(12/13), 1971-1986.

Coates, S. (2016). *Unlocking Potential: A Review of Education in Prison*. Retrieved 06 June, 2019 from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf

Costelloe, A. and Warner, K. (2014). Prison education across Europe: Policy, practice, politics. *London Review of Education*, *12*(2), 175-183. doi: 10.18546/LRE.12.2.03

Czerniawski, G. (2016). A race to the bottom – prison education and the English and Welsh policy context. *Journal of Education Policy*, *31*(2), 198-212, doi: 10.1080/02680939.2015.1062146

Darke, S. and Aresti, A. (2016). Connecting prisons and universities through higher education. *Prison Service Journal, 225*, 26- 32. Retrieved from https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/ files/PSJ%20225%20May%202016.pdf

Denscombe, M. (2014). *The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Social Research Projects*. Fifth edition. Open University Press, Maidenhead.

Dufour, I., Brassard, R., and Martel, J. (2015). An Integrative Approach to Apprehend Desistance. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *59*(5), 480-501.

Edgar, K., Aresti, A. and Cornish, N. (2012). *Out for Good: Taking Responsibility for Resettlement*. London: Prison.

Evans, C., Rees, G., Taylor, C., and Wright, C. (2017). 'Widening Access' to Higher Education: The Reproduction of University Hierarchies Through Policy Enactment. *Journal of Education Policy*, *34*(1), 101-116.

Ford, J. A. and Schroeder, R.D. (2010). Higher education and criminal offending over the life course. *Sociological Spectrum*, *31*(1), 32-58. doi: 10.1080/02732173.2011.525695

Francis, P. (2009). Visual Criminology. *Criminal Justice Matters,* 78.

Fromm, E. (2013). *The sane society.* Open Road Media, ISBN 1480402052, 9781480402058

Giordano, P., Cernkovich, S., and Rudolph, J. (2002). Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, *107*(4), 990-1064.

Glaw, X., Inder, K., Kable, A, and Hazelton, M.(2017), Visual Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Autophotography and Photo Elicitation Applied to Mental Health Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*, 1-8.

Gosling, H and Burke, L. (2019). "People Like Me Don't Belong in Places Like This": Creating and Developing a Community of Learners Beyond the Prison Gates. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry 6*(1), 46-61.

Gray, N., Ward, J, and Fogarty, J. (2019). Transformative Learning Through University and Prison Partnerships: Reflections From "Learning Together" Pedagogical Practice. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry*, *6*(1), 8-24.

Hall H, Griffiths D, and McKenna, L. (2013). From Darwin to Constructivism: The Evolution of Grounded Theory. *Nurse Researcher*, *20*(3), 17-21.

Harris, T.(2014). Grounded Theory. *Nursing Standard*, *29(35),* 3239. doi:10.7748/ns.29.35.32.e9568.

Hennink, M. (2014). *Focus Group Discussions. Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford University Press.

Jarvis, A. (2020). *To help 'left behind' Britain, more adults need to feel able to go to university.* Guardian, March 2nd 2020, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/mar/02/to-help-left-behind-britain-more-adults-need-to-feel-able-to-go-to-university

King, A. (2012). Transformative agency and desistance from crime. *Criminology and Criminal Justice. 13*(3), 317-335. doi: 10.1177/1748895812452282

King, H., Measham, F. and O'Brien, K. (2019). Building bridges across diversity: Utilising the Inside-Out prison exchange programme to promote egalitarian higher education community within three UK prisons. *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversity in Education. 4(1), 66–81. doi: 10.4018/ ijbide.2019010105*

Lapum, J., Liu, L., Hume, S., Wang, S., Nguyen, B. and Harding, K. (2015). Pictorial Narrative Mapping as a Qualitative Analytic Technique. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *14*(5).

Laub, J. and Sampson, R. (2001). Understanding Desistance from Crime. *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, *Vol 28,* 1-69.

Lockwood, S., Nally, J., Ho, T. and Knutson, K., (2012). The Effect of Correctional Education on Post release Employment and Recidivism: A 5-Year Follow-Up Study in the State of Indiana. *Crime and Delinquency*, *58*(3), 380-396.

Maruna, S. (2011). Re-entry as a Rite of Passage. *Punishment & Society*, *13,* 3-28.

Meyer, S. J. and Randel, B. (2013). The impact of an Associate's Degree Program for Incarcerated Students a Randomized Trial of the Correctional Education Association College of the Air Program. *Community College Review*, *41*, 223-248.

McNeill, F. (2019). *Making Rehabilitation Work for Ex-prisoners*. Retrieved June 03, 2019, from https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/news/news-items/making- r e - habilitation-work-for-ex-prisoners/

McNeill, F. (2018) *Rehabilitation, Corrections and Society*. Retrieved July 01, 2019, from http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/159625/7/159625.pdf

McNeill, F., Farrall, S., Lightowler, C., and Maruna, S. (2012). How and Why People Stop Offending: Discovering Desistance. *Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services. Enlighten* – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow. Retrieved June 05, 2019 from http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/79860/1/79860.pdf

McSweeney, T. (2010). Recovery, desistance and 'coerced' treatment. In: Yates R, Malloch M (Eds.) *Tackling Addiction: Pathways to Recovery*. London: Jessica Kingsley, pp.179–189.

Ministry of Justice. (2013). *Justice Data Lab re-offending analysis: Prisoners Education Trust.* London, United Kingdom: Ministry of Justice

Ministry of Justice. (2010). *Understanding Desistance from Crime*. Available at: http://www.safeground.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Desistance-Fact-Sheet.pdf

Nugent, B., and Schinkel, M. (2016). The Pains of Desistance. *Criminology and Criminal Justice, 16*(5), 568-584.

Ochieng, N. T., Wilson, K, Derrick, C. J, and Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods Ecol Evol 2018 9:*20–32 https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.12860

Pike, A. and Adams, A. (2012). Digital exclusion or learning exclusion: An ethnographic study of adult make distance learners in English prisons. *Research in Learning Technology, 20*, 363-376. doi: 10.3402/rlt. v20i0.18620

Pompa, L. (2013). One brick at a time: The power and possibility of dialogue across the prison wall. *Prison Journal, 93*(2), 127-134. doi: 10.1177/0032885512472479

Prison Education Trust (2017). *To be Truly Inclusive, Universities Must Help Prisoners Feel They Belong.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/aug/16/to-be-truly-inclusive-universities-must-help-prisoners-feel-they-belong

Runell, L. (2017). Identifying Desistance Pathways in a Higher Education Program for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *61*(8), 894-918.

Sandberg,S and Ugelvik, T. (2016). The Past, Present and Future of Narrative Criminology: A Review and an Invitation. *Crime, Media and Culture*, *12 (2),* 129-136.

Senkans, S., Thakker, J. and Ward, T. (2015). Desistance in Offenders with Mental Illness, in Winstone, J. (Ed.) *Mental Health, Crime and Criminal Justice: Responses and Reforms.* London: Palgrave, pp. 67-90.

Shapland, J., and Bottoms, A. (2011). Reflections on Social Values, Offending and Desistance Among Young Adult Recidivists. *Punishment and Society*, *13*(3), 256-282.

Sim, J. and Waterfield, J. (2019). Focus group methodology: some ethical challenges. *Qual Quant 53, 3003–3022* https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00914-5

Stern, K. (2014). *Voices from American prisons: Faith, education and healing.* Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Stewart D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., and Rook, D. W. (2014) *Focus Groups. Theory and Practice* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Sykes, G. M., and Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, *22*(6), 664-670.

Szifris, K., Fox, C., and Bradbury, A. (2018). A realist model of prison education, growth, and desistance: A new theory. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *5(1),* 41-62. doi: 10.25771/qac7-9w77

Torlone, F. and Vryonides, M. (2016) *Innovative Learning Models for Prisoners*. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, 2016, Firenze University Press. ISBN 978-88-6655-923-8

Turner, E., Borad, R., Miles, C and Maruna, S. (2019). Learning Desistance Together. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry, 6*(1), 96-112.

Vaughan, B. (2007). The Internal Narrative of Desistance. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *47(3)*, 390-404.

Warner, K. (2007). Against the Narrowing of Perspectives: How Do We See Learning, Prisons and Prisoners? *Journal of Correctional Education, 58*(2), 170-183. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/23282735

Weale, S. (2018). *UCAS drops need for university applicants to declare convictions*. Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/may/29/ucas-drops-need-for-university-applicants-to-declare-convictions

Weaver, B., & McNeill, F. (2015). Lifelines: Desistance, Social Relations, and Reciprocity. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, *42*(1), 95-107.

Welsh Government. (2017). *Adult Learning in Wales*. Welsh Government, available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/adult-learning-in-wales.pdf

Wilson, D. and Reuss, A. (2000). *Prison(er) education: Stories of change and transformation*. Winchester, United Kingdom: Waterside Press.

Wood, S. (2020). *Inmates share inspirational prison education stories in powerful new book.* June 9th, 2020. The Big Issue. Available at: https://www.bigissue.com/latest/social-activism/hmp-pentonville-prisoners-education-trust/

Woolcock, M. and Narayan, D. (2000). Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy. *The World Bank Research Observer*, *15(2*), 225-249.

Zgoba, K. M., Haugebrook, S., and Jenkins, K. (2008). The Influence of GED Obtainment on Inmate Release Outcome. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour, 35(3),* 375-387.

Mark is director at Higher Plain Research and Education and former Associate Professor of Education with over 22 years' experience working with people in the community with the last 11 years' within Higher Education specialising in pedagogy, reflective practice and education research with marginalised groups using inclusive qualitative research. Mark is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and professionally qualified youth and community practitioner. You can contact Mark at higherplainresearcheducation@gmail.com

Debbie is an Associate Professor in Criminology and Director of Undergraduate Studies, The Hillary Rodham Clinton, School of Law, Swansea University. She is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Debbie's has focused her academic career on the development of inclusive research and teaching methodologies that seek to empower those experiencing disadvantage and stigma. You can read more about Debbie here https://www.swansea.ac.uk/staff/law/jones-d-a/

Journal of Prison Education and Reentry

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2020

RESEARCH PAPER

JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

The Open University and Prison Education in the UK – the First 50 Years

ROD EARLE
The Open University, UK

JAMES MEHIGAN
University of Canterbury, New Zealand

ANNE PIKE
The Open University, UK

DAN WEINBREN
The Open University, UK

Abstract: *In 2019, The Open University (henceforth, The OU), based in Milton Keynes in the UK, celebrated its 50th anniversary. Since 1971 it has pioneered the delivery of Higher Education in prisons and other secure settings. Some 50 years on, in 2021 there is much to celebrate and still more to learn. In this article we briefly review the establishment of the OU in 1969 and explore how it has maintained access to higher education in the prison system. It draws from a collection of essays and reflections on prison learning experiences developed by OU academics and former and continuing OU students in prison (Earle & Mehigan, 2019). We begin by outlining the unique features of the OU and the circumstances of its establishment in the post-war period in the UK. We then present an account of its work with students in prison in the UK (and elsewhere) and conclude with some critical reflections on the place and prospects of higher education in an expanding Higher Education sector and an escalating preference for carceral punishment in the UK. No country on Earth can match the penal preferences of the United States, but the UK's habit of slipstreaming behind its massive carceral bulk tends to obscure the fact that the UK punishes more people with imprisonment, and with longer sentences, than any other Western European state. It also manages to exceed the United States in rates of racial disproportionality in its carceral population (Phillips, 2013). Despite these outlier features in incarceration, a silver lining to the carceral cloud can be found in The OU's pioneering work with imprisoned men and women.*

Keywords: *education, prison, prisoner, The Open University*

A University of the Air? The Foundation of The Open University

Widely regarded as one of the world's greatest educational innovations, the origins of the OU are less widely known than they should be, both in the UK and internationally. Although correspondence courses and the use of radio and television for educational purposes were becoming familiar features of the post-war educational landscape in the UK, it was only in 1963, after the leader of the Labour Party, Harold Wilson, promoted a 'university of the air',

Correspondence: Rod Earle, Email: r.earle@open.ac.uk

(Accepted: 30 May 2021) ISSN: 2387-2306 doi: https://doi.org/10.25771/yq2e-xc25

that the idea properly took flight. In 1964 as Prime Minister of the Labour government Wilson appointed Jennie Lee to take his sketchy idea and make it a reality.

Jennie Lee was the youngest woman ever to be elected to the UK parliament when she won her seat in 1929. Aged 25 she was herself too young to vote, but she was radical and eloquent, with family roots in Scotland's working class socialist and communitarian cultures. At age 60, she became the motive force behind the plan and ensured that the Open University overcame the scepticism and ridicule that initially confronted Harold Wilson's proposal. It was an idea aligned with Wilson's faith that, in the 1960s, he could modernise an ailing post-Imperial Britain using 'the white heat of the technological revolution' that was sweeping the richer countries of the West. This was a period when scientific intellectuals and rational planners with technocratic expertise, were increasingly influential. There were substantial efforts to restructure, on scientific lines, the civil service, industrial relations, and the criminal justice system. With his idea for a 'university of the air' Wilson wanted television and broadcast media to deliver higher education to anyone who wanted it rather than just 'the chosen' ones of the upper classes rich enough to afford it. Readers outside the UK may not fully appreciate how deeply and fully implicated university education in the UK is in the reproduction of the privileges of its enduring class hierarchy (Reay, 2017). Within the UK, class-based inequalities in education have persisted for decades. In 1961 around 25% of undergraduates were from manual backgrounds, compared with 28% in 2008 (Bolton, 2010). Since that time, while the number of students has increased, the socioeconomic disparities have remained (Machin & Vignoles, 2004).

Although Wilson himself was a rare working-class graduate of Oxford University, graduating with some of the highest marks ever achieved in its Politics, Philosophy, Economics degree, he had reasons aplenty to shake the traditional university system's grip on higher education (see Weinbren, 2014; Weinbren, 2019). Jennie Lee's skilful management and vision for a full university, rather than a technical or vocational training college, that would have national reach into parts of the population left behind by the post-war expansion of universities was as essential as it is under-sung. In the early 1960s, the UK lagged well behind the rest of Europe, the USA and the USSR in expanding and extending university provision. Only about 4% of school leavers went into the university system and its routine neglect of working-class young people was increasingly exposed as an enduring and profoundly consequential social injustice. The new universities subsequently established in the first phase of post-war expansion succeeded mainly in extending provision to more of the white middle class, notably "the daughters of the sharper-elbowed middle class" (Hollis, 1997, p. 146).

Much of the UK's well-heeled, university-educated establishment scoffed at Harold Wilson's 'pipe dream', suggesting it did little more than reveal a typical socialist's idealism, at "their most endearing but impractical worst" (cited in Hollis, 1997 p. 148). A recurring theme of the sniping and condescension was that an open university would be a 'haven for housebound Guardian housewives' (McIntosh, 1975, p. 12). The Controller of BBC, Stuart Hood, compared the idea to an animated 'historical fossil' lumbering inappropriately out of the dismal socialist fog of the 1930s (Hood, 1967). Nevertheless, Harold Wilson, to his lasting credit, backed Jennie Lee and the Open University became his proudest achievement and a legacy no Prime Minister in the UK since has come close to leaving (Haines, 1998).

In the early days, the OU quickly established a reputation for radicalism. Although this attracted the hostile scrutiny and direct threats of a Conservative government in the 1980s (see Weinbren, 2014), it was initially the result of academically and politically conservative scholars in the UK's most prestigious universities advising their promising post-graduate students to avoid applying for positions in the OU's early recruitment drives 'because it clearly has no long-term future' (Hollis, 1997, p. 150). This advice skewed the recruitment toward a cohort of younger and indeed radical academics emerging from the new universities who were sympathetic to the University's egalitarian mission statement: 'To be open to people, places, methods and ideas'. Its official mandate, secured by a Royal Charter, is 'to promote educational oppor-

tunity and social justice by providing high quality education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential'. Another unusual feature of the Charter required the OU 'to promote the educational well-being of the community generally'. This is significant because although the OU was not specifically obliged to accept prisoners (the decision was made by the first Vice-Chancellor) it could refer to the Charter's implicit endorsement of such an approach.

In 1975, an activist for penal abolition, Dr Mike Fitzgerald, joined the OU Faculty of Social Science (Fitzgerald, 1980). In a 1975 *Review Symposium on Changing the Penal System* and building on the ideas of Thomas Mathiesen (1974), Fitzgerald cautioned against investing in the easily identified *positive reforms* of prison that 'improve or build up the system so that it functions more effectively' but fail to impact on the underpinning ideology. By contrast, he advocated *negative reforms* that 'remove greater or smaller parts on which the prison system in general is more or less dependent' (Fitzgerald, 1975, p. 94). Such reforms constrain expansion and diminish penal options but may appear to lie outside the penal domain. In the Netherlands, for example, and some of the Scandinavian states more influenced by this approach to addressing general social conditions rather than investing in penal solutions to social problems, prisons stand empty and others have closed (Boztas, 2017). Looking forward, the radical visions of critical scholars such as Mike Fitzgerald are needed more than ever to challenge the sweet-toothed preference for positive reforms that deliver penal obesity on the back of a short-lived sugar-rush of philanthropic optimism.

From the Chartists in the mid-19th century, to the Workers Educational Association (WEA), and left-wing summer-schools that grew up in the hard, depression-hit 1930s, radical pedagogies have been linked to various freedom struggles. Women's and Black liberation movements in the USA and the UK have long recognised how emancipation starts in the head as well as the heart, and so it is with prison learning. The front cover of the book the authors of this paper were involved in producing, *Degrees of Freedom* (Earle & Mehigan, 2019), suggests this experience. People sometimes say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but the editors were more than happy for their book to be judged in that way. The cover art was donated by the artist, 'Ben', who was serving his sentence in a Scottish prison. His work has been acclaimed and displayed by the Koestler Trust, a charity that promotes arts and humanities activities in prisons across the UK. He was invited to produce an image for the cover of the book and without much briefing – except that it was about the OU's work in prison – he produced the stunning image on the front cover, a life- and learning-affirming painting of light breaking out of a smiling man's head. As one of the contributors to the book, Erwin James, a former prisoner and established author, has said 'in prison you live in your head' (James, 2012, p. 3). Anyone who has been imprisoned knows the truth of that statement and might also recognise the light that in dark times helps you through time lived without its flow: prison time (Riley, 2019).

Opening the University to Prison Learners

The basic principles of OU teaching have remained reasonably consistent over the last 50 years but are not typical of most universities invested in face-to-face teaching and learning. The OU is a distance-learning institution, unusual in having no entry requirements. Almost anyone is welcome to study anything in the prospectus. Recognising that many people may not know exactly what they want to study as much as the fact that they want to study, OU students can begin studying without a predetermined pathway to a specific qualification. The most popular degree is still, 50 years later, the Open Degree, an assemblage defined and decided by the student's choices, it takes advantage of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) to secure sufficient academic credits at each level. Many students benefit from the flexibilities of this system by using the OU to 'test the water' and establish their confidence to study before moving into the conventional university system with their CATS. This can be particularly attractive to students in prison.

Clear guidance is provided by OU staff and pre-entry support is available to advise

prospective students on the challenges ahead. With no expectations of prior levels of academic achievement, OU learning resources are developed with extraordinary attention to the learner's needs. Many learners may have been failed by their school or left fulltime schooling as soon as it was legal to do so (16 in the UK from the early 1970s). As a result, many will harbour thoughts that they are 'not good enough' for university level study. The OU has from the outset, addressed this false sense of inadequacy by offering 'a second chance' to mature learners. The sense of 'a second chance' resonates even more deeply with students in prison.

All OU students are assumed to have no access to libraries, or to laboratories and specialist technical equipment. These included microscopes, dissection kits, comprehensive reading anthologies, and sample press cuttings. They were provided, traditionally, in a large cardboard box delivered to the student's doorstep and received with much anticipation, excitement, and anxiety by the new student. Prior to the OU being established, nobody believed you could study and practice university-level science without access to a laboratory. Against expectation and prediction, it has enabled prisoners to study science and engineering subjects, if the equipment was allowed through security which wasn't always the case. Kamul Abdul recalls his struggles to study engineering:

> The journey into mathematics and engineering was very difficult within the secure environment… However, perseverance would be rewarded, understanding would unveil itself, and a flood of confidence, enthusiasm and passion would return (stronger). I learnt to become very resourceful. Eventually I was permitted to study an engineering course and, in an aim to bridge theory with practice, I joined the welding workshop, which proved to be equally as important as the OU course material… Although my subject was uncommon, being around other students who had worked equally as hard, and had faced similar issues, reassured, and encouraged my resolve. In spite of this, nothing would have been possible without all the wonderful librarians (non-prisoners) who have encouraged, supported and provided the security of a close OU community – something not easily achieved in prison (Abdul, 2019).

The Open University has a reputation for excellence. It has consistently achieved more than 90% in the National Student Survey, 80% of FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff to take OU courses, and the UK's latest audit of research found that 72% of OU research was world-leading or internationally excellent (FutureLearn, 2021).

Its teaching materials are collectively produced by teams of OU academics and advisers, editors, producers, external contributors, and learning design technicians. Rigorous testing of both the learning material and assessment procedures are a necessary defence against the widespread suspicion that opening access to non-conventional students without proof of prior educational achievement would result in second-rate, or even bogus qualifications. The OU's commitment to robust assessment and extraordinary levels of quality assurance in its learning design have secured its reputation for providing opportunities to gain not merely qualifications but ones recognised as a first-class higher education. It is an early and continuing example of what can be achieved if sufficient resources are providing for 'levelling-up' in place of cheap rhetoric that only levels down.

Once learning materials have been produced, in all their diverse and changing forms of media, they are presented to students by Associate Lecturers (also known as tutors) who usually convene and support regionally based groups of students. Because students in prison cannot participate in these groups, they are allocated a dedicated OU tutor to support their learning. OU tutors use their expertise to curate centrally produced OU content, and as necessary, they arrange graduation ceremonies in prisons. Whenever possible these may include relatives, suitable refreshments, and academic staff wearing, and providing graduates with, gowns.

Learning New Identities

Most prisoners come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and many have experienced family breakdowns, periods in local authority care, physical abuse, trauma, drug and alcohol abuse (Light et al*.,* 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2010: Williams et al*.*, 2012). Prisoners have often also had disrupted school attendance with 63% of adult prisoners having been suspended or temporarily excluded and 42% permanently excluded or expelled from school (Williams et al., 2012). Added to which, a third self-identify as having a learning disability (Coates, 2016). In this context of multiple and compounding deprivation, a sustained period of relatively fixed and predictable accommodation and stable access to sustenance means a prison sentence can sometimes offer a first opportunity at 'the second chance' of an education. Acknowledging education as a basic human right, the Council of Europe states that education in prison should aim to develop the whole person; to limit the damage done by prison, to provide support to address educational disadvantage and to support them turning away from crime (Council of Europe, 1990).

In the UK, prison education departments frequently prioritise basic literacy and numeracy programs, which are clearly important to address the prevalence of this form of educational deficit. They often cannot adequately provide prisoners with the specialist skills and qualifications required to address the profound personal and social development needs that many prisoners require to get close to expectations of social integration and sustainable employment (Clark, 2016). Since a lack of previous education does not equate to a lack of intelligence, when provided with the opportunity and the necessary support to progress many prisoners serving longer sentences flourish in their studies, rising quickly to higher levels (Pike & Hopkins, 2019).

Prisoners may start their learning journeys for many reasons – survival of a long prison sentence, boredom, making loved ones proud and making the best use of their time inside (Hughes, 2012). Some prisoners work their way through all the basic education available from the prison itself and OU study is simply a logical progression. Other prisoners may have previous qualifications and choose to study for their well-being or to re-skill for a change of employment on release (Champion and Noble, 2016). Frequently, interest in OU study may be sparked by seeing other prisoners studying, by participating in a promotional OU seminar, or by being involved in other university-led activities such as Prison University Partnerships that do not match the range or continuity of curriculum provided by the OU. While the initial motivation to start studying is important, what matters most is maintaining progression. With progression comes confidence and with higher level learning comes the ability to critically reflect on a situation; the life that led to prison. Eventually, students begin to see a different future:

> Never in a million years would I have thought I would undertake a degree – yet here I am, doing it! What is most striking is how it turns from something to do with my time in prison into something I do with the rest of my life. (Nic, HMP Parc, 2018, cited in McFarlane and Pike, 2019)

The OU encourages learners to create their own study spaces. After interviewing 53 student prisoners, Forster (1976) concluded that many saw studying as an 'escape from routine'. One prisoner said that he applied to study at the OU 'so that for just a few hours a week I could get away from the obscenities, the prison gossip, the scheming'. Another called studying 'a lifeline – it reaches outside. I'm a member of the University and that means that I'm still a member of the human race'. Moving into and remaining in the alternative space was not always straightforward, and prisoners would often come to an OU tutor session in a disturbed or distressed state after a difficult visit or following bad news from outside. Tutor Jackie Watts explained:

> During my three years as a higher education tutor in prison I was never once able to move straight into a teaching role at the start of the session. This was

> because before the student could move into the student 'self' to be fully engaged in the learning situation, it was necessary for [the student] to actively, if only temporarily, leave and 'unlock' the prisoner 'self' (Weinbren, 2020, p. 14).

Studying with the OU enables prisoners to develop a positive sense of themselves and their potentials. They develop skills in self-management and forward planning that are necessary for OU study and these have collateral advantages in helping them to partition themselves from the more damaging effects of prison (Behan, 2014). As they progress with their studies they increasingly feel they belong to a learning community and develop an identity as students, rather than prisoners. Prisoners themselves observe how they find themselves seeking different interests and conversations from their fellow inmates:

> It's opening up my eyes to a lot of things. It's changing me as a person. It's giving me the way out. My interests are different. I don't necessarily entertain certain conversations as I'm not in that frame of mind. Andrew (in Pike and Hopkins, 2019, p. 57)

Research evidence indicates that developing a positive identity as a student is a key benefit for improving post-release outcomes (Pike, 2014). This is because it helps to overcome the stigma of the criminal label that is so difficult to get beyond. Penal stigma is reinforced by the labels commonly encountered by ex-prisoners on release, in other universities and seeking employment (Eris, 2019; Gough, 2019; Schreeche-Powell, 2019). Longitudinal research which investigated the impact of higher-level learning for prisoners after release found that prisoners who fully engaged with their studies in prison had high hopes and strong, realistic aspirations for a decent, crime-free life upon release. Becoming a student had offered them a sense of hope and a realistic means of realising their aspirations. By comparison, those who expressed an interest in the OU but had not been able to engage in OU study, had very few aspirations or protective factors (Pike, 2014).

Successfully overcoming the challenges in completing distance learning in a prison environment provides OU students in prison with determination and develops a resilience that has the capacity to see them through the prison gate and on to the challenges they meet outside (Hughes, 2012). That resilience, along with an often newly found ability to reflect on difficult situations, reduces the likelihood of returning to prison:

> There have been days when I've thought, sod it, I'll just go and do something that'll send me back to prison and it'll just be easier, but I know that in the long term I won't be doing anybody any favours …so I have got my head about it … I'm determined not to go back. (Released student in Pike, 2014)

Positive identity change can lead to lasting or 'secondary' desistance from crime (McNeill, 2014) not least because Higher Education increases both prisoners' employment prospects and their rates of pay upon release (Costelloe, 2014; Duwe & Clark, 2014). The Longford Trust reports that the targeted financial support it provides for serving and ex-prisoners to undertake higher education modules at universities, results in fewer than 5% of recipients of its awards reoffending (Coates, 2016, p. 38).

Continuity of study after prison is very important for maintaining a positive student identity. As the OU is a national university, students are able to continue with their studies wherever they live in the UK when they are released, and even if they move abroad. However, when OU students leave prison, many aspects of their life change and even if they are able to overcome the many challenges facing ex-prisoners generally, they still have new priorities and new pressures on their time. Despite the best of intentions, many students find it very difficult to continue their studies. The OU now provides a support pack for released students which contains a range of resources to accomplish the transition from studying in prison to studying in the community. The pack provides them with information on OU resources that will be

new to them, such as a university library blessed with one of the finest collections of online subscriptions of any university in the UK. In addition, a 'Through the Gate' support leaflet provides information about agencies which focus on supporting people with convictions back into employment. There is also a dedicated OU website with additional online resources supporting the transition to OU study on the outside.

The First Decade

Although the OU's devolved national and regional structure was not designed to support the learning of prisoners, it has meant that whenever and wherever a prisoner is moved to another prison, support can be organised and delivered. Even so, in the early days the scarcity of available tutors meant long distances to travel. A tutor in the 1970s who lived in Milton Keynes where the main OU campus is located, recalled supporting a student in a prison 260 miles north, HMP Acklington, in Northumberland (Regan, 2003, p. 5). Other tutors have travelled to Continental Europe to teach British subjects in overseas prisons.

The design of OU teaching materials intended for people learning from home and unsupported by the infrastructure of a campus university, meant the OU's 'everything-in-a-box' packages were ideal resources for isolated prison learners. In 1970, starting with two prisons for men, the Home Office agreed to make finance available to prisoners to pay the fees and provide facilities for OU modules. This was a period when support for prison education was relatively high. HMP Blundeston, 'resembling a school or university campus' opened in 1963, reflected the shift in attitudes 'from detention and retribution towards training and rehabilitation' (Jewkes & Johnston, 2007, p. 188). In 1971, six prisoners in HMP Albany and 16 in HMP Wakefield started their OU studies. By the end of that year two had gained distinctions, 15 gained credits, four failed, and one had dropped out. The following year, 1972, 13 students continued their studies and they were joined by 27 more students, including eight from HMP Gartree. The scheme was extended beyond England with a further prisoner in Belfast and two in Scotland (Perry, 1976). The prisoners' pass rate in 1974 was relatively low at 45% of those that started the course as many withdrew before they reached the examination. Those who sat the examinations had what the Vice-Chancellor, Walter Perry, called 'reasonably good' results (Perry, 1976, p. 173). In 1974 the first prisoner graduated with an OU degree. By 1975, there were 109 students at 11 establishments and by 1976, 142 prisoners in 14 establishments studying 197 subjects (Forster, 1976, p. 7).

Expansion of OU provision since the 1970s has steadily increased. In the 1980s there were approximately 150 students spread across 31 prisons. In the 1990s this had more than doubled to around 300 prisoners studying in 80 prisons. This upward trend continued, and by 2005 there were 1500 students in 120 prisons, but the positive trend was then reversed by a number of factors. Among these were the OU's accelerating shift to online delivery, prison service reorganisation, new education providers' priorities, and most significantly, changes to the personal loan funding scheme for Higher Education Institutions. The Government's requirement that students must be within six years of their release date to be eligible for a tuition fee loan, was particularly devastating for long-term prisoners. in 2014/15 the number of OU students in prison had fallen to below 1000 (McFarlane & Pike, 2019). Although many issues remain unresolved, by 2019, its 50th anniversary year, the OU had approximately 1800 students on more than 130 modules across all faculties in approximately 150 prisons (covering all security categories) in the UK and Ireland (Open University, ND).

The scale of the OU's accomplishments, especially in the early years, are easy to underestimate. Fitzgerald's (1980) account of prison conditions in the late 1970s, alongside the first-hand testimony of some of its survivors, such as Jimmy Boyle (1977), John McVicar (1980), and Trevor Hercules (2019), should leave no one in any doubt about what was achieved by these OU students and those that supported them. The appalling conditions arising from institutional neglect, overcrowding and, in some cases, the brutality of prison staff led to widespread

riots, disturbances and other forms of protest during the 1970s and 1980s (Fitzgerald, 1977). In Northern Ireland where people were interned without trial from 1971, protests included arson and hunger strikes. In 1972, the OU began to teach prisoners in the Long Kesh Detention Centre (later HMP Maze) and other prisons. Estimates as to the numbers taught vary but the OU's Regional Director, who himself taught in the Maze, noted that 'at one time there were as many as one hundred students following our courses and being visited by tutors' (Macintyre, 2013). A number of OU-educated prisoners were closely involved in the process which culminated in the 1998 Belfast Agreement (McKeown, 2019; O'Sullivan & Kent, 2019; Weinbren, 2020). As Billy Hutchinson, one of the first to engage in the Peace Process negotiations, concluded, 'The Open University taught me how to actually do that' (Hutchinson, 2011).

Prison wings and prison cells are difficult places to study. A cell may be shared, there is precious little desk-space, let alone shelving. Locks on doors and metal bars on windows, and the pervasive focus on punishment and correction rather than rehabilitation, signal just a few of the many ways in which prisons are different to other learning environments. They are a world away from a university campus. Universities are regarded as convivial environments, benign elective, youthful communities supportive to learning and extending the boundaries of experience. No one chooses to get sent to prison and alongside austere living conditions, there is intrusive surveillance, corrosive fear, suspicion and mistrust. This is how one prisoner described studying to his tutor:

> In prison there is rarely another inmate following the same course and visits from a tutor can be infrequent and sometimes impossible. There is noise, arbitrary interruption, tension and sometimes the threat of violence […] The student in prison can face prejudice, jealousy and ridicule in an environment which is often hostile to intellectual activity. (Regan, 1996)

In the early days of OU provision much depended on the creativity of OU staff based in the English regional and Celtic nation (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) offices to negotiate initiatives with prisons in their area (see O'Sullivan & Kent, 2019, in relation to the conflict in Ireland). Developing the availability of OU modules to students in prison while ensuring parity in the education service provided to those outside, was often accompanied by proliferating and distinctive logistical challenges. For example, students in prison could not attend the residential schools or tutorials that regular OU students were encouraged to attend. These residential events have themselves become part of HE folklore, legendarily social, transformative, and sometimes transgressive for those that attended. At least one prisoner attended a mainstream Residential School (Weinbren, 2019, p. 59). In 1976, a student counsellor arranged a version of a summer school in a prison and also for students from outside the prison to join those inside in tutorials. There was a five-day programme to mimic the residential school attended by other students studying the same module, an early precursor of the Prison/University partnerships that are now becoming much more widespread.

The OU's slowly growing presence in prison through the 1970s was not without controversy for while critics of imprisonment, such as Mike Fitzgerald, highlighted brutal conditions and harsh deprivations, those from the other end of the political spectrum thought prisons were at risk of becoming soft and easy, holiday camps where incorrigible rogues and villains exploited liberal misgivings. To those holding these perspectives the introduction of OU degrees for prisoners exemplified their suspicions of this tendency. The OU presence in prison provided easy punchlines for comic sketches and story lines in popular TV programmes. A typical exchange occurred in the first episode of a comedy-drama series *Minder* between Alfie, a seasoned 'con,' and Terry, a charismatic, but slightly simple, bodyguard.

> *Alfie:* Did all my bird 20 years ago when it was hard. Look at 'em now. All in the OU. Big Bob Whitney. You know he's got a bleeding degree.
>
> *Terry*: I never knew that.

Alfie: Sociology. Still at the thieving game. But now he knows why he's doing it (Euston Films, 1979).

Screen Time Learning

The OU has faced immense challenges in providing a high-quality learning experience comparable with mainstream students whilst respecting the security requirements of prison settings. Those challenges for prisons, prisoners and the OU have evolved continually over the last 50 years. Most significantly, developments in information, communication and media technology over the last 50 years have led to major changes in the way distance learning study materials are prepared, shared and used. As a result, efforts to narrow the gap between the learning experience of students in prison and mainstream students has been a recurring challenge.

In the early years, bridging the gap involved fairly modest adaptation of learning resources. OU teaching materials were mostly books with radio and television programmes, tutorials and residential schools (Forster, 1976). Prisoners received identical paper-based materials as other OU students, and later the same audio or video tape recordings were made available to them. Experiment kits, calculators and CDs were rarely permitted (Weinbren, 2018, p. 52). Prisoners could not attend residential schools or indeed view live television programmes, since in-cell television was not introduced until 1990's (Jewkes, 2002; Knight, 2016). However, all other study materials were the same and very few alternatives were required. In fact, the reality was that many OU students, even those in the 'free world', could not necessarily watch all the OU broadcasts because they were at work, or because their household dynamics precluded it, or because the VHF broadcasting signal was locally very poor or non-existent. As a result, the module teams ensured that credit-bearing assessment tasks were usually focussed on those parts of the module not supported by television broadcasts, so as not to disadvantage students in such constrained circumstances. Gradually, delivery through radio and television declined with the final TV programme linked to a specific module being broadcast in 2006.

As the OU turned to new communication technologies offering modules with online elements, opportunities for digital interaction increased accordingly. Prisons, on the other hand, had little reason to respond to the changing realities of online learning. As access to radios and television have become part of prison infrastructure, so they have declined as vehicles for OU learning delivery. As the 'university of the air' has evolved toward to the internet and come to resemble more closely its original radical vision, delivery to carceral spaces has become increasingly challenging. Prisoners are increasingly becoming a group of people almost entirely disconnected from the 21st-century digital 'network society' (Castells, 2004). As all forms of social, personal, commercial, and cultural interaction have become more dependent on social media technology such as smart phones and tablets, which themselves evolve at an accelerating rate (Kitchin & Fraser 2020; Wajcman, 2016), the traditional isolation of prisoners is becoming more unpredictably consequential, if not unintentionally punitive. Most prisoners still have no direct access to internet-enabled computers. Digital skills are vital for everyday existence; without them, prisoners are significantly and additionally disadvantaged, and less likely to successfully integrate back into society upon release (Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2020). Many prisoners have been left stranded on the wrong side of the digital divide, unable to study some modules because considerable periods of internet access are required. Prison policy tends to prioritise security concerns and they have been quick to adopt new technologies that serve such purposes, but their risk-averse approach to the use of learning technology has become a serious obstacle to rehabilitation. Johnson and Hail-Jares (2016) cite this risk-averse approach as contributing to an increasing digital 'isolation' among prisoners with limited access to technology.

In response to the growing tensions of fulfilling its mission 'to be open to people, to places, methods and ideas', the OU initially adopted a "traffic-light system" to identify in the OU prospectus which modules might be precluded because of the extent of digital study which would not be viable from prison ('green' modules fully available, 'amber' modules difficult

to study and 'red' modules unavailable as interactive or fully online (see McFarlane & Pike, 2019 for a full account)). Pike and Adams (2012) and Hancock (2010) highlighted significant inconsistencies in student experiences as the number of 'red' modules grew rapidly, leading to a review of OU provision and support. As a result, a specific learning support team was created, replacing the terminology and infrastructure of the ad-hoc Offender Learning Group with the more appropriately titled Students in Secure Environments team (SiSE). SiSE was central to the success of gathering contributions to *Degrees of Freedom* with nine of its 14 chapters authored by OU students in prison or released, supplemented by nine further, similar contributors offering shorter vignettes of their OU study in prison (Earle & Mehigan, 2019).

SiSE operates from the OU's Milton Keynes campus to improve overall communication with the Government Ministries of Justice, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) for England and Wales and their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The team manages online module adjustments that are possible for prisons, often involving the assembly of comprehensive and voluminous 'print packs' of non-interactive on-line resources. These seek to provide a learning experience for students in prison that is reasonably consistent with those on the outside with access to on-line resources. An OU 'Guide to Learners in Secure Environments' (Open University, n.d.) is now published annually, listing the available study units and what support is available for OU study, both in terms of access modules and full degree study programmes.

Prison security requirements and protocols have established that all communication between the OU and its students must be via an intermediary within the prison, often the prison-based education manager (see Ministry of Justice, 2012). In the 1970s, prison education fell under the remit of different local education authorities who had responsibility for resourcing education provision of residents in the local area. For people in prisons, this meant patchy and inconsistent education opportunities across the country. Sometimes this resulted in good local support for 'extra-mural' activities such as OU study (Forster, 1976) where particular individuals and coalitions of support could drive positive initiatives. More recently, a trend toward centralisation and standardisation resulted. In 2006, the Skills Funding Agency's Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) was introduced which contracted out the prison education to college providers. This development led to some improved technology provision for learning and greater consistency across prison education departments. However, as OLASS focused on school-level study rather than college level, it has tended to result in less support for OU students (McFarlane & Pike, 2019).

Techno-prisoners in a Revolving World

Pike and Adams (2012) found the embrace of digital access was inconsistent across prisons and somewhat contra-intuitive in that high security prisons appeared to be more supportive than lower security prisons. For example, at HMP Whitemoor, one of only five high security prisons with a Close Supervision Centre (for prisoners considered particularly dangerous), the provision of the Whitemoor Wide Web intranet, provided, for a short time, a learning environment which looked very much like the internet but was totally secure. However, these ad hoc developments and technologies were gradually closed down as the prison service sought a more consistent (secure) system. The first iteration of this was POLARIS, a 'proof of concept' trial of online computers in London prisons supported by an external server (Schüller, 2009). The system worked well but was considered difficult to roll out across the secure estate because it required implementation over so many prisons in diverse physical settings.

OU students outside secure environments access online teaching materials via the internet. There are facilities on module websites for them to chat and links to many external websites. For students in prisons platforms are available, notably a 'Virtual Campus'. These include the OU teaching materials and exercises but exclude external links and communication with other students. The Virtual Campus (VC) was developed to provide secure access to

selected employment and education websites. After initially promising trials this was extended to most prisons and intended to streamline and modernise the system of delivery for education, training, and employment in the secure estate (Turley & Webster, 2010).

The OU makes module materials available on the prison hosted Virtual Campus, and any other secure platform available in a prison, via a 'walled garden'. The 'walled garden' replicates the OU's normal Virtual Learning Environment but removes access to student and tutor forums and other collaborative activities, as well as to external hyperlinks. Ideally, the intention was that students should be able to directly access all leaning materials, including online audio and videos, submit assignments and securely message their OU tutors. Unfortunately, the value of the Virtual Campus has been compromised by the use of outdated technology and inadequate infrastructure in prisons which render many of its intended benefits unusable (Coates, 2016). Access to the Virtual Campus is often restricted by OLASS's education provider priorities and localised regime requirements. Despite these limitations, persistent promotion and widespread recognition of the positive benefits of OU study has resulted in over 120 modules being made available for study on this platform.

Lack of access to online facilities and social media increasingly detaches prisoners from their families and wider social support networks and undermines their capacity to maintain digital literacy skills. These effects compound and exacerbate the conventional 'pains of imprisonment' and ensure it is more difficult for people leaving prison to integrate themselves into the 'free world' when released. People who are sent to prison now experience a kind of highly consequential and additional form of digital exclusion (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016) that revives the notorious 'revolving door' of repeat offending and repeat imprisonment (Maguire, 2020).

It does not have to be that way. In-cell technologies already exists in a few prisons in England and Wales, such as HMP Wayland and HMP Berwyn (see Burgon, 2018), providing direct access to the full benefits of the OU's Virtual Campus for students in their cells. The demand for in-cell devices is growing, but availability is dependent on individual prison authorisation processes and budgets. This technology should be rolled out to all prisons, allowing all students in prison direct access to their learning materials (Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2020).

The 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic has proved seriously damaging to education, particularly higher education in prison (Davies, 2021 forthcoming) but has also highlighted how prisons cannot remain compliant with international obligations to uphold human rights if they neglect technological opportunities to maintain communication across the digital divide. In some UK prisons, video calling of relatives using smart phone apps such as the Purple Visits app (see Purple Visits, n.d.)) has been enabled during the lockdown regime imposed in response to the pandemic. By May 2020, this facility had been rolled out in 26 prisons in England (Centre for Social Justice, 2021). The introduction of broadband facilities in prisons that enable features of digital justice, such as virtual court appearances and 'visual legal visits' that have become more widespread because of the pandemic could be extended to other essential outside contacts, such as OU tutors. A few prisons have also introduced video-chat facilities for family communications involving several locations and participants, which could be used to support online tutorials involving other prisoners and tutors. The development of increasingly sophisticated virtual reality emulations of real-world contexts used by the OU for online science teaching and research could also reach students in prison. Recent research by McLaughlan and Farley (2019) identifies promising results from the use of virtual reality to teach literacy and numeracy in a prison in New Zealand.

The Future – Vision, Commitment, Resources, Courage

Rising to the opportunities of delivering on-line learning in prison and maintaining its commitment to openness, equity and access to all who want to learn presents the OU with per-

haps its biggest challenge since its original vision was picked up by advocates and enthusiasts in prison in 1971 (O'Sullivan & Kent 2019; Weinbren, 2019). The withdrawal of major components of government funding for universities in 2010 and their replacement with a student fees and loans system resulted in dramatic increases in the cost to students of an OU module. Students in prison now pay this full cost of a module whereas in the past OU costs to prison students were covered from central government funds. The digital transition to teaching and learning materials designed for on-line delivery increasingly means that students in prison receive a different learning experience. Learning is a collaborative, social, experience and while enormous effort and expense is involved in narrowing the gap, paper copies of on-line materials do not, and cannot, fully reproduce the intended OU learning experience. Prison students may justifiably feel they are getting less for their money.

Despite the best efforts of both the OU and prison services in the UK, access to the OU Virtual Campus and ICT equipment within prison education departments is rarely at the level that it needs to be for it to be meaningful to OU students. It is widely recognised that prisons need to do more to make mobile technology available to students. This has been further highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the resulting widespread closure of prison education departments and restricted computer access (Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Davies 2021, forthcoming). In February 2021, fifty years after OU teaching began in prison, a motion was tabled in the UK Houses of Parliament, sponsored by Labour MP Zarah Sultana and the University and College Union (UCU), highlighting how the impact of the pandemic had damaged prison education and the way relatively modest investment in digital educational technologies could mitigate some of its worst effects for prison students. It reflects growing recognition that prisons without adequate education facilities become little more than penal warehouses.

The OU has now partnered with Coracle, a Ministry of Justice approved ICT provider, to implement a mobile technology strategy. This takes the form of providing Chromebooks loaded with OU content to OU students in prison. Coracle has already successfully trialled approximately 70 Chromebooks in over 17 prisons. An OU pilot project is in motion to supply, in 2021, all students on the three OU Access modules with a Chromebook that will facilitate their studies at the beginning of their learning journey. It will reduce the need for (and ideally eventually replace) most of the OU print materials. It will give the OU student an enhanced learning experience much closer to that of students in the 'free world' and develop their digital literacy. A number of additional and ancillary benefits are that it can also deliver material to address specific learning difficulties for prison students with disabilities or additional learning requirements. In the OU pilot project being rolled out in 2021, it is anticipated that learning materials will be easily portable and therefore remain with the student at all times, including if they are transferred to another prison. Currently, during such moves prison students often lose their learning material, such as books, study notes, essays, feedback from tutors and so on, because they do not fall within the eligible quantities of print material allowed by prison service 'property within cell' requirements at the moment of transfer. With a laptop provided by the OU a student would have vastly improved opportunities to study outside of prison education department working hours, in their cell or when it suited them.

Distance learning can be a lonely activity and students in prison often experience severe isolation. McFarlane and Morris (2018) found that when students in prison were actively involved in a study community or a representative body which allowed them to suggest improvements to the system, their levels of engagement increased, leading to increased confidence and higher overall assignment scores. Hopkins and Farley (2014) identified a wide set of social and cultural issues associated with learning in prison and with prior experiences of learning, recognising that social interaction is fundamental to learning, but is often missing in a prison setting due to security restrictions.

Many OU tutors go to great lengths to support their students in prison, even when students are transferred across the country with little warning. The importance of this support

is fully acknowledged by students: "The determination of the teaching staff and tutors when faced with the realities of a prison security department and the rules and restrictions was quite inspiring. It encouraged me to persevere and I am glad I did." (Liam, former OU prison student, cited in McFarlane & Pike, 2019, p. 19). These tutors channel the vision, commitment and energy that Jennie Lee found in Harold Wilson's idea of a 'university of the air'. The OU was not designed for prisoners, but its larger vision of access and inclusion of those traditionally denied and excluded from higher education intrinsically challenges much of what prisons stand for – isolation, exclusion, retribution, pain and punishment. It was a vision blending pragmatic, technical and managerial priorities driven by cold war tensions as much as it was by romantic utopianism. The OU was designed to have central control of the 'production' of 'units' (teaching materials) with the delivery of these teaching materials focused on students in their own homes. Teaching has had to be adapted to make it appropriate for prisons. There has been an additional barrier to prison education. The long-running criticism in the press and Parliament of people being permitted to study for degrees while in prison. In the face of constraints, Open University staff have found ways to support learners in prisons and prisoners have found ways to create spaces for learning. As a result, there have been significant benefits for everyone – individual prisoners and for our society as a whole.

The current UK government's Prime Minster, privately educated at Eton and Oxford University, has indicated his commitment to increasing prison places and decreasing university places. As another technological revolution sweeps the planet, The Open University will need all the vision, commitment, and energy of its founders if it is to continue opening the doors that prisons close.

References

Abdul, K. (2019). 'Vignette 1 – Choosing my journey' in R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

Behan, C. (2014). Learning to escape: Prison education, rehabilitation and the potential for transformation. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *1*(1), 20-31. http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v1i1.594

Bolton, P. (2010). *Higher Education and Social Class* (Special Note SN/SG/620). House of Commons Library. http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00620/SN00620.pdf

Boyle, J. (1977/2016). *A Sense of Freedom*, Ebury Press.

Boztas, S. (2017). Why are there so few prisoners in the Netherlands?, *The Guardian*, Why are there so few prisoners in the Netherlands? | World news | The Guardian [accessed 24/05/21]

Burgon, R. (2018). Prisons: Computers and telephones. UK Parliament: Written question, 12 March, UIN 132163. https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2018-03-12/132163#

Champion, N. and Noble, J. (2016). *What is prison education for? A theory of change exploring the value of learning in prison,* Prisoner Learning Alliance. https://www.prisonereducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Theory-of-Change-Report.pdf

Castells, M. (2004). Informationalism, networks and the network society: A theoretical blueprint. In M. Castells (Ed.), *The network society: A cross-cultural perspective*, Edward Elgar.

Centre for Social Justice (2021). *Digital technology in prisons: Unlocking relationships, learning and skills in UK prisons*. https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/digital-technology-in-prisons-unlocking-relationships-learning-and-skills-in-uk-prisons

Coates, Dame Sally (2016). *Unlocking potential: A review of education in prison*, Ministry of Justice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf

Costelloe, A. (2014). Learning for liberation, teaching for transformation: Can education in prison prepare prisoners for active citizenship?, *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 14, 30-36. https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijass/vol14/iss1/4/

Council of Europe. (1990). *Education in Prison* (Recommendation No. R (89) 12). www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/Education_In_Prison_02.pdf

Clark, R. (2016). How education transforms: Evidence from the experience of Prisoners' Education Trust on how education supports prisoner journeys, *Prison Service Journal*, *225*, 3–8.

Coyle, A., Fair, H., Jacobson, J., Walmsley, R. (2016). Imprisonment worldwide: The current situation and an alternative future, Bristol. Policy Press.

Davies, W. (2021) Devastation and innovation: Examining prison education during a national pandemic, *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, (forthcoming)

Duwe, G. and Clark, V. (2014). The effects of prison-based education on recidivism and employment, *The Prison Journal*, *94*(4), 454–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885514548009

Earle, R. and Mehigan, J. (2019). *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open Universit*y, Policy Press.

'Eris' (2019). Vignette 4 'Out of the abysmal'. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

Fitzgerald, M. (1975). The strategies of radical prisoners' groups, Review Symposium on the Penal System, *British Journal of Criminology*, *15*(1), 92–4. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a046616

Fitzgerald, M. (1977). *Prisoners in Revolt*, Penguin.

Forster, W. (1976). *The higher education of prisoners*. Department of Adult Education, University of Leicester.

FutureLearn (2021). The Open University. https://www.futurelearn.com/partners/the-open-university

Gough, M. (2019). 'From Despair to Hope'. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

Griffiths, L. & Sasdy, P. (1979, October 29). Gunfight at the O K Laundrette. [Television series episode]. In V. Lambert. Minder. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kmg-NOu9Qdk&list=PLvrinI8FfP9u2zDIQP1axOpQZp2kHMJXb

Haines, J. (1998, October 1). How Harold's pet project became his monument', *Independent*.

Hancock, V. (2010). Essential, desirable or optional? Making distance e-learning courses available to those without internet access, *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning, 1*, 1–11.

Hercules, T. (2020). *Labelled a Black villain*, Waterside Press.

Hollis, P. (1997). *Jennie Lee: A life*, Oxford University Press.

Hood, S. (1967, September 22). Dangers of educational television, *The Times.*

Hopkins, S. and Farley, H. (2014). A prisoners' island: Teaching Australian incarcerated students in the digital age, *Journal of Prison Education and* Reentry, *1*(1), 42-51. http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v1i1.631

Hughes, E. (2012). *Education in prison: Studying through distance learning*, Ashgate.

Hutchinson, B. interview with Pat Jess 22 August 2011, Gabi Kent, 'Sowing Seeds of Peace' in Time to Think, https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/person/per:a57e9df2c3f-5ce48f45b5937f8eafa6f

James, E. (2012). *Free to write: Prison voices past and present*, Headland Press.

Jewkes, Y. (2002). Captive audience: Media, masculinity and power in prison. Collumpton, Willan.

Jewkes Y. and Johnston H. (2007). The evolution of prison architecture. In Y. Jewkes, (Ed.), *Handbook on Prisons* (pp.174-196). Willan.

Jewkes, Y and Reisdorf, B. (2016). A Brave new World: The problems and opportunities presented by new media technologies in prison, *Criminology and Criminal Justice, 16*(5), 534-551. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895816654953

Johnson, R. and Hail-Jares, K. (2016). Prisons and technology. In Y. Jewkes, B. Crewe and J. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook on Prisons*, (2nd ed, 278–92). Routledge.

Kitchin, R. and Fraser, A. (2020). *Slow Computing: Why We Need Balanced Digital Lives*, Bristol University Press.

Knight, V. (2016). Remote control: Television in prison. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Light, M., Grant, E. and Hopkins, K. (2013). *Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*. Ministry of Justice Analytical Services. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220060/gender-substance-misuse-mental-health-prisoners.pdf

Machin, S. and Vignoles, A. (2004). Educational inequality: the widening socio-economic gap. *Fiscal Studies*, 25, 107-128. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5890.2004.tb00099.x

Macintyre, G. Written submission, 23 July 2013. Time to Think Open University Journeys in British and Irish Prisons During the Years of Conflict, 1972–2000 (Milton Keynes: Digital Archive, The Open University 2019), https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/pdf/script/script:059_T_clip01 accessed 1 March, 2020.

Maguire, D. (2020). *Male, failed, jailed: Masculinities and 'revolving door' imprisonment in the UK*, Palgrave.

Mathiesen, T. (1974). *The politics of abolition*, John Wiley & Sons.

McFarlane, R. and Morris, A. (2018). Developing the learner voice, *Advancing Corrections Journal, 6*, 151–60.

McFarlane, R. and Pike, A. (2019). From Prisoner to Student. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of Freedom: Prison Education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

McIntosh, N. (1975). Women and the OU. In Piper, D. (Ed.), *Staff development in universities programme: Women in higher education*. *Papers from a conference held in London on 29 June 1973*. University of London Teaching Methods Unit.

McKeown L. (2019). From D102 to Paulo Freire: An Irish journey. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of Freedom: Prison Education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

McLaughlan, J. & Farley, H. (2019). Fast cars and fast learning: Using virtual reality to learn literacy and numeracy in prison. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research, 12*(3), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.4101/jvwr.v12i3.7391

McNeill, F. (2014). *Three aspects of desistance*. Discovering Desistance. https://discovering-desistance.home.blog/2014/05/23/three-aspects-of-desistance/

McVicar, J. (1980). *McVicar By Himself*, Arrow.

Ministry of Justice (2010). *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199224/compendium-of-reoffending-statistics-and-analysis.pdf

Ministry of Justice. (2012). *Open University higher education and distance learning*. (Prison Service Instructions 32/2012). https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20200701105638/http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2012/psi-32-2012-open-university-revised-april-2019.doc

Open University. (n.d.). *Studying with the Open University: A guide for students in a secure environment*. https://www.open.ac.uk/secure-environments/sites/www.open.ac.uk.secure-environments/files/files/SiSE%20Prospectus%202020-21.pdf

O'Sullivan, P. and Kent, G. (2019). Pioneers and politics: Open University journey in Long Kesh during the years of conflict 1972-75. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

Phillips, C. (2013). *The Multicultural prison: Ethnicity, masculinity and social relations among prisoner*s, Oxford University Press.

Pike, A. (2014). *Prison-based transformative learning and its role in life after release* [Doctoral dissertation, The Open University], Open Research Online. http://oro.open.ac.uk/61452/1/13834868.pdf

Pike, A. and Adams, A. (2012). Digital exclusion or learning exclusion? An ethnographic study of adult male distance learners in English prisons. *Research in Learning Technology*, *20*(4), 363–76. https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v20i0.18620

Pike, A. and Hopkins, S. (2019). "Education is transformational": Positive identity through

prison-based higher education in England and Wales. *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversity in Education*. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJBIDE.2019010104

Perry, W. (1976). Open University: A personal account by the first Vice-Chancellor, The Open University Press.

Prisoners' Education Trust. (n.d.). *Prison-university partnerships network*. https://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/what-we-do/work-with-universities/prison-university-partnerships-in-learning/

Prisoner Learning Alliance. (2020). The digital divide: Lessons from prisons abroad. https://prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Digital-Divide-Lessons-from-prisons-abroad-v3.pdf

Purple Visits. (n.d.). *About Purple Visits*. https://www.purplevisits.com/about

Reay, D. (2017). *Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes*, Bristol. Policy Press

Regan, P. (1996). '*Opening opportunities for students at a disadvantage',* presentation of positive practices in the field of lifelong learning, Athens.

Regan, P. (2003). *The Open University in the North: Widening participation in prisons, 2002. An evaluation.* Open University.

Riley, D. (2019). *Time lived without its flow*. Picador.

Schreeche-Powell, E. (2019). Becoming me with The Open University. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

Schüller, T. (2009). *Crime and lifelong learning*. (Inquiry into the future for Lifelong Learning, Thematic Paper 5). National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. https://archive.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Crime-and-Lifelong-Learning-Thematic-Paper-5.pdf

Turley, C., & Webster, S. (2010). *Implementation and delivery of the Test Beds Virtual Campus Case Study*. National Centre for Social Research.

Wajcman, J. (2016). *Pressed for time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. University of Chicago Press.

Weinbren, D. (2014). *The Open University: A history*. Manchester University Press.

Weinbren, D. (2018). Prisoner students: building bridges, breaching walls. In *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (pp. 45-75). Palgrave Macmillan.

Weinbren, D. (2019). A University without walls. In R. Earle and J. Mehigan (Eds.), *Degrees of freedom: Prison education and The Open University*, Policy Press.

Weinbren, D. (2020). Learning to live together? The Open University, student-prisoners and 'the Troubles'. *Family & Community History*, *23*(1), 4-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631180.2020.1771029

Williams, K., Papadopoulou, V., & Booth, N. (2012). *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds. Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*. (Ministry of Justice Research Series, 4/12). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278837/prisoners-childhood-family-backgrounds.pdf

–

Rod Earle is a senior lecturer at The Open University.

James Mehigan is a senior lecturer in law at the University of Canterbury.

Anne Pike is a Research Fellow at The Open University and was an Open University Tutor for nearly 20 years.

Daniel Weinbren works at The Open University and is the author of *The Open University. A history*, MUP, 2014.

Journal of Prison Education and Reentry

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2021

PRACTITIONER PAPER

JOURNAL OF PRISON EDUCATION & REENTRY

When 'Inside-Out' Goes 'Upside-Down': Teaching Students in a Jail Environment During the COVID Pandemic and Implications for the Use of Correctional Technology Post-Pandemic

KIMBERLY COLLICA-COX
Pace University, USA

Abstract: *The transient population of county jails pose unique challenges for program implementation and maintenance. This past year, the spread of COVID-19 substantially increased such challenges, particularly since most correctional institutions are opposed to using Internet-based technologies, such as Zoom, in the secure part of their institution. Although college programming is rare in most jails, Inside-Out type classes, which allow college students to take a credited course alongside the incarcerated in a correctional setting, is a great way to provide a missed opportunity for purposeful intervention for the incarcerated, while providing a unique experiential learning opportunity for traditional undergraduate students. Based on an Inside-Out class conducted during the first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, this paper examines the challenges of providing such instruction during a statewide shutdown, with preliminary data suggesting that despite a change in instruction mid-semester due to COVID-19, innovative technological methods can be utilized to maintain program integrity if correctional administrators are amenable to its implementation. Even though inside/outside students could not remain in the same classroom for the entire semester, as the original program was intended, both groups of students still benefited from a modified pedagogical model. Implications suggest that such methods could be utilized to maintain the integrity of correctional-based programming (post COVID) when the physical presence of faculty is prohibited or hindered.*

Keywords: *Inside-Out, corrections, experiential learning, COVID-19, online education, correctional technology*

Introduction

Since the inception of the reformatory, educational programming has always been an important component of American correctional facilities (Gaes et al., 1999). Although data on the extent of college programming is available for prisons, little is known about its extent in jail facilities, where college programming appears rare. Jails have difficulty supporting long term programming because of their transient population, limited applicant pool, and the fact that they house all security levels (i.e., minimum, medium, maximum, etc.) (Link, 2016). It is unlikely that jails can offer a full course of study (such as an associate degree or higher) but they can offer individual classes (rather than a full degree program) to help incarcerated persons begin their college education and possibly alter their crime trajectory. Inside-Out courses, where traditional college students take a college course alongside incarcerated students in a correctional setting, is one effective way to provide college programming to those who are incarcerated; such programming is very effective in creating a unique learning experience for both inside and outside students (Pompa, 2013). In response to this need, Pace University partnered with the Westchester County Department of Correction (WCDOC) to develop, implement, and evaluate an *Inside-Out* course for incarcerated men/women and Pace undergraduate

Correspondence: Kimberly Collica-Cox , Email: kcollicacox@pace.edu

(Accepted: 27 July 2021) ISSN: 2387-2306 doi: https://doi.org/10.25771/dhvk-bc68

students.

The WCDOC jail, like many institutions, unexpectedly went on lockdown mid-semester due to the Coronavirus pandemic, creating challenges for the delivery of educational services. The current paper will discuss the benefits derived from participating in one *Inside-Out* class, the challenges faced when New York State was forced into lockdown during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and how those challenges were addressed. An examination of future pedagogical possibilities, including a discussion of the technological impact on correctional education, will also be discussed. It was hypothesized that although there was a change in instruction mid-semester, the contact between Inside-Outside students, albeit limited, would still create a positive experience for both groups. Going forward, when there was time allotted for planning (i.e., between semesters), it was hypothesized that innovative technological methods could be utilized to maintain program integrity if correctional administrators were amenable to its implementation. With few college classes allowed to continue in correctional institutions during the pandemic, it provides a model for how such classes can be modified in instances when the professor cannot be physically present, allowing inside students to complete their coursework, without jeopardizing their ability to complete the course.

Literature Review

Most correctional institutions, which afford college programming for its residents, do not have an *Inside-Out* model, a model that demonstrates benefits for all involved students (Allred, 2009). The idea of bringing inside and outside students together originated between a lifer, Paul Perry, and Temple University's Lori Pompa, implementing their first session in 1997 (The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, n.d.)[1]. Classes are offered in different disciplines, all over the world, from colleges and universities of different sizes to correctional populations of varying security levels (Pompa, 2013).

Inside-Out focuses on a model of equality; both student groups are treated the same by the instructor (Heider, 2018). Inside and outside students are contemporaries, often learning in a circle, with a vested interest in the learning process which essentially becomes "transformative" for the instructor and students (Pompa, 2013, p. 129). The collaborative work between students is an integral component of the course, allowing for the equal exchange of ideas. The interactions with one another helps to encourage growth and community building (Allred, et al., 2019). This model differs from traditional correctional-based college programming where all students are incarcerated or where outsiders come into the facility to impart their knowledge to the inside group (i.e., a power differential is clearly evident) (Inside-Out, n.d.). Research shows that when inside students learn with outside students, both groups tend to be more engaged in the course material, have more self-reflection, think more critically, and develop altered perceptions which help to counteract previously held stereotypes (Allred, 2009; Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014; Long & Barnes, 2016; Martinovic et al., 2018). Outside students can learn in an environment (i.e., the jail setting) that helps them to understand the concepts they are discussing more deeply, while inside students have an insulated space that provides them brief separation from the rest of the correctional environment (Allred, 2009; Werts, 2013). This experience lessens the monotony, encourages interactions between inside and outside students and inspires in-depth discussions (Allred, 2009). Research finds that inside students gain more knowledge of the criminal justice system, while stereotypes held by outside students (i.e., incarcerated people are inherently bad people), as well as their view of the criminal justice system, is changed (Martinovic et al., 2018; Mishne et al., 2012). Outside students develop more positive views of the criminal justice system and hold less punitive attitudes toward the incarcerated (Philippan, 2018). There are statistically significant changes in their views when compared to those students not involved in *Inside-Out* programming (Wyant & Lockwood, 2018). Classes in criminal justice often discuss components of the system but they are missing interactions with the incarcerated; these classes allow students to know the population they will

1 Instructors are certified by completing a six-day training through the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

serve as future criminal justice professionals (Link, 2016), helping to prepare more competent professionals for the field.

Methods

Program Overview During COVID

This class consisted of 22 students. It was comprised of 11 inside students (consisting of two females and nine males) and 11 outside students (consisting of one male and 10 females) taking CRJ 242 – Crime & Public Policy - a three-credit enhanced writing course, focusing on criminological theory, from Pace University during the Spring 2020 Semester (15 weeks). This project was unique as it allowed Pace students to work with both incarcerated men and women simultaneously. The class took place at the WCDOC, a county jail located in Valhalla, NY, within the County of Westchester, a large suburb of New York City; it is the second largest jail in New York State. Students from both campuses (The NYC Campus and the Westchester campus) participated and were transported via shuttle from Pace's Westchester Campus to the jail site. Outside students were able to attend class at the jail for seven weeks before the jail closed to outside visitors for COVID-19. During the six weeks of instruction (the first week each group had a separate orientation before they were brought together), inside and outside students sat next to one another – sometimes in a circle and other times at smaller tables that faced the professor toward the front of the room. Each class required inside and outside students to work together in small groups on various projects – most class activities were integral components of the *Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program* curriculum. These exercises allowed for the development of team building skills and it was an opportunity for both groups to become better acquainted.

Data Collection

It was hypothesized that innovative technological methods could be utilized successfully for program completion if correctional administrators were amenable to its implementation. It was also hypothesized that although there was a pedagogical modification mid-semester due to COVID-19, the initial contact/interactions between Inside-Outside students were sufficient to create a positive experience for both groups. Seemingly, onsite interactions would be preferable, allowing for maximum engagement between student groups, but if the class is planned with the correct technological tools at its inception (which is possible when the professor knows the class will be remote, rather than when the class switches to a remote format mid-semester unexpectedly), there is no reason to believe that positive experiences in an online format for both student groups could not be similar (although probably not as significant) to the positive experiences incurred during an onsite format.

To evaluate student experience, students were given a pre and post-test survey to assess their perceptions of corrections and their experience in the class. Although inside/outside students did not have to participate in the survey to participate in the class, all volunteered their participation. Both surveys took approximately 30 minutes to complete and were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Outside students accessed their survey via email, while inside students completed their survey at the jail. The pretest ascertained demographic information, in addition to their reasons for taking this course, their feelings regarding the criminal justice system and whether they were nervous to take this class, etc. The post-test included questions to understand students' experiences learning in an I*nside-Out* modeled course, such as what they found to be most challenging in the course, most rewarding, how they felt about their interactions with the other student group and their feelings regarding the criminal justice system. Outside students were given a specific scale (ATP – Attitude Toward Prisoners scale) to measure their attitudes toward incarcerated persons (Mackey & Courtright, 2000; Melvin et al., 1985). The ATP scale, comprised of 36 items about attitudes toward those who are incarcerated, are scored on a Likert scale from 1 (representing the most negative attitudes toward those who are incarcerated) to 5 (representing the most positive attitudes toward those who are incarcerat-

ed), ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. ATP has good test-retest reliability (Melvin et al, 1985). Differences from the pre and post-test were examined to determine if changes in perception occurred. Students were also asked to maintain a journal and write a reflection paper at the course's conclusion detailing their feelings about their experience in the course and with one another. Qualitative survey data, journals and reflection papers were analyzed using content and thematic analyses and coded utilizing the open-ended approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Initial themes were organized into categories and reorganized during several readings. Representative quotes were selected to describe categories and/or distinguishing themes within categories. Frequencies/percentages were used to quantify responses from the closed-ended questions.

Inside Students

Potential inside students were selected by the WCDOC Program Board based on eligibility criteria, such as possession of a GED or high school diploma, approximately three months remaining at the jail, English speaking, and a non-violent disciplinary record at the facility. Upon meeting these criteria, the program sergeant approached potential students to ask them if they wanted to join the class. Interested students could also send a letter to the Program Board asking to be included. Eleven students were selected; two of these students were women. Regarding ethnicity, the majority were black (n=6), followed by Latino (n=2), white (n=2), and one who identified as biracial (n=1). Three of the inside students had children (both women and one of the men), only one was married, and seven were employed prior to their arrest. Eight (73%) suffered from substance abuse issues and almost half (n=5; 45%) were being treated for a mental health issue.

Outside Students

The professor sent email blasts and posted flyers to recruit interested Pace students. Criteria included completion of CRJ 150 – Introduction to the Criminal Justice System - and the ability to pass a background check (i.e., no convictions for misdemeanors or felonies). Interested students emailed the professor and then the professor would email them a background packet. Once 11 students completed background packets, all 11 were registered as a group by the professor and the course was closed. Outside students were traditional college students; all were full-time, and the majority were 18 (n=4) and 19 (n=4) years of age, while three students were in their twenties. Most students were from the New York Tristate Area (n=9) and seven of the students were from the Pleasantville campus, while four students came from the NYC Campus. Regarding race, almost all students were white (n=9); one student reported as Asian. Approximately half of the students held jobs while attending school (n=5) and the majority aspired to be lawyers (n=4), forensic psychologists (n=2), law enforcement (n=2) or other (n=3). The majority of students were freshmen (n=4), followed by sophomores (n=3), juniors (n=2), and seniors (n=2). Almost all the students had no experience with the criminal justice system, with all presenting with clean background checks; one student reported having a cousin in prison and one student reported having a friend who was incarcerated. All outside students attended a jail orientation and were provided with volunteer badges for the semester, which assisted in easing entry into the facility each week.

Class Structure

When outside students arrived for the first combined class, the inside students were already assembled in the classroom and sitting with one another. The professor began by rearranging seats and starting with an icebreaker activity, which required the outside students to sit in a circle, facing a larger circle of the inside students, who faced them. This icebreaker, known as the wagon wheel, is taught to *Inside-Out* instructors during their certification training. The students had five minutes to introduce themselves (i.e., their name, why they wanted to take this class, how they were feeling, one thing they were proud of, and anything else they felt comfortable sharing). Once time was called, the outside students would rotate around the inside

students, and this was completed until every outside and inside student had the opportunity to meet individually. This activity proved to be highly beneficial. Clearly nervous at the beginning, all students were laughing, joking, and much more comfortable by the end. Student seating was then arranged where an inside student would sit next to an outside student; this model was maintained for all subsequent classes. When broken into smaller groups, equal numbers of inside and outside students were assigned per group. Each class would include a lecture and at least one smaller group activity based on the lecture.

During the second class, students discussed victimization. Students broke into groups to discuss Dostoevsky's quote – "The degree of civilization in society can be judged by entering its prisons" (another activity in the *Inside-Out* curriculum). Both groups diverged in their understanding of its meaning. Inside students discussed how they felt incarcerated persons were viewed as uncivilized, while outside students felt it was a quote about treating everyone humanely. Students also discussed how perceptions, based on media portrayals, changed from when they arrived at the jail. Many students said it was not as scary as they thought. Some inside students said they were "schooled" by others before they were remanded to the jail. During class three, students broke into groups to discuss target hardening strategies as the class learned about situational crime prevention. Inside students discussed ways that crimes could easily be committed and helped outside students to think about various target-hardening strategies. During class four, students took their first test. Many inside students expressed nervousness and anxiety because it was a long period of time since they last took an exam. After the exam, students broke into groups to talk about positive and negative reinforcement in childhood. It was during this class that inside students began to share intimate details about their backgrounds. This intimacy added a new dimension to the class and really helped the outside students to understand more about those who were incarcerated. Several inside students talked about being abused as children and how that affected them. One inside student discussed his suicide attempt and his struggle with drugs. He shared a song with the class that he wrote about his life experiences. After the class, it was clear that the outside students were very empathetic to his situation and were quite moved by his openness.

By class six, the students really seemed to come together as a cohesive group. Inside students, especially the few who had not taken the class very seriously, were beginning to participate more and there was less time the professor had to spend getting the class focused. One inside student asked the professor to write a letter to the judge overseeing his case. He wanted to stay in jail longer so he could finish the class. It is important to note that if inside students were released prior to the class' conclusion, the WCDOC administration provided approval for these students to return to the jail, with the outside students, in order to finish the class. This particular inside student did not want to return; he felt he would perform better if he was permitted to remain at the jail and finish the class. Hence, the professor wrote a letter to the judge on his behalf. The class activity for class six involved discussing the 'Alligator River Story,' an activity in *the Inside-Out* curriculum, which is a story with several characters that have different levels of responsibility in an assault. Students broke into smaller groups to discuss and debate levels of blame. This was one of the most productive activities because it generated tremendous discussion and every student was engaged. It was unfortunate that it would be everyone's last time together, although students did not know this at the time. Once the professor left with the outside students, Pace University sent a notice to all students that classes would be remote for the next several weeks due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Outside students were so upset about this news and wanted to know, while boarding the shuttle back to campus, if they could still "sneak" into the jail for class without the University's knowledge. Students were willing to forgo their spring break if it meant that they could continue with the class. Unfortunately, Pace, like most universities, was not able to return to onsite classes during the Spring 2020 semester and within a few days, the jail also closed to all non-essential staff. It was at this point that this one class divided into two classes.

COVID – Trying to Maintain Course Integrity

By January 2020, as college classes were beginning the Spring 2020 semester, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2020). At the start of the virus, New York State became the primary epicenter of the U.S. (McKinley, 2020). New York's *Stay-At-Home* Order went into effect mid-March of 2020. Universities delivered classes remotely and some correctional-based college programs shifted to distance learning during the pandemic; others were disbanded indefinitely (Burke, 2020). Bail Reform in NYS, coupled with a partnership between the Westchester County District Attorney's Office and the Legal Aid Society of Westchester, helped to release incarcerated men and women at the WCDOC who might have been eligible for early release or who presented with underlying medical conditions (Lartey, 2020; Westchester County New York Office of the District Attorney, 2020). Completion of programming in a correctional setting can be difficult under normal circumstances because of unanticipated transfers (Allred et al., 2013; Long & Barnes, 2016) but the Coronavirus led to an increase in the number of releases (Collica-Cox & Molina, 2020). By the conclusion of this class, only two of the 11 inside students remained at the jail.

The Lockdown

The lockdown occurred suddenly (during week eight) and lasted for the remainder of the semester, with no ability to organize or plan. Initially, the professor and students thought a return to the jail was possible but within a few days, New York State's Governor declared a disaster emergency (March 7, 2020) and New York itself was on lockdown (NYS, 2020). To protect the jail residents and curtail the spread of COVID-19, there was strict quarantining of the incarcerated, which made it difficult for the professor to work with them. The outside students were able to meet live on Zoom to continue their studies, but the inside students had no access to technology. It was clear that a plan had to be developed quickly for the inside students and it required assistance from correctional staff.

Responding to the Challenge

Maintaining good working relationships with correctional staff and administrators is essential to the success of any correctional-based program. This proved to be even more essential during the lockdown. Correctional staff stayed in consistent contact with the professor and worked with her in developing a plan for the continuation of the program. The WCDOC has custodial program staff consisting of a program warden, sergeant, and two correctional officers. These staff, although often deployed to work in other areas during the pandemic, were able to assist in this process to ensure the success of the program. While the professor worked with the outside students on Zoom, she worked with the inside students remotely through the program sergeant. The syllabus and assignments had to be revised for the inside students. With quarantining in place, inside students could not be in one room to take an exam and there was no one available to proctor individual exams. All assignments needed to be revised. With the inability to continue in-person instruction, the inside students no longer had access to university library resources, which were shared with them by the outside students. The only material in their possession was their textbook. At this point, inside students had modified assignments when compared to the outside students. The group project and the exams were eliminated for the inside students, and both were replaced with writing assignments. Similar to the outside students, they were asked to write a reflection paper at the course's conclusion. The professor wrote detailed instructions and emailed them to the program sergeant. The program sergeant printed those instructions, made copies, and hand delivered the assignments to the inside students. Once the assignments were completed, she went to each of the housing blocks, collected the assignments and submitted them to the professor.

The WCDOC, unlike many institutions, has been amenable to innovative teaching methods, including the use of technology (Collica-Cox & Molina, 2020). They have utilized

video platform technology for many years that allows for virtual visitation (i.e., for family visits, court appearances, meeting with probation/parole, etc.). The use of video technology is becoming more commonplace in American correctional institutions – approximately 30% of states use this technology with their incarcerated population (Digard et al., 2016). It was the availability of technology, coupled with the assistance of the program sergeant, which allowed the inside students to successfully continue their studies. Within one week of the lockdown, the professor obtained permission to utilize WCDOC's video visitation system to meet with her inside students individually. The system was never used for educational purposes previously but the professor, as well as several other community-based agencies, utilized this system to maintain a continuity of services during the lockdown. The professor was able to schedule her visits in advance with the inside students from her computer and then could meet with them independently to answer questions or discuss concerns. This proved to be extremely helpful in clarifying assignments and in motivating inside students to remain focused, while providing positive feedback for work that was already completed.

As mentioned, many of the inside students were released early as a result of COVID-related policies to reduce the jail population, providing additional challenges. Nine of the 11 inside students were released prior to the class's conclusion; seven of them completed the course. Four of the inside students who were released early never completed their work prior to leaving the facility, and although the professor tried to find these students upon release to encourage them to complete the class, she was unsuccessful in locating them. Three of the inside students who were also released during this time regularly attended classes on Zoom with the outside students. Although the interactions between the inside and outside students did not seem as productive as in the correctional setting, the outside students were clearly happy for the reunification. Difficulties arose, however, since many of the inside students did not have access to computers when released and were using their smartphones to complete assignments. They were unable to Zoom in quiet locations and sometimes had difficulty following proper netiquette. Post-release services were virtual and difficult to access for releasees. One releasee died of a heroin overdose three weeks after his release, directly at the end of the semester. The professor learned of his death from a released inside student. Since it was the last class when the news was learned and there would be no time to help students process their feelings effectively, the Professor did not share this news with the other students.

Findings

Impact of Pandemic Experience

It was clear that both inside and outside students benefited from their participation in this course but those benefits were hindered when they were separated as a result of the lockdown. This change was reflected in students' responses to the survey. However, data suggests that even limited interaction can produce beneficial results. Despite the lockdown, all inside students enjoyed the course, primarily because it gave them the opportunity to learn, as well as earn college credits:

> I loved learning the material and having this opportunity.

> It was good to get back into a learning environment for the first time in a long time.

All outside students said that they enjoyed the class because it was a great experience outside of the classroom (n=9) or because they enjoyed working directly with the inside students (n=2):

> This was probably my favorite course that I have ever taken. I learned so much and I got to know so many people and it was overall a very valuable experience.

> I definitely did enjoy taking this course at the jail. It opened my eyes to so many things. I'm grateful that I got to end my college career with this experience. It was awesome to be able to take a class in a different environment with [those incarcerated] who were also determined to learn.

Inside students felt the experience was rewarding because they learned new material (n=2), they had an opportunity to go to college (n=2), they liked being with the Pace students (2), or they discovered they were able to do the work (n=1):

> The most rewarding part of this course was, of course, having [everyone] from Pace come in. I find it rewarding because that never happened.

> I always wanted to go back to college and I took the first step. [It] made me feel like I achieved a goal.

> Learning all of the theories because I like theories and it opened my mind more. I never thought about why people do what they do.

For outside students, the most rewarding part of the course was watching the inside students' growth:

> I think the most rewarding part was getting to see the inside students each week, to share that time with them and try to help them learn and make them smile. I found it rewarding because just getting to spend time with them and talk about either class topics or random things, we were making connections.

> I think the most rewarding aspect of this course was just being a part of a program that gave [those incarcerated] something to work towards, and it was really amazing to see how motivated some of them were. I could tell that a lot of [them] were just really glad to be a part of the class and earn college credits rather than just sitting in their cellblocks all day.

> The most rewarding part of this course was hearing people open up about their struggles. I think if everyone heard what some of them have gone through, they would be more empathetic to people in jail/prison or with a criminal record.

Both inside and outside students reported that the part of the class they liked best was learning and engaging with one another, which is consistent with the literature (Pompa, 2013). For the inside students, the interactions validated that they were more than their crime:

> That we got to interact with other students. It felt good to not be treated like some sort of animal.

> Everybody participated. How [they] came in and didn't look at us like criminals even though we were wearing oranges. [They] looked at us like normal people.

All students would recommend this course to other students. One outside student stated:

> This is a once in a lifetime learning experience. I think Criminal Justice majors should definitely take this class because it's a crucial part of the criminal justice world. I would also recommend anyone to take this class in the jail because it opens your eyes to a different world.

Changes in Perception

Initial perceptions each student group possessed about the other were changed over the course of the semester, which is consistent with the literature (Pompa, 2013). This result was very encouraging considering they were not together for the entire semester, such as in traditional Inside-Out courses. All the inside students enjoyed taking the class with the outside students and said that they felt differently about them after the class started:

> At first I was nervous of the judgement of us being inmates. But I personally think it was such an amazing experience. Some of their personal stories are amazing. They definitely left a place in my heart. Miss them!

> It was the best part of the class. They get to see the jail firsthand and we get to bounce ideas of off each other.

> At first I was not comfortable because I didn't really know people. I thought they would discriminate against me but after seeing them, it was wonderful. They didn't discriminate. It made me feel better to talk to regular people other than COs (correctional officers). They could connect. They were my age.

They all felt that the outside students demonstrated growth during the class:

> They opened up more. They let their guard down. Everyone was nervous and shy on both sides but they saw we were just a person in orange.

Nine of the outside students said their feelings changed from the beginning of the course to its completion; they were no longer nervous, realizing the inside students were just regular people:

> At first I was really nervous about having [incarcerated people] in the class because I didn't know what was going to happen, but I adjusted to it and realized that I was safe and they were all pretty nice people. We didn't go to the jail up until the end of the course, but I do believe that as we all adjusted to each other, our nerves went down and we all felt more confident.

Inside students felt the outside students added value to the course:

> The Pace students gave incentives for us to come.

> We felt as if we were all equal no matter if we were behind bars.

> It felt more real. It felt like an actual college class instead of just something the jail offered.

One inside student commented that seeing the outside students once a week was not enough for him but it provided him with the motivation to complete his work:

> I hardly got to see [them], only once a week. We had to do our work. I didn't want to do it but when I came to class, the first class, I really liked it. I wanted to graduate. I wanted to pass it. I got on others to get our work done.

Outside students also felt that the inside students added value to the class:

> It 100% increased the value. We didn't just take a class or learn something new. We were able to sit down with people our ages and see how quickly life could change for all of us. However, it showed us that there is still hope. It was

more of a life lesson than just a class.

Specific Changes Inside Students

Inside students reported feeling much more confident in their ability to perform college level work:

> I definitely feel more confident. At first I was nervous going back at a college level after being [out of school] for 10 years. Also [coming to class] without drugs involved was a huge achievement.

> I feel better. I am still nervous but I know I am able to do it.

All of these students, except for one, said it made their time at the jail easier:

> [It] made me feel like time wasn't just wasting away. [It] gave me something to look forward to each week. And having projects to do were fun.

> It was something to keep me busy and focused. I didn't want to get in trouble because the class was good.

Inside students' perspectives toward the criminal justice system changed slightly. Three were optimistic about the criminal justice system (compared to two in the pretest) (three were neutral) and three did not believe the criminal justice system was doing a good at preventing crime (compared to five in the pretest) (two were neutral). In examining levels of responsibility, four thought people should obey the law even if it goes against what they think is right (one was neutral) (compared to eight in the pretest), and three agreed that one cannot be blamed for breaking the law if they can get away with it (two were neutral) (compared to six in the pretest).

Specific Changes Outside Students

Outside students' views changed by the end of the course. Six students' views of corrections changed as a result of being in this course; four realized the inside students were just people, one realized that change was possible, and one said the jail conditions were much better than she anticipated:

> They are truly real people and just humans and want to make sense of things. They are not combative all the time and they don't just want all fun and games; they truly care.

Four students also had a change in their views of punishment; two acknowledged that inside students were not necessarily bad people but just made mistakes, one student's beliefs in rehabilitation was heightened, and one student recognized the role external forces played in shaping behavior:

> After seeing [them] firsthand and building some relationships with them, I have so much more compassion for [them] than I previously did. I got to see that these are real people who really aren't very different from me, and they are all struggling in one way or another. I definitely gained a new perspective on punishment and I saw that most of these people just need help rather than harsh punishments.

Five students changed the way they felt about rehabilitation, where all believed in the possibility of rehabilitation by the course's conclusion:

> I believe even more so that prison can change a person's life.

> After taking this course I saw [them] in a different light from how I previously did. I don't just see them as criminals, I see them as victims of abuse, trauma, neglect, loss, and I have compassion for them. I think that a lot of them need

> rehabilitation, which I believe would be much more effective in healing them and setting them on the right path, instead of being locked up and having all their individual rights taken away.

Positive changes in attitude toward their incarcerated classmates were reflected in changes in the ATP scores. Utilizing a paired sample *t*-test, data indicated statistically significant changes in the ATP Scale concerning positive attitudes toward the inside students (M=-50.36; SD=15.78; *t*=-10.59, p≤.01, p<.05; d=-.284) (1st ATP M = 50.45; 2nd ATP M=100.82). Students discussed some of the myths they had in the beginning of class regarding the inside students which changed over the course of the semester:

> I expected the inside students to participate minimally. I assumed they would just come to the class at the scheduled time to get their credits and go. I was completely wrong. Most of the inside students were very vocal in a good way. They participated in class discussion and group discussion. I also expected it to be a much different experience. The inside students were very nice to be around and all around fun people.

> For the first couple of classes I was nervous about [the inside students]. I was nervous that they would act out once we were there or one would try to cross the line and put a Pace student in an uncomfortable situation. I didn't think [they] would take the class seriously. I assumed they were using it to be able to socialize with other [inside] and outside students. Now that the class has ended my impression has definitely changed. …[They] took the class more seriously [than the outside students] and participated a lot in class.

Positive changes in their attitude toward correctional staff and corrections in general was also reflected in qualitative responses. Three outside students changed their views on correctional staff stating they were *nice* and *respectful*:

> My opinion of correction staff has changed. I kind of viewed correction staff as being mean or having power over the [incarcerated] and not treating them well. But from the experience at the jail, I think all the COs and other staff seemed respectful.

> A lot of the corrections staff that I interacted with actually cared about the [inside students]. I previously thought they would all just treat them as less than human, but I actually got to hear a corrections officer speak about how he actually cares about their well-being and respects them like he would anyone else. I saw that corrections officers don't just tell [them] what to do all the time and I saw that they actually have personal relationships with each other.

Most notably, students changed the way they felt about working in corrections. The experience opened them to the possibilities of new career options. Eight students (73%) would consider working in corrections, compared to five students when asked during the pretest:

> I think these people make a huge impact on the lives of those who are incarcerated and I would love to have a job where I could help people.

Challenges

Both groups of students experienced challenges, which appeared to increase during the shutdown. Inside students faced some challenges, such as the change in pedagogy due to COVID-19 (n=2), having to take an exam for the first time in a long time (n=2), writing papers

(n=1), getting acclimated to a school setting (n=1) and being in jail (n=1):

> At first I thought intermingling inmates and regular students would make me feel belittled and judged but in the end my challenge was not having our full course together.

> After the pandemic, the most challenging part was that we couldn't meet. We had to take more of an initiative. There was no one to push you. I was in a little competition with my classmates and then there was nothing to light my fire.

> The test because I haven't sat down for a test in years.

Inside students also reported to the professor that having assignments to complete during the quarantine helped to keep them occupied and they looked forward to the individual video visits with the professor. They would often ask about the outside students, and many wrote about a specific outside student in their journal/reflection paper who impacted them positively. They commented on the outside students' goals, achievements, and hardships as inspirational. They felt motivated by the presence of the outside students and most of them felt inspired by more than one outside student. As one inside student noted:

> He [in reference to an outside male student] is a very good inspiration to others getting his goals and achievements accomplished so early in life… he has so much to offer society and life. She [in reference to an outside female student] made such an impact on me with her drive and determination…I truly admire her strength and courage to pushing forward and not down dark roads.

Another inside student stated:

> There was someone in the class that every time I saw pushed me to work harder than usual and to be greater. She left a strong impression on me.

Like the inside students, the biggest challenge faced by the outside students during the semester was overcoming the obstacles created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The part the inside students liked least was the class' limited time together:

> This course opened my eyes to many new things. I absolutely enjoyed it and wish the COVID-19 didn't ruin our time together.

Like inside students, outside students continuously asked the professor for updates on their inside classmates. The outside students also wrote about one or two inside students in their journal/reflection papers who impacted them positively. One outside student wrote about an inside student who shared a very personal story about the day he thought of committing suicide:

> It [referring to what an inside student said] was very inspiring…It really goes to show that the perception [that others have about the incarcerated] are wrong to a certain extent. A lot of people can only see them for their crime and not what led to there.

Another outside student was impacted by the way the inside students' comments during class enhanced the course material:

> Being able to hear their [referring to the inside students] stories and positions on a subject was very eye opening. Their personal experiences were very helpful in my understanding of the course content.

Outside students commented on how similar they were to inside students. One student spoke about an inside student that she identified with:

> [Name of inside student] and I are the same age and have the same interests. I saw a lot of similarities between us and it was eye opening for me because one dumb move with my friends and I could have been [him].

Discussion

Lessons Learned

Even though course modality changed mid-semester, it was clear that the limited interaction between inside and outside students proved to be beneficial to both. This is encouraging because prior research has examined the benefits of inside/outside student interactions after a complete semester. This data suggests that similar benefits can be derived in less time and that any interactions/exposure between inside and outside persons can beget beneficial outcomes. Both groups of students enjoyed the course and the new experience it provided. By the end of the course, they all supported rehabilitation and believed correctional programming was an important component in this process. Initial nervousness, based on misconceptions each student group had about the other, subsided for both groups after the first class and both groups reported that they witnessed growth and change in the other group. The outside students stated that the change they saw in the inside students was the most rewarding part of their experience. For the inside students, the most rewarding part of the course was engaging with the outside students. They benefited from not feeling judged by the outside students. The outside students were able to encourage them and assist them during this process, which was evident during the smaller group work. This course created a moment of connection for two groups, who may not have otherwise met; their time together appeared to create a deeper understanding of the material for inside students and a deeper understanding of the incarceration experience for outside students. These findings are consistent with previous Inside-Out research (Allred et al., 2019). Both groups were disappointed that they were not able to be together as a class for the remainder of the semester when the University and the jail stopped the program mid-semester to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission. Yet, the connections they made were strong as both groups consistently asked the professor about the other group.

Overall, inside students reported that they learned a lot of new material, which mirrored other research that showed that inside students gained more knowledge of the criminal justice system after completing similar programming (Martinovic, et al., 2018). Inside students had the opportunity to earn three free college credits, they gained confidence in their ability to work at a college level and they felt that being in the class made their time at the jail easier. Inside students worked together on their housing blocks to help motivate one another pre-pandemic. These students were able to interact in a very pro-social way both in and out of class. This college course was something for them to look forward to weekly and additional work helped to occupy their time when they were not in class, especially during the quarantine. Once the class was divided, it appeared more difficult for the inside students to remain motivated. Although limited interactions can produce beneficial outcomes, a full semester of engagement would be preferred to maximize outcomes.

This course provided outside students with a unique opportunity to work directly with the incarcerated, which afforded them real world experience and the ability to address biases/stereotypes that they held about the incarcerated, an important change for future criminal justice professionals. By the end of the course, all of the outside students supported rehabilitation. They realized that the inside students were "just people" and that change was possible. Changes in the ATP scale proved to be statistically significant. It's a humanizing process (Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014) and it is important to consider that attitudes or beliefs can a play a role in how students relate to the incarcerated (Melvin et al., 1985). Exposure to a correctional environment clearly helps to debunk myths and stereotypes toward those who live and work within its walls. Outside students not only experienced changes in their view toward inside students, but their views on corrections and correctional staff also changed. More students con-

sidered working in a correctional setting (five during the pretest compared to eight during the post-test). It is interesting to note that it did not take the entire semester to effect such change, suggesting even limited contact in a correctional setting is beneficial.

The benefits of this course for both groups were likely to be more impactful if the class was allowed to continue as designed. The abrupt change in teaching modality, the uncertainty about contracting the virus, and the anxiety surrounding the length of the lockdown, affected both groups of students, which were verbally reported to the professor throughout the remainder of the semester. Even though outside students greatly appreciated the inside students who joined the class via Zoom after they were released, the quality of the interactions were not the same, especially when inside students had difficulty connecting to technology. They were often late to class, with the professor calling them several times to remind them about class the day before and the day of class. An unstructured environment is a much more difficult environment to manage. However, with proper planning in a structured environment, technology could be used more effectively to facilitate educational programming in the correctional setting, especially for facilities that have had difficulty securing educational services for its population prior to COVID.

Inside students cited COVID-19 as a major challenge during the course, especially when the class was no longer allowed to meet and they were required to work remotely and independently. The pandemic proved to be particularly stressful for them; they feared getting infected with Coronavirus, they were not allowed to receive visits while incarcerated, and they were no longer able to participate in many programs (many programs closed during this time). Several inside students were awaiting early release decisions, which appeared to be anxiety-producing. For those who were released, there were limited services available in the community because of the pandemic. Once released, they discussed with the professor the many struggles they were facing (i.e., loneliness, lack of housing, no employment, other charges/court cases, family problems, drug use, mental health, etc.). Getting released from a correctional institution can produce feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression under usual circumstances, but their release during a pandemic was anything but usual. It was unfortunate that during the sixth week, inside students really began to demonstrate change (i.e., participating and sharing more, taking the class more seriously, etc.) but due to the Coronavirus, it would be the last time the class would be together. The camaraderie and group support that was formed during the first half of the semester was lost, especially for the inside students, during the latter half.

Self-Reflection

An Inside-Out type course requires tremendous preparation, and many lessons were learned by the professor, who was not only teaching this course for the first time, but also teaching it during an unprecedented pandemic. It was helpful to have a separate orientation the first week of class – one for the inside students and one for the outside students. This is recommended in the *Inside-Out* Program's curriculum. Rules and regulations could be discussed and warnings regarding inappropriate behaviors were provided. Students were allowed to ask questions (without the other group present) and meet with the professor prior to combining the groups. Group activities were the most beneficial. Pairing inside and outside students to work together on activities that were related to the respective lecture was a great way for students to connect and develop confidence, team building and critical thinking skills. Students overwhelmingly enjoyed this aspect of the course. It was unfortunate that the course was closed after week seven and the professor was not able to pilot all of the group activities. The activities developed/chosen for the first half of the semester worked very well and will be maintained moving forward. Since the class involved both incarcerated men and women, a correctional officer was placed in the classroom. It was important to establish a good rapport with correctional staff and most COs assigned to the class were encouraged to participate by the professor. Their participation and active engagement helped them to seem like a part of the class. Their presence did not disrupt the class or the students' ability to engage with one another. In fact,

inside students talked very openly despite the presence of correctional staff.

Technology was essential and is underutilized in most correctional environments. Although the class could no longer be together, technology was instrumental in maintaining educational integrity. The professor Zoomed with outside students during their regularly scheduled class time. As inside students were released, they were able to join the outside students on Zoom, bringing the class together, albeit in a different way. For those who remained incarcerated, the professor met with inside students via WCDOC's video visitation system to discuss assignments, readings, and answer any questions. Although inside students found this mode of instruction challenging, they benefited from this interaction, and most were able to successfully complete the course. As inside students were released, the professor spent a large portion of her time staying connected to them, encouraging them, providing referrals for services for them, and helping them to complete their assignments, despite the other difficulties they were facing.

Implications and Future Research

This experience demonstrated that technology is critical to the maintenance of correctional-based programming, just as it was critical for community-based education at all levels, during a crisis. It was unclear whether any other Inside-Out courses were provided at other facilities during the pandemic; the author was not able to ascertain this information. However, it implies that such technology can be used far after the pandemic is over to expand educational services for correctional populations. Not only did the WCDOC utilize existing technology during the lockdown, but in preparation for the future, purchased a smart television with Zoom capabilities in summer 2020 and purchased several more for the Spring 2021. The professor, who teaches a parenting course for the WCDOC during the Fall semester (*Parenting, Prison & Pups)*[2] utilized this technology to teach her class. Outside students were not allowed to visit the jail because of their high risk for COVID-19, but the professor and her therapy teams were physically present with the incarcerated women and Zoomed the outside students into the class. From the professor's perspective, having the students physically present typically provided more engagement between them and the incarcerated women, however, without this technology, this class would have been cancelled. There were also benefits this technology provided over traditional in-person classes for the outside students. Students did not have to worry about transportation. They had to devote less time to their participation since they did not have to go through security, which is often a lengthy process. They did not have to worry about missed classes and could easily login via Zoom from any location. The fall 2020 semester had the benefit of time and experience to plan how to effectively incorporate technology and to improve upon the course structure, which the previous spring 2020 semester did not afford the facility or the professor.

As COVID-19 rates rose again, the WCDOC is not allowing non-essential staff to have contact with the incarcerated based on recommendations from the Department of Health. The professor, who taught the *Inside-Out* course again in Spring 2021, originally planned to teach the *Inside-Out* class in the same manner she taught the parenting class in Fall 2020 (i.e., being physically present in the jail with the inside students, while the outside students Zoomed into the jail). However, she was deemed non-essential and was remote until the recommendation changes. Fortunately, the approval of technology made this class possible. With these changes in mind, a plan was organized with correctional program staff and approved by correctional administration to continue the *Inside-Out* course without affecting the most important component of the course – the interactions between the inside and outside students. The smart television, which allows for Zoom capabilities, was used to Zoom the professor, the inside students, and the outside students together. A program officer was assigned to assist with these classes at the jail and monitor the technology. Having correctional support was essential; security concerns

2 Parenting, Prison, & Pups is a parenting course, integrated with animal-assisted theory, taught to incarcerated women at two different jails, with the assistance of undergraduate student teaching assistants enrolled in a civic engagement course.

prohibit inside students from directly accessing technology, especially technology that allows for an outside connection. The presence of custodial staff ensures that protocols are followed and allows the class to function even though the professor cannot be in the physical classroom.

The smart television allows for everyone to be together while Zooming but will not allow for smaller group engagement (i.e. breakout rooms) between the inside and outside students, which is the most important component of the course. Hence, Pace University donated four laptops to the jail for the semester. One laptop was shared by two inside students to allow for social distancing (i.e., the inside students each sat at the opposite end of a rectangular table with the laptop between them). These laptops were used to place inside and outside students in Zoom "breakout" rooms where they were able to complete the smaller group work essential to the integrity of the course. The author knows of no other facility that was able to facilitate an Inside-Out course during the pandemic with the use of similar technology. This class included a smaller number of inside students than would normally be included (six inside students) and all of these inside students were from the same housing block (unlike last year), which limited the number of incarcerated persons eligible. There were two reasons for this change. First, without the professor onsite, a larger number of inside students, who often need additional support, would be difficult to manage. It is important that they receive the support they need. The professor was able to meet with them individually through the WCDOC's video visitation system. Second, it will allow the class to continue should COVID rates continue to rise and comingling between blocks prohibited, as it was last year during the height of the pandemic. The professor spent time revising assignments and adding additional group work to increase the interactions between inside and outside students. Although they cannot be together, the more time spent in these smaller groups, the more intimate and more connected they felt.

The WCDOC can serve as a model to other correctional institutions that may fear the use of similar technology. Technology can be properly monitored and effectively used when outside agencies work together with correctional staff to ensure that security protocols are the highest priority. The use of technology for the past year at WCDOC, with several programs, has been without incident. The implementation of video technology could expand programming for other correctional institutions, even post-COVID. This could be instrumental in bringing programming to facilities where programming has been difficult to implement because of distance from the nearest college/university willing to provide educational resources. Such technology can also be used when there is another reason the professor may be unable to be physically present at the correctional institution (i.e., inclement weather, sickness, etc.). Class would not have to be cancelled if technology was available. The use of these resources will far exceed the benefits it provides during and after the current pandemic.

Through college programming, even remote programming, opportunities can be created for inside/outside students to have transformative learning experiences that highlight partnership and discourse, while encouraging them to take primary roles in addressing vital social issues. With empirical evidence, there is an opportunity to impact policy by demonstrating why partnerships between correctional facilities and universities/colleges are crucial in addressing social inequity (i.e. educational attainment) among our most disadvantaged citizens. Jail populations receive fewer programs than prison populations, with jailed women being the least served (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). There is sufficient research which shows that college programming often leads to lower rates of recidivism and improved disciplinary behavior (Gaes et. al., 1999). Those housed in American jails, who often suffer from a paucity of programming, especially college level programming, will have the opportunity to take a college course for no cost. The use of technology is an important consideration in helping to maintain programming during a crisis, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Correctional facilities should consider how the use of technology can expand service opportunities for the incarcerated without jeopardizing security.

College education in correctional facilities is cost- effective (Davis et al., 2013) and fu-

ture researchers should examine which pedagogical approaches are most effective in a correctional environment, especially a jail environment, in order to determine the best way to invest limited programmatic resources. *Inside-Out* courses appear to be a highly effective modality. Challenges in the jail setting, in terms of the implementation and maintenance of programming, should not dissuade educators or researchers from conducting this important work.

References

Allred, S. (2009). Inside-Out prison exchange program: The impact of structure, content, and readings. *Journal of Correctional Education, 60*(3), 240–258. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23282746

Allred, S. L., Boyd, C., Cotton, T., & Perry, P. (2019). Participatory evaluation in a prison education program: Meaning & community building within Inside-Out think tanks. *Corrections. Policy, Practice and Research, 5*(1), 6-27. DOI: 10.1080/23774657.2019.1604193

Bahr, S. J., Harris, L., Fisher, J.K., & Armstrong, A. H. (2010). Successful reentry: What differentiates successful and unsuccessful parolees? *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 54*(5), 667-692. DOI: 10.1177/0306624X09342435

Burke, L. (2020). College programs in prison go remote. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/18/college-programs-prisons-adapt-covid

Burke, A. S., & Bush, M. D. (2013). Service learning and criminal justice: An exploratory study of student perceptions. *Educational Review*, *65*(1), 56-69. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.638138

Collica-Cox, K. & Molina, L. (2020). A case study of the Westchester County New York's jail response to COVID-19: Controlling COVID while balancing service needs for the incarcerated- A national model for jails. *Victims & Offenders: An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice, 15*(7-8), 1305-1316. https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1820923

Collica-Cox, K., & Furst, G. (2019). Parenting from a county jail: Parenting from beyond the bars. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 40*(7), 593-604. https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2019.1565877

Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education. A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. Washington, D.C.; Rand Corporation. Available: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html

Digard, L., diZerega, M., Yaroni, A., & Rinaldi, J. (2016). A new role in technology? Implementing video visitation in prison. Vera Institute of Justice: NY. Available: https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/video-visitation-in-prison_02.pdf

Gaes, G., Flanagan, T., Motiuk, L. & Stewart, L. (1999). Adult correction treatment. *Prisons* (ed by Tonry, M. & Petersilis, J). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heider, C. (2018). The Inside-Out prison exchange program: Intersections between feminism and communication. *Humanities, 7*(3), 84. https://doi.org/10.3390/h7030084

Hilinski-Rosick, C., & Blackmer, A. (2014). An exploratory examination of the impact of the Inside-Out prison exchange program. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education, 25*(3), 386–397. DOI:10.1080/10511253.2014.922593

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. (n.d). Inside-out at 20: The power of connection and community. https://www.insideoutcenter.org/PDFs_new/AnnualReport_InsideOut.pdf

Lartey, J. (2020, April 23). New York rolled back bail reform. What will the rest of the country do? *The Marshall project.* https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/04/23/in-new-york-s-bail-reform-backlash-a-cautionary-tale-for-other-states

Link, T. C. (2016). Breaking down barriers: Review of an Inside/Out prison exchange program in a jail setting, Part 1. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry, 3*(1), 50–55. DOI:10.15845/jper.v3i1.923

Long, D., & Barnes, M. (2016). A pilot evaluation of the Inside-Out prison exchange program in the Philadelphia area. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action, Temple University's In-

side-Out Center.

Mackey, D. A., & Courtright, K. E. (2000). Assessing punitiveness among college students: A comparison of criminal justice majors with other majors. *The Justice Professional, 12,* 423- 441. https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2000.9959561

Martinovic, M., Lidell, M., & Muldoon, S. D. (2018). Changing views and perceptions: the impact of the Australian Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program on students. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 24(*6-7), 437-453. DOI: 10.1080/13803611.2018.1543051

McKinley, J. (2020, March 22). New York City region is now an epicenter of the Coronavirus pandemic. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/22/nyregion/Coronavirus-new-York-epicenter.html

Melvin, K. B., Gramling, L. K., & Gardner, W. M. (1985). Scale to measure attitudes toward prisoners. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 12(*2), 241-254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854885012002006

Mishne, L., Warner, E., Willis, B., & Shomaker., R. (2012). Breaking down barriers: Studentexperiences of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. *Undergraduate Journal ofService Learning and Community-Based Research, 1*, 1–14. https://ujslcbr.org/index.php/ujslcbr/article/view/87

NYS (New York State). (2020). Information on novel Coronavirus. Available: https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/no-202-declaring-disaster-emergency-state-new-york

Philippon, C. N. (2018). *Sending students to prison: An impact evaluation of the Arizona Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program*. Unpublished Dissertation: Arizona State University. https://ccj.asu.edu/sites/default/files/philippon_sending_students_to_prison.pdf

Pompa, L. (2013). One brick at a time: The power and possibility of dialogue across the prison wall. *The Prison Journal, 93*(2), 127-134. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885512472479

Werts, T. (2013). Reflections on the inside-out prison exchange program. *Prison Journal, 93*(2), 135-138. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885512472483

Westchester County New York Office of the District Attorney. (2020). 65 inmates released from county jail on COVID-19 concerns. Available: https://www.westchesterda.net/april-2020/6517-65-inmates-released-from-county-jail-on-covid-19-concers

WHO (World Health Organization). (2020, July 9). Transmission of SARS-CoV-2: implications for infection prevention precautions. Available: https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-implications-for-infection-prevention-precautions

Wyant, B. R., & Lockwood, B. (2018). Transformative learning, higher order thinking, and the Inside-Out prison exchange program. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, *69*(3), 49-67.

Kimberly Collica-Cox, Ph.D. is a Professor with Pace University in the Department of Criminal Justice & Security. Her research focus is on incarcerated populations and prison-based programming; she has over 20 years of practitioner experience working with incarcerated populations and is a certified PREA and ACA auditor. She is the Director and co-creator of the Parenting, Prison & Pups Program, and has served as a professional trainer since 1997, working with incarcerated populations, correctional staff, and community-based service providers.

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank the Westchester County Department of Correction, especially Joseph Spano, Louis Molina, Nory Padilla, Leandro Diaz, Walter Moccio, Marie Reyes, Michael Gerald, Cassandra Tejeda and Eileen Sacharewitz. for their com-

mitment to rehabilitative programming and research. A special thanks to our inside and outside students for their commitment to higher education and to helping and supporting one another.