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# Education in prison

A literature review





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# IMPRINT

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### **Artworks:**

The artworks used in this publication were produced by serving or released prisoners, and appear with permission. With the exception of Eddie Cahill, we have been requested not to identify the artists, most of whom are still serving sentences. We have, however, credited the photographers, and given a brief description of how and where each work was created.

We are grateful to Tom Shortt, Arts Development Officer for the Irish Prison Education Service, who sourced the works on our behalf and also took some of the photographs. His kind support and interest in the project have been much appreciated.

### **Cover picture:**

The artwork, entitled Yellow Tree, was painted by a participant in art classes at the education unit of Midlands Prison. The artist painted on a part-time basis before serving his first prison sentence, in his fifties. Challenged and encouraged by a prison art teacher, he has, since his release, painted full-time and is building a career as an artist.

**Photo:** Eugene Langan



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## Foreword

Today, approximately 11 million people are in penal institutions worldwide, a number that is constantly growing. With prisons frequently overcrowded, prison systems around the world are at crisis point, unable to provide services such as education to the level required by international standards. Education, however, is a fundamental human right, of which prisoners should not be deprived. Enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and at the heart of UNESCO's mission, the right to education implies a right to lifelong learning. This includes providing access to quality education from the first day of incarceration to and beyond the day of release.

The impact and power of education in prison is undeniable. Education in prison can provide prisoners with the opportunity to learn new skills and give them a renewed sense of purpose. Research has shown that prisoners who participate in education and training programmes are less likely to return to prison. They are also more likely to find employment on release.

Understandably, education in prison can take on different meanings and forms depending on local and national context. The concept of education in prison itself can be all-embracing and sometimes even contested. Its meaning and scope differ across countries and jurisdictions and must be understood according to their political, social and historical context. Many countries provide formal primary and secondary education and vocational training to prisoners free of charge. Some countries provide access to higher education, whether through distance learning or in prison, at the prisoners' own expense or financed by private grants. Prison libraries also play a key role in enabling access to information and reading materials for inmates. International organizations, non-governmental organizations and other institutions provide educational activities in prisons, ranging from law classes to creative writing workshops and learning focused on building links between prisoners and their families.

Recognizing the variety of understandings of the concept of education in prison, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has developed a set of two comprehensive literature reviews (in English and French) as part of



UIL's **Education in Prison** project, which aims to support prison education through producing new evidence on effective policies and practices, documenting lessons learned and promoting informed professional exchange on prison education among policy-makers, researchers and practitioners in all regions.

These literature reviews aim to provide a renewed approach to the concept of education in prison, as well as to build a solid knowledge base, and to identify current trends, achievements and challenges in prison education at a global level. They are also meant to identify critical knowledge gaps and inform the next steps for research in the field. The first literature review, *Education in Prison: A Literature Review*, surveys the literature in English and focuses on some of the unique characteristics and challenges concerning the provision of education in prison, including: the emergence of an informal curriculum; language tuition in prison; access to higher education; the availability of library facilities; digital literacy; civic engagement and social (re)integration; and prison programmes for education. It also analyses commitments made through international and regional declarations and agreements. Furthermore, it examines penal policies, strategies and pedagogical approaches established in jurisdictions around the world. Finally, this review provides recommendations to local administrations and national government on education in prison.

The second review, *L'éducation en prison: revue de littérature francophone*, covers French-language literature on the topic of education in prison and, like its English-language counterpart, offers a set of recommendations.

Together, those two publications document what remains an unserved domain of education and penal policy, and can inform actions and reforms by governments, policy-makers, concerned organizations and other stakeholders engaged in ensuring that incarceration does not become a barrier to the right to education.

**David Atchoarena,**  
**Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning**



This painting is by Eddie Cahill, an Irish artist who began to paint while serving time as a prisoner. A representation of three young men embarking on a life involving crime, they appear youthful and healthy but perhaps naive and innocent.

*Photo:* Tom Shortt

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background and rationale

There are more than 11 million people in prison worldwide. From 2000 to 2018, the recorded prison population increased by 24 per cent (Walmsley, 2018, p.2). While these raw data do not illuminate the experiences of education for learners and educators, they provide the context in which to study education in prison. As with all forms of pedagogy, prison education is not a neutral activity that is independent of the context in which it operates. It must be considered against a wider historical, social, political, economic and cultural backdrop. Moreover, education in prison takes place in an institution that is cut off from the public gaze, and influenced by unique institutional culture(s).

While the rates vary widely between countries and across jurisdictions, imprisonment has significant personal, familial, social, political and cultural consequences. Furthermore, due to the vast numbers incarcerated in some jurisdictions, the use of prison as punishment has become a major economic issue in the twenty-first century. The considerable amount spent on imprisonment and other forms of punishment is having a negative impact on investment available for public education and other social and public services, with a corrosive knock-on effect for wider society.<sup>1</sup>

**1** In 2016, a report from the United States Department of Education (2016, pp. 1–2) outlined trends in expenditure on education and imprisonment: ‘From 1979–80 to 2012–13, public PK–12 expenditures increased by 107 percent (from \$258 to \$534 billion), while total state and local corrections expenditures increased by 324 percent (from \$17 to \$71 billion)– triple the rate of increase in education spending’. It noted: ‘Over the past three decades, state and local government expenditures on prisons and jails have increased at a much faster pace than state and local spending on elementary and secondary education and postsecondary education. All too often, children growing up in poor communities not only do poorly in school but also are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated during their teenage and young adult years’. H. Rangel Terrijo (2019, p. 792) notes that attempts to reduce the cost of incarceration through the privatization of prisons in Mexico have not led to financial savings. He cites an academic study, which found that, in private prisons, each person can cost the state 1,500 pesos a day (and up to 2,500 pesos for women). In public prisons, this averaged between 150 and 390 pesos. Further, ‘the privatization process in Mexico is far from improving prisons: this policy shows a lack of transparency, the deterioration of services for prisoners, and the violation of prisoner rights’. As many scholars have noted, cuts to prison budgets usually impact negatively on the provision of programmes, especially in the provision of education (see for example, Baratov, 2014; Smith, 2013; Warner, 2007; Warr 2016).

The study of education in prison has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years. There has been an increase in the number of academic publications on prisoners and education. In 2014, the *Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry* was established. An international open-access journal, it has a research and practitioner section featuring papers written by academics, practitioners and students in prison. In 2019, the *Journal of Higher Education in Prison* was launched, with its first issue scheduled for publication in 2020. It is due to be published twice yearly by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison in the United States of America, and will provide ‘the growing field of higher education in prison a forum to discuss praxis and the ways that theory can and should inform teaching and learning in prison’ (Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, 2019).

In 2013, *Radical Teacher* published a special issue on ‘the possibilities and limits of radical teaching inside prisons and other institutions of incarceration’ (Drabinski and Harkins, 2013, p. 3). This followed a special issue on prison education, published in 2000, on the theme of ‘Teaching Against the Prison Industrial Complex’, which examined strategies for teaching about, and against, carceral institutions, from outside the prison walls. In 2016, the editors described a special issue of the *Prison Service Journal* (PSJ) on ‘The Transformational Potential of Prison Education’ as ‘both a celebration and a provocation’. Covering a wide array of topics and challenges around education in prison, its aim was ‘to offer material that will encourage positive practices, without avoiding uncomfortable questions’ (Bennett, 2016, p. 2). In 2018, *Advancing Corrections* published a special issue on education in prison entitled ‘Innovation in Education: Voices from the Front Line’, followed one year later by a special issue of *Review of Communications* (2019) on the same theme. The latter publication set out to ‘radically reframe how academic literature addresses and understands the carceral classroom’. The editors maintained that ‘the primary lens through which prison education is evaluated is as a means of reducing recidivism [...] we write back against that assertion, arguing that prison education is far more than a tool for crime reduction [...] we offer a view inside the classroom behind bars and demonstrate that prison education is a means of resistance’ (Key and May, 2019, p. 1).

Other journals have joined the discussion, publishing papers on subject-specific education in prison. The special issue of the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* on 'Planning beyond Mass Incarceration', which appeared in 2020, contained a paper on teaching an urban sociology course in prison, comprising 'inside' and 'outside' learners (see Chapter 3). It stressed 'the importance of new locations of learning that enable classrooms to become contact zones, pushing students to collaboratively reimagine justice in the city with those outside the traditional classroom' (Steil and Mehta, 2020, p. 186).

In 2019, the *International Review of Education*, produced at UIL, published a special issue entitled 'Education in Prison: A Basic Right and an Essential Tool'. Examining education for people in prison from a human rights perspective, articles in the special issue covered a range of countries. Guest editors Hugo Rangel Torrijo and Marc De Maeyer (2019, p. 677) concluded that the 'committed provision of prison education (in both financial and practical terms) enables society to change prisons and inmates' lives. Doubtless, the ultimate end of prison education is to humanise prisons'. They note, too, that in 2011, as a reflection of UNESCO's commitment 'to promote, stimulate and encourage applied research on various aspects of correctional education and to monitor the situation at the international level', a UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison was established at Marie-Victorin College in Montreal, Canada (Rangel Torrijo and De Maeyer, 2019, p. 672).

Along with renewed academic interest in education behind bars, there has been an increase in the number of programmes run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), voluntary organizations and educational institutions to provide a range of pedagogical activities in penal institutions. These range from the Stepping Stones college preparatory programmes in the United States of America (Alexander, 2011) to library-led initiatives to allow incarcerated parents to record bedtime stories for their children (Storybook Dads, 2020). Sometimes, organizations provide prison programmes to make up for a lack of services provided by national or local penal and/or educational administrations. In other instances,

these programmes are designed to supplement existing provision (see, for example, the case studies provided in this review).

There has been an upsurge in the number of tertiary institutions providing educational courses in prisons. As this review will demonstrate, the expansion of third-level education usually involves university students participating collaboratively with learners in prison. One such programme, Inside-Out, endeavours to promote ‘social change through transformative education’ (The Inside-Out Center, 2020) as university students visit prisons to learn alongside students inside. Similar programmes, such as Learning Together in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Ludlow et al., 2019) and comparable initiatives in Denmark and Belgium, provide third-level learning opportunities for students inside and outside the prison context (Champion, 2018).

In order to widen participation and meet their civic and community obligations, some universities provide tuition to degree level specifically for prisoners. In the USA, the Bard Prison Initiative provides a liberal arts curriculum in six New York State prisons. The programme ‘creates and protects academic spaces where students and faculty engage in ambitious college coursework, challenge one another intellectually, and build supportive community’ (Bard Prison Initiative, 2020). Such was the level of interest in education in prison that the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) aired a four-part documentary on the Bard College programme, ‘College Behind Bars’, in 2019 (PBS, 2019).

Given this renewed interest in the education of prisoners, and in light of the personal, social, political and economic consequences of imprisonment, it is therefore an appropriate time to undertake an in-depth review of the literature on education in prison.

## 1.2. Executive summary

Education in prison differs across countries and jurisdictions. While philosophies, approaches, programmes and practices vary from one jurisdiction to another, there are nonetheless common characteristics that link the practice of education in prison across the globe. Despite geographical, cultural and political differences, educators in prisons across the world find themselves facing similar challenges as they adopt innovative strategies and approaches in order to overcome the complexities of teaching in coercive environments.

The topics covered in this literature review are specific to education in prison. The review focuses on some of the unique characteristics and challenges associated with the provision of education in prison: the emergence of an informal curriculum; language tuition; access to higher education; the availability of library facilities; digital literacy; civic engagement and social (re)integration; and the relationship between what are termed behavioural programmes and the provision of education.

One of the most significant findings in the review is the mismatch between the commitments professed in international and regional declarations and agreements, and the ways in which these have (or have not) been translated into the provision of education in prison. With a few notable exceptions, such commitments have not been embraced by national penal policy-makers, which in turn has had a negative knock-on effect for educational provision in prisons.

The literature reviewed here stresses the importance of providing a holistic suite of educational resources to meet the needs of those confined in penal institutions. Mindful of the student group, there is a persuasive argument to be made for adequate allocation of resources to what might be considered a 'hard-to-reach' group.

In order to transform the notion of 'education for all' from an aspiration into a reality, and to provide a robust education system for those confined in penal institutions, there needs to be a re-examination of penal policies, strategies and pedagogical approaches in many jurisdictions. The

mismatch between principles and policy found across the world is partly due to the competing agendas advocated by penal policy-makers, on the one hand, and educationalists, on the other. The ideals laid down in various international documents will only become a reality if and when policy-makers – both penal and educational – take steps, both politically and financially, to ensure their implementation.

The analysis of the literature concludes with a number of recommendations regarding policies and programmes for education in prison. After conducting the review, gaps were identified in the literature, and recommendations made for future research.





Pottery and clay modelling are popular activities throughout the Irish Prison Education Service. These ceramic tiles, which draw on environmental themes, were created by prisoners attending the education unit at Arbour Hill Prison in Dublin.

*Photo: Eugene Langan*

## 2. SETTING THE SCENE

### 2.1. Introduction

Education in prison differs across countries and jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup> While there are differences in philosophies, approaches, programmes and practices across the range of jurisdictions, there are also common characteristics that link the practice of education in prison worldwide. Despite differences at the geographical, cultural and policy levels, educators in prisons around the world face similar challenges as they adopt innovative strategies and approaches, and strive to overcome the complexities of teaching in coercive environments. This review will sketch out the contours of education in prison across the globe and consider some of the key challenges facing educators and learners in penal settings in the twenty-first century.

The topics covered are specific to education in prison, and the review is structured as follows:

- The present chapter (Chapter 2) defines the parameters of the study. It begins by stating the aims and objectives of the literature review, and lists the questions that the review will cover. It then outlines the scope of the study and the methodology used, noting the important role that language plays in any study of prisons and people in prison.
- Chapter 3 considers the development of education in prison, examines the principles on which it is based, and details the make-up of the learner population. In particular, this chapter reflects on what is characterized as education in prison, how its definition varies across and within different jurisdictions, and how this can lead to contrasting approaches with regard to educational provision.

**2** In some countries, national governments are in charge of criminal justice, penal and educational systems. In others, these fall within the remit of regional, provincial, state or local administrations.

- Chapter 4 addresses issues specific to education in the prison context: the emergence of an informal curriculum; language teaching and migrant prisoners; access to higher education; the availability of library facilities; digital literacy; civic engagement and social (re)integration; and the relationship between what are termed behavioural programmes and the provision of education.
- Towards the end of the literature review, two sets of recommendations (Chapter 5) are made. The first concerns education in prison and addresses national governments and local administrations. The second provides recommendations for future research.
- The review of the literature concludes (Chapter 6) by making the case for the provision of education in prison.
- The appendices and references included at the end of this review provide a comprehensive list of resources for further reading.

## 2.2. Aims and objectives

The purpose of this review is to examine the literature on education in prison. It will address the following questions:

- How has education in prison developed over time?
- How is education in prison defined?
- Are there common characteristics among prison populations that need to be taken into consideration in order to meet their educational needs?
- What are the challenges facing education in prison internationally, in terms of both policy and practice?
- What support is needed in order to promote education in prison?
- What further research is required to improve the provision of education in prison?

### 2.3. Scope

The purpose of this study is to identify, collate and analyse a range of literature on education for adult prisoners. It concentrates on issues relating to education in prison, rather than those affecting education in general, unless the latter have a direct impact on the provision of education for adult prisoners.

As with all studies, time and financial constraints limit the scope of this review in a number of ways. First, the concept of education in prison can be a contested one. How it is defined can differ depending on who is describing, teaching, funding and researching it (this will be further scrutinized in Chapter 3). Hence, while this review will acknowledge a range of perspectives, it will focus primarily on the characteristics that define education in prison as laid down in various international declarations, conventions and standards. These in turn pertain mainly to issues of adult education within a social justice framework that advocates for access to education for all as a human right.

Second, due to the considerable range of literature under consideration, the review will take a thematic approach, i.e. it will cover various topics unique to education in prison. It will acknowledge wide variations with regard to educational provision across the world by including regional examples. However, in some parts of the world, literature on education in prison is scant, as Rangel Torrijo and De Maeyer (2019, p. 676) discovered when preparing their special issue on education in prison for the *International Review of Education*. They found that it was 'not easy to gather an international range of researchers on this subject who would be able to cover all world regions', and thus argued that further research would be needed to cover this lacuna (see recommendations in Chapter 5).

Third, the review is cognizant of the limitations concerning geographical focus and language. Most research and the majority of higher-level institutions, journals, resources and academics are located in the Global North (Carrington et al., 2019, p. 164). This is particularly true in the subject areas of the social sciences pertinent to this review, i.e. adult

education, criminology and penology. After reviewing literature relating to education in prison in five adult education journals, Frey (2014, p. 195) concluded that the themes that are ‘currently lacking or not well-represented include a deficiency of international focus beyond Euro-centric countries’. While the situation is changing, criminology is currently largely USA- and UK-centric (Ugelvik, Jewkes and Crewe, 2020). As the USA has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, it is perhaps understandable that there is considerable research on its penal system and education in prison (or, as it is termed in the USA, correctional education). In his study of life in an Ethiopian prison, O’Donnell (2019, p. 267) argued that our understanding of penology ‘tends to be rooted in research carried out in Europe and the United States’. While this review concentrates on research available in the English language, it is informed by an understanding not only of the study’s limitations, but also of the richness of educational provision available outside the jurisdictions that are covered in this review. Where academic research on non-English-speaking countries has been published in English, it has been included in the study.

This literature review does not cover the education and training of prison officers. Prison officers contribute significantly towards creating a positive learning dynamic in prisons, and are increasingly becoming a focus of research in their own right (see e.g. Liebling, Price and Schefer, 2011; Humblet, 2020; Akoensi and Tankebe, 2020). The education and training of prison officers requires a study of its own and thus falls largely outside the scope of this review.

Similarly, this review does not consider the specific training needs of educators who take up a career teaching in prison. The training available to prison educators varies widely. Some jurisdictions provide courses exclusively for teachers working in prisons, others allocate teachers from their external cohort of adult educators. Many jurisdictions provide no specific courses for educators prior to them taking up a teaching position in a prison, but instead offer on-the-job training.

Although there are similarities in the provision of education in juvenile and children’s institutions, there are a number of key differences with

regard to legislation, approaches, demographics and focus. As this study concentrates on the provision of education in adult prisons, it does not deal with education in juvenile institutions, which requires a stand-alone review.

The objective of the literature review is to lay the foundations for a solid knowledge base regarding education in prison. It is hoped that it will serve as a springboard to further research projects, especially in other languages.

## **2.4. Methodology**

The review considers original research and academic studies, literature reviews, national policies, and reports at international, country and regional levels. Using scholarly and online databases, it concentrates on key issues facing education in prison in the twenty-first century. It uses a range of search terms: prison education; education in prison; correctional education; corrections education; prisoner learners; libraries in prison; higher education in prison; and history of prison education. Due to the sheer volume of available literature, not all publications in these categories can (or, indeed, should) be included. For example, at the time of writing (7 July 2020) a search for the term ‘prison education’ in Google Scholar alone generated 3,150 results for the period 2015–2020, and 4,250 results for the term ‘correctional education’. A search of the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database for the same time period yielded 244 results for ‘prison education’ and 382 results for ‘correctional education’.

## 2.5. A note on terminology

Various names have been, and are currently used to describe places of confinement, among them: house of corrections, asylum, jail, prison, borstal, penitentiary, reformatory, detention centre and correctional institution (Morris and Rothman, 1998; Ugelvik et al, 2020).<sup>3</sup> The language around places of confinement and the people housed therein is contested. How places are named reveals something about the expectations of these institutions, and points to their objectives. Although Scott (2014, p. 411) astutely observes that ‘language usage haunts’ the way we describe the penal system, the rationale and history behind the usage of these terms falls outside the scope of this review. For the purposes of this review, the generic term ‘prison’ will be used.

Various jurisdictions use different terms to describe education in prison. The USA, for example, refers to it as ‘correctional education’ and Australia and New Zealand as ‘corrections education’. Europe, Asia and the Global South tend to call it ‘prison education’. For the sake of clarity, this review uses the phrase ‘education in prison’, rather than ‘correctional education’ or ‘prison education’, unless one of the latter two terms appears in the title of an institution or in a publication. This review opts for the term ‘education in prison’ as it is appropriately descriptive. ‘Education in prison’ thus locates the practice of pedagogy in penal institutions. The term frames an understanding of education within a particular context, rather than allowing the context to configure the concept of education. This review argues that education in prison should be based on the same principles and values that underpin education in the community, framing it within an adult education approach.

**3** The terms ‘jail’ and ‘prison’ are often used interchangeably to describe places of confinement. Today, the USA usually distinguishes between jails, which house those awaiting trial or being held for minor crimes, and prisons, run by the state and federal government, which house those convicted of more serious crimes, with sentences of over one year (see Bureau of Justice, 2020).

Perhaps the most heated debate in this field of study centres on the language used to refer to prisoners. In official discourse from governments and policy-makers, and informally in the media and wider society, a range of nomenclatures are used: offender, convict, prisoner and other, more pejorative terms. Scott (2014, p. 412) argues that the ‘words we use to refer to people predispose us to act towards them in a different way’. In many jurisdictions, prisoners have become ‘othered’ (see Garland, 2001, pp. 184–6). This can lead to the erosion and potential elimination of their civic, political and social rights, including the right to education. Further, ‘othering’ people in prison potentially stigmatizes them and ‘removes from view other dimensions of their lives: personalities, experiences, relationships, awareness, history, culture’ (Muth et al., 2016, p. 394). Their imprisonment defines them while they are incarcerated and, in some countries, the label of ex-prisoner can be attached to them for the rest of their lives (See Behan 2018). Othering frustrates individuals' efforts to move away from their prisoner identity, undermines their potential for transformation, and can have a direct impact on the provision and practice of education in prison. One former prisoner discussing the use of language made the following plea for understanding:

In an effort to assist our transition from prison to our communities as responsible citizens and to create a more positive human image of ourselves, we are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to simply refer to us as people. People currently or formerly incarcerated, people on parole, people recently released from prison, people in prison, people with criminal convictions. (Ellis, 2015, p. xiii)

In light of the above, and in view of this review’s focus on education in prison, it uses the appropriately descriptive terms of person/people in prison, prisoner(s), or learner(s)/student(s).



## 2.6. What works?

Finally, case studies (in text boxes) are provided throughout this review to showcase examples of innovative pedagogical programmes in prison. These demonstrate the diverse practices being carried out in the field of education in prison. These practices range from a programme teaching construction skills to women in Bolivia to an award-winning prison library in Germany. They include the provision of book clubs in the USA, as well as the practice of citizenship education in Ireland. These examples illustrate how education in prison takes place in a variety of locations and through various mediums. While the case studies provided here are not designed to be prescriptive – and mindful of the fact that these examples may not be replicable elsewhere – they are included here because, in the course of reviewing the literature for this study, many challenges facing those engaged in education in prison (both as educators and as learners) are identified. Prison regimes, with their disciplinary limitations inherent in the denial of liberty, create structural restraints that can be difficult to overcome in order to engage in pedagogy. However, as with all education, the innovation, adaptability, resilience and determination of learners and educators can provide the space needed to engage in pedagogy. Although pedagogy in prison presents unique challenges, the case studies selected and presented herein show that there are opportunities to create sufficient space for education, even in the penal context. Mindful of the negativity surrounding prisons and conscious of the many challenges that educators and learners face in creating a positive pedagogical space, these case studies are intended to serve as examples of good practice, essentially illustrative of what works in education in prison.



This artwork, a photomontage entitled *Opium Express*, is by a young prisoner serving a sentence at Mountjoy Prison Progression Unit in Dublin. Drawing on the artist's direct experience, it depicts the harsh reality of the drugs trade through cold blue tones and a few carefully selected cut-out images floating against a split-screen backdrop of falling water.

*Photo:* Tom Shortt

## 3. POLICY, PRACTICE AND PEOPLE

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the principles of education in prison, looks at how they translate into policy and practice, and analyses the make-up of the prison population. It begins with a brief history of education in prison. Examining various international declarations and agreements on access to education, the chapter focuses principally on those dealing with education in prison. It then considers the debates on how to define education in prison, contending that these in turn affect how education in prison is practised. Recognizing that ‘education for all, including incarcerated people, is a key component in developing sustainable societies’ (Perreault, 2020, p. 5), the chapter concludes with an examination of the demographics and characteristics of those confined in prisons across the globe.

### 3.2. History of education in prison

Education in prison is as old as the institution itself. Much debate has been generated concerning the emergence of the modern prison and its desire to punish, discipline and control (Foucault, 1977; Ignatieff, 1978; O’Donnell, 2016; Morris and Rothman, 1998). Early discussions detected a degree of convergence between the objectives of the modern prison and those of education in prison: personal change and transformation of the individual, essentially a form of what is today loosely termed ‘rehabilitation’. The early penal innovators, promoting prison as a humane form of punishment, wanted education to play a role in their institutions, although there was not always consensus as to the nature or type of tuition that should be provided. Some wanted religious instruction, to encourage prisoners to mend their immoral ways, leave their sinning (i.e. criminality) behind, and become law-abiding citizens. Others emphasized that prisoners should be taught to work hard, thereby enabling personal transformation. Indeed, some believed that punishment could be transformative in itself, with the

experience of detention and isolation offering an instructive opportunity for reflection (see Morris and Rothman, 1998).

Although education in prison came into vogue in the twentieth century, its antecedents date back to the emergence of the modern prison in the early 1800s. The historian of education in prison, Thom Gehring (2020), argues that there is a ‘hidden heritage’, and that historical accounts have overlooked a number of radical and highly progressive practices that long predate the professionalization of pedagogy in prison. Notable innovators include Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), a middle-class and well-connected English Quaker. She began organizing educational activities at London’s Newgate Prison in 1817. In 1840, Alexander Maconochie (1787–1860) became the Governor of Norfolk Island, a prison island in Australia. He believed that cruelty debased both the prisoner and the society inflicting it. Punishment should not be vindictive, but a means of enabling a prisoner’s social reformation. Maconochie instituted many progressive programmes, such as the ‘mark’ system: the more marks a prisoner earned, the shorter the prison sentence. In the twentieth century, countries across the world adopted his innovations as progressive penal polices. Janie Porter Barrett (1865–1948) opened the Virginia Industrial Home School for Colored Girls, with support from many black and white women. Its programme of self-reliance and self-discipline offered academic and vocational instruction, and focused on providing social support for women at risk (Gehring, 2017 and 2020). By the early twenty-first century, practically every jurisdiction in the world had integrated some form of education into its prisons, with many regions creating their own professional organizations (see Appendix 1). In 2014, 13 October was officially declared International Day of Education in Prison.

### 3.3. International declarations, conventions and standards

There are a range of international declarations, covenants and regional agreements that apply to the provision of education in prison. Some of these expressly mention the education of prisoners in the context of

lifelong learning for all; others refer to it as a human right; some argue that education in prison should be embedded within a social justice framework. Although not all of these international and transnational declarations explicitly mention the education of prisoners, the aspiration to provide education for all implicitly includes them. This section will review the range of international agreements in place that deal specifically with education in prison, in order to sketch out the principles that underpin it. While acknowledging that such agreements rarely translate into domestic policies, they nonetheless set standards and provide benchmarks by which to judge the framework, approach and provision of education in prison. Many of the declarations cited here situate the right to education in prison within an adult education framework. As Section 3.5 makes clear, there is a strong case to be made for considering the education of prisoners within a social justice context, on the basis of common characteristics identified among prison populations internationally.

The starting point is what has become the landmark document for assessing human rights internationally: the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Clearly, and without caveats, Article 26 states that: that '[e]veryone has the right to education', which 'shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. Meanwhile, the first post-World War II document to deal specifically with the rights of prisoners was the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNSMR). It was adopted by the first United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 1955. One of its 'Guiding principles', elaborated upon in Rule 59, decreed that penal institutions 'should utilize all the remedial, educational, moral, spiritual and other forces and forms of assistance which are appropriate and available, and should seek to apply them according to the individual treatment needs of the prisoners'. In a specific reference to education in prison, Rule 77 offered a wide definition of education, to include recreational and cultural activities. It also stated that particular attention should be paid to young people in detention and those with literacy difficulties.

Some years later, at a meeting of UNESCO in 1960, the Convention against Discrimination in Education was adopted. It recalled that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts ‘the principle of non-discrimination and proclaims that every person has the right to education’. Its preamble deems that ‘discrimination in education is a violation of rights enunciated in that Declaration’. In the same spirit, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976) recognized the ‘right of everyone to education’. There was no exclusion of prisoners as it declared that education would enable the ‘full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms’. In 1990, UN General Assembly resolution 45/111 agreed the following in its Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners:

5. Except for those limitations that are demonstrably necessitated by the fact of incarceration, all prisoners shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, where the State concerned is a party, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as such other rights as are set out in other United Nations covenants.

6. All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality (United Nations, 1991).

The final report of the fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) (1997), organized by UNESCO, located education in prison within an adult education framework. It recognized ‘the right to learn’ for all prisoners. This was to be achieved by providing prisoners with information on different levels of education and training, and ‘by developing and implementing comprehensive education programmes in prisons, with the participation of inmates, to meet their needs and learning aspirations’. Finally, the conference stated that prisoners must have ‘access

to educational institutions and encouraging initiatives that link courses carried out inside and outside prisons' (UIL, 2020, p. 36).

The final report from the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) (2009), the Belém Framework for Action, stressed that inclusive education is 'fundamental to the achievement of human, social and economic development'. Further, it declared that there can be no exclusion from education on the basis of imprisonment. It concluded that measures should be taken to enhance motivation and access for all: 'To these ends, we commit ourselves to [...] providing adult education in prison at all appropriate levels' (UNESCO, 2010, p. 39).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it was recognized that the UNSMR needed to be revised in order to take account of developments in human and civil rights, in particular the increasing use of prison as punishment; the existence of alternative forms of punishment; and the conditions of confinement.

In 2011, in recognition of a growing awareness of the differential impact of imprisonment on women, the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (also known as the Bangkok Rules) were agreed by the UN General Assembly. In the Bangkok Rules, specific mention is made of health education for women and programmes that take gender-appropriate needs into account. The Bangkok Rules were timely. Given the 53 per cent global increase in the number of women and girls imprisoned between 2000 and 2017, there was an urgent requirement to focus on their needs. Women and girls now make up 7 per cent of the global prison population, and in 80 per cent of countries worldwide, female prisoners constitute between 2 per cent and 9 per cent of the total prison population (Walmsley, 2017, p. 2). With the overwhelming majority of the prison population being male, penal and educational policy tended to focus on dealing with the needs of male prisoners. Indeed, in terms of the architecture, rules, regulations, discipline and hierarchy implemented in prisons, scholars have argued that they could be deemed masculine institutions. Sandoval, Baumgartner and Clark (2016, p. 34) concluded that there was

a ‘need for more and targeted advocacy and education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women’. Further research needs to be undertaken to examine how women and girls experience imprisonment and, in particular, their involvement in education, prior to, during and after their time in prison. Otherwise, there is a risk of focusing on agendas, curricula and modes of assessment framed by policy-makers to meet the needs of the (male) majority of prisoners, rather than responding to the needs of all learners (see recommendations for further research in Chapter 5).

In 2015, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the Mandela Rules. As regards the provision of education and recreation, the revised rules mirror the first iteration of the UNSMR. In particular, Rule 104 states that all people in prison should have access to education, with special attention paid to people with literacy difficulties and juveniles.

Other UN declarations based on the ideal of education for all may impact on the provision of education in prison. Similarly, regional declarations such as the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948), the African Union’s Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1981) and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2013) seek to provide education for all. The most comprehensive transnational organization to address education in prison is the 47-member Council of Europe. Recommendations set out in their *European Prison Rules* (1987 and 2006; with a revised edition agreed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 1 July 2020) and *Education in Prison* (1990) have informed the philosophy of education behind bars in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

**4** In 2019, an Expert Group from the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris) published a Review of European Prison Education Policy and Council of Europe Recommendation (89) 12 on *Education in Prison* (see King, 2019). This review essentially reiterated and updated the provisions set out in the original document, *Education in Prison* (1990). EuroPris is a non-political, non-governmental network of prison practitioners. Its purpose is to promote and develop European prison practice in accordance with international rules and regulations. Membership is open to public institutions or organizations in Council of Europe member countries, which provide prison or correctional services on a legal or statutory basis. In 2019, 33 jurisdictions were members of EuroPris. For further details, see [www.europris.org](http://www.europris.org).



**Rule 28 of the *European Prison Rules* (2020) contains a comprehensive outline of the expectations of national governments and individual prisons:**

28.1 Every prison shall seek to provide all prisoners with access to educational programmes which are as comprehensive as possible and which meet their individual needs while taking into account their aspirations.

28.2 Priority shall be given to prisoners with literacy and numeracy needs and those who lack basic or vocational education.

28.3 Particular attention shall be paid to the education of young prisoners and those with special needs.

28.4 Education shall have no less a status than work within the prison regime and prisoners shall not be disadvantaged financially or otherwise by taking part in education.

28.5 Every institution shall have a library for the use of all prisoners, adequately stocked with a wide range of both recreational and educational resources, books and other media.

28.6 Wherever possible, the prison library should be organised in co-operation with community library services.

28.7 As far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall:

- a) be integrated with the educational and vocational training system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education and vocational training without difficulty; and
- b) take place under the auspices of external educational institutions.

As *Education in Prison* (1990) was drawn up by prison educators, it argues compellingly for education in prison as a right, and for prisoners to have equal access to the provision available to learners outside: 'Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age-groups in the outside world, and the range of learning opportunities for prisoners should be as wide as possible' (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 4).

The recommendations in *Education in Prison* (Council of Europe, 1990, pp. 4–5) were wide-ranging. They included the following: ‘All prisoners shall have access to education, which is envisaged as consisting of classroom subjects, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, physical education and sports, social education and library facilities’. Special attention should be paid to those with learning difficulties; education should have no less a status than work within the prison regime; and the ‘funds, equipment and teaching staff needed to enable prisoners to receive appropriate education should be made available’. Of particular importance in the light of the demographics of prison populations, *Education in Prison* recommended that education in prison ‘shall aim to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context’.

*Education in Prison* (1990, p. 15) acknowledged that the penal context has a bearing on opportunities for fruitful pedagogical participation. Further, prison ‘by its very nature is abnormal and destructive of the personality in a number of ways’. However, it declared that education has the ‘capacity to render the situation less abnormal, to limit somewhat the damage done to men and women through prison’ (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 13). Echoing the declarations from UNESCO’s conferences on adult education, education in prison ‘must in its philosophy, methods and content, be brought as close as possible to the best adult education in society outside’ (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 14).

Although these international declarations, conventions and standards setting out the principles of education in prison are very welcome, with a few notable exceptions, they have rarely been fully realized in practice. Translating such principles into domestic policy and local practice is a challenge across nearly all jurisdictions. One review of education in prison across Europe found that while all jurisdictions maintained that they followed Council of Europe recommendations, there are indications that ‘actual implementation or application of these conventions can vary’ (GHK, 2013, p. 14; see also Behan 2018). Another report on adult education in Europe was more forthright. It concluded that many excluded and marginalized groups, including prisoners, rarely feature in lifelong learning strategies in many jurisdictions. Despite the

objectives set out at an international level, 'prison education is outside the Pale of strategic focus and intervention at national level in some countries' (Downes, 2014, pp. 192–3, cited in Behan, 2018, p. 101).

In Latin America, 'prison education is more marginal than adult education' (Rangel Torrijo, 2019, p. 802). In Mexico, for example, adult education teachers are 'volunteers' who receive minimal, if any, remuneration from the National Institute of Adult Education. The authorities have been so keen not to give status to these 'volunteers' that they have avoided referring to them as 'teachers'. Further, in his study of education in South American prisons, Rangel Torrijo (2019) found that education behind bars was more peripheral than adult education, with many teachers reporting a lack of institutional support.

However, it is important to note that attention in Latin America to the education of people in prison has increased in the last decades, with Argentina, Mexico and Peru creating a legal basis for prison education. In Argentina, for example, a national programme of prison education was established in 2004, stating that 'inmates must have full access to education in all its levels and modalities' (UNESCO, 2020). The 2020 Global Education Monitoring regional report for Latin America and the Caribbean explains that prisoners in Argentina 'should be able to acquire certification in minimum literacy through the youth and adult literacy programme Encuentro so they can resume their education'. Other countries are also making changes. Colombia has 'an education law for the social rehabilitation of people deprived of liberty and an education model for the penitentiary and prison system', while in El Salvador, 'the Constitution guarantees minors the right to receive education without discrimination, including those in confinement'. In Honduras, three programmes have been developed, reaching over 4,000 prisoners: the Educatodos programme (in 16 prisons), Alfasic (in 8 prisons) and the public school at the Támara National Penitentiary Centre. The GEM report notes, however, that 'civil society organizations have raised questions over the fact that inmates, rather than trained teachers, teach each other and textbooks are not provided' (UNESCO, 2020).

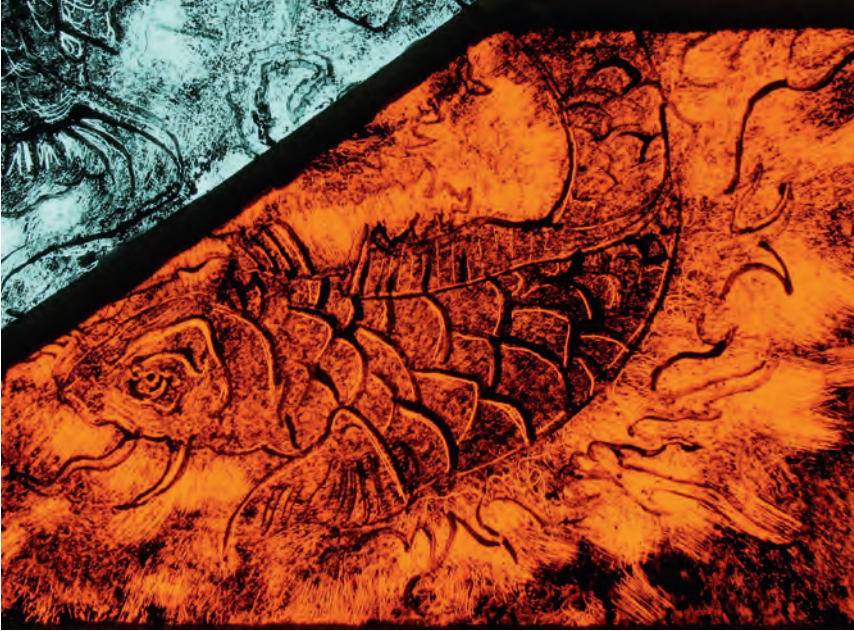
In summing up a report on education in adult and juvenile institutions in Central Asia, South America, North Africa and Europe, Ravshan Baratov found common issues of concern. These included the lack of a legal framework surrounding the provision of education in prison; the absence of state training for teachers and a concomitant scarcity of qualified teachers; and a lack of subject- and age-specific resources and materials (Baratov, 2014, p. 124). He concluded with a warning that will resonate with educators and learners in prisons worldwide:

One is tempted to conclude that the available resources in prisons are more often used in order to improve protection, safety and order, and not to invest in the prison workshops, vocational training, tools for providing the educational process, sports and leisure, on the assumption that security can be achieved by applying more restrictive and disciplinary measures, but not by improving the prison environment, providing constructive employment of prisoners and encouraging positive relationships between staff and prisoners. (Baratov, 2014, p. 125)

The mismatch between the principles laid down in various declarations and practice is usually related to penal policy in general, and a lack of resources allocated for the provision of education in prison in particular. The penal policies that are prevalent in a particular jurisdiction influence the provision of education in prison. In those jurisdictions that have a more punitive penal policy (see Cavadino and Dignan, 2006), the provision of education in prison tends to be more minimalist – and, in some jurisdictions, if educational provision exists at all, it is in name only. Meanwhile, countries with a more rehabilitative approach to imprisonment place a far greater emphasis on education in prison.

### **3.4. What is education in prison?**

Just as the principles laid down in UN declarations and regional agreements translate into policy and practice in different ways and to different



This is a detail from a panel featuring two fantasy fish created by a young, technically gifted artist and illustrator from the vibrant art education programme at Cork Prison. The artist produces wonderfully original images directly from his imagination in a range of media.

*Photo: Tom Shortt*

degrees, definitions of education in prison vary greatly. In her introduction to *Youth and Adult Education in Prisons: Experiences from Central Asia, South America, North Africa and Europe*, Costelloe (2014a, p. 9) contends that ‘how we define prison education has a fundamental impact on how we develop and deliver prison education’.

Given that many prisoners lack the employment skills needed to join the workforce on release, policy-makers often contend that education in prison should primarily prepare prisoners for employment, with a particular focus on vocational skills. Others reject this: some argue that education in prison should be based solely on an adult education approach; some believe that it should mirror programmes of education

offered to the wider community outside the prison context, and some make the case that education in prison should be viewed as part of a social justice framework. And in light of the large numbers of people in prison who come from marginalized and minority communities (see Section 3.5), some scholars believe that education in prison should be part of a consciousness-raising process.

The most dominant perspective expounded by political and penal administrators internationally is that education should be used as a tool for rehabilitation (see Bozick et al., 2018). This approach tends to prioritize education in prison not as a right, but as a means to an end, the goal being rehabilitation. Prominent in this understanding of education as a means of rehabilitation is the promotion of vocational and skills training designed to prepare prisoners for employment on their release. Understandably, governments and penal policy-makers are keen to promote this approach to education, which can upskill prisoners, prepare them for the workforce and, it is hoped, prime them for employment that will encourage them to move away from a life of crime. In a study of prisoners participating in education in prison in Western Australia, Giles (2016) found that the more classes prisoners completed, the lower the rate of re-incarceration. Research in South Africa (Vandala and Bendall, 2019, p. 1) led to the conclusion that education in prison transforms prisoners' lives by boosting self-esteem and confidence, improving literacy levels, and equipping prisoners with valuable skills. The researchers determined that education in prison 'transforms offenders into law-abiding and productive citizens on release'.

Bozick et al. (2018) identified a total of 57 studies that evaluated recidivism and 21 studies that assessed employment following participation in education programmes in prison. They found that prisoners participating in educational programmes were 28 per cent less likely to re-offend than detainees who did not participate in these programmes. However, they found that this reduction in the rate of recidivism did not always lead to gainful employment after release. People who did not participate in education in prison were as likely to obtain post-release employment as those

who did. The impact of a prison sentence outweighed a prisoner's educational achievements while incarcerated. Despite this, Bozick et al (2018, p. 389) nonetheless concluded that this demonstrated the value of providing prisoners 'with educational opportunities while they serve their sentences if the goal of the program is to reduce recidivism'.

Meanwhile, skills-based, vocational approaches to education in prison have been criticized for being more akin to training for employment. Critics contend that the educational needs of learners can become subsumed into the requirements of employers. Costelloe and Warner (2014, p. 177) argue that 'much of the employment-focussed "education" provided in some countries does not constitute education as it is understood generally in the field of adult education, or indeed "prison education" as understood by the Council of Europe'. Downes (2014, p. 202) concludes that while there was a 'national strategic approach to access to lifelong learning in prison' in England, 'it nevertheless remains a concern that the goal of employment subordinates other legitimate goals of lifelong learning, such as active citizenship, social cohesion and personal fulfilment' (see also Behan 2018).

Although education and training are both important in their own right, Pike and Farley (2018) argue that the terms 'education' and 'vocational training' are sometimes used interchangeably in a prison context. However, they believe that there are important differences between the terms that need to be considered. They use the term 'education' to refer to all forms of formal and informal education for personal development that may relate to vocational outcomes, but which are not specifically aimed at employment. 'Vocational training', meanwhile, also incorporates the idea of personal progression, and is aimed at learning specific skills for particular types of employment. Pike and Farley identify significant benefits from all forms of education and training in prison contexts. In their examination of theoretical models of education and training, they consider 'how best to cultivate a learning environment in prisons which can fully engage prisoners in education; to be not only employable, but with a positive pro-social identity, encouraging active citizenship' (Pike and Farley, 2018, p. 82).

The relationship between education and personal development is the subject of some debate, as education has become increasingly enmeshed in discourses around rehabilitation and treatment. Rehabilitation programmes such as anger management and aggression replacement training are included in education provision in Estonia (GHK, 2013, p. 17, fn. 25). While a holistic approach, i.e. one that aims to educate the ‘whole person’, undoubtedly contributes to a transformative process of development, Warr argues that education should not be confused with treatment. To do so could lead to a situation where rehabilitative programmes and educational opportunities ‘serve the interests of the institution and the wider public over that of the prisoner’. He concludes that, ‘in much criminal justice procedure the prisoner comes very low on the hierarchy of stakeholders’ (Warr, 2016, p. 20).

In some jurisdictions, prison educators endeavour to distinguish their practices from contemporary rehabilitative programmes that can be used by the state to ‘responsibilize’, ‘redeem’ or ‘normalise’ the socially excluded” (Ryan and Sim, 2007, p. 697; cited in Behan, 2018, p. 104). Drawing on the ‘prison works’ and ‘get tough on crime’ agendas, Costelloe and Warner (2008, p. 137) contend that some of these follow the ‘discredited medical model of imprisonment’, with an underlying ethos that views the prisoner primarily as something broken in need of fixing, or as an object in need of treatment. Robinson and Crow (2009, p. 121) suggest that ‘themes of personal responsibility, choice and recognition of the moral implication of these choices’ predominate in ‘offending behaviour’ programmes within contemporary rehabilitation models. Frequently, these can overlook the social context of criminality, punishment and imprisonment (see Behan, 2018 and 2014b).

Bayliss (2003) sees a middle way. He argues that, in jurisdictions in which the prison population is rising, governments are according education an increasingly important role. He believes that the main effect of education in prison is to increase ex-prisoners’ chances of employment and hence reduce recidivism. Bayliss is convinced that, if this link were to be firmly established, ‘it may convince policy makers, prison staff and inmates of the further benefits of prison education’. He argues



that educational programmes should offer a wider curriculum than basic education, become an integral part of the prison regime and prepare prisoners better both for life after prison and for a greater degree of involvement with the outside community (Bayliss, 2003, p. 157). Bayliss consequently believes that it is necessary to move away from what he terms the North American cognitive-behavioural programmes in favour of an integrated approach that encompasses both formal and informal learning. This, he contends, will reduce the focus on security agendas and increase community involvement to create 'institutions whose walls are, in the jargon, permeable, and which maximise staff-prisoner interaction; whose values are open, democratic and inclusive' (Bayliss, 2003, p. 174).

Key and May (2019) resist efforts to evaluate and define education through the twin prisms of rehabilitation and recidivism. They argue that education in prison is more than just a tool for crime reduction, and believe that it can be an empowering process that goes far beyond the original intention of state-sponsored rehabilitation. There is a long history of prisoners engaging – individually and collectively – in education in prison as a consciousness-raising activity (Rodríguez, 2006; Alexander, 2011), especially among minority communities that are over-represented in prison. As the introduction to Alexander's essay (2011, p. 88) contends: 'The process of reading and discussing the works of African American writers can provide a critical lens for understanding one's own subjugation, and participates in a long tradition of African American community literacy by helping to transform the lives and minds of a population disproportionately comprised of people of color'.

As with all forms of education, especially those grounded in community and adult contexts, pedagogy in prison occurs in the space where learners and educators meet. While this space may be (physically) located in a prison school, if an educational programme follows a dialogical method, it can also create a space where learners can be free to consider ideas in different contexts. The end result may be far more liberating than following a text, reading a play or considering a historical event. In this space, the student becomes more than a learner acquiring knowledge and accumulating

skills, and instead develops the capacity to locate the acquisition of this knowledge in a wider context. This process can be transformational, and has been observed in numerous spaces where learners become increasingly conscious of how they are treated by society, e.g. because of their race, class, gender, history and present circumstances. Such a process can transform an individual's worldview; in this context, education in prison becomes part of the process of consciousness-raising. 'While prison systems do not encourage incarcerated men and women to challenge the existing social order,' argues Scott (2014, p. 402), 'many college-in-prison programs facilitate their students becoming advocates of peace, justice, social engagement, taking action to challenge individual and institutional violence, becoming spokespersons for their communities, and succeeding where the system had told them they were failures'.

Members of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and individuals such as Malcolm X, Angela Davis and George Jackson in the USA understood the liberating power of education for themselves and fellow prisoners. Gehring and Puffer (2004) considered how Malcolm X became increasingly conscious of his background, society, politics and culture, and of the process that had led him to prison. The experience of education in prison transformed Malcolm X from a prisoner into a community leader. In his autobiography, Malcolm X recounts how, on being asked by a reporter where his alma mater was, he simply replied 'books'. He continued: 'I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did. In fact, prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently and I had attended some college' (X and Haley, 1965, p. 175).

Like Malcolm X, many prisoners first became aware of the power of education while in prison. Some realized that they needed to be better educated; they became politicized, either through self-learning or through classes they attended in the prison school, and subsequently evolved into community leaders, both inside and outside the prison. George Jackson and Angela Davis used their time in prison to further educate others inside and engender political and social awareness among the wider prison population. Davis (2003, p. 24) cites Eddie Ellis's observation in *The Last Graduation* 'that

the more education they had, the better they would be able to deal with themselves and their problems, the problems of the prisons and the problems of the communities from which most of them came’.

As can be seen from the debates outlined above, education in prison is by no means a settled concept. While there may be significant differences in how education is defined, the Mandela Rules maintain that prisons should provide those confined therein with a holistic suite of educational opportunities. For the purposes of this review, the concept of education in prison will be based on the provision offered to people in the wider community outside the prison context, with the caveat that some subjects need to adapt to the specifics of location. Further, the concept of education used here is framed around the values and principles laid down in international declarations and treaties – in particular, UNESCO declarations on lifelong education – within an adult education approach and based on the right to education for all (UIL, 2014).

### 3.5. Identity, marginalization and imprisonment

This section will consider the demographics of those who end up in prison. All education, especially adult education, begins by developing an understanding of the learner group: its history, identity, culture and current circumstances. This understanding enables educators to remain attuned to the educational needs of their learners and decide if and how the principles of education laid down in international declarations might be translated into practice. *Education in Prison* (1990) recognized this when it reminded prison educators that, while criminal activity should not be condoned,

there are aspects of the prisoner’s culture which the adult educator must respect, or at least accept. These aspects may include a critical view of authority, anger at social injustice, solidarity with one another in the face of adversity, etc. As in any field of adult education, respect and acceptance of the students and potential students are crucial to motivation and participation. (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 20)

As potential students are incarcerated, the internal dynamics of the institution in question, along with the penal culture of specific jurisdictions, must be considered. Penal policies also influence the provision of education in prison. In their study of comparative penal policies, Cavadino and Dignan (2006) found three types of penal systems: 1) relatively more liberal countries such as Norway and Sweden had a rights-based framework for, and an inclusionary approach towards, prisoners; 2) Germany, Italy and France had mixed modes of punishment, with the dominant penal ideology being rehabilitation/ resocialization; and 3) jurisdictions such as England and Wales, USA, Australia and South Africa with a 'law and order' ideology and an exclusionary attitude toward prisoners.

Countries with more punitive penal polices tend to invest less – in terms of both policy development and financial resources – in education and prison programmes. Those with higher rates of imprisonment and more punitive penal cultures such as the USA, which has over 2.1 million prisoners or 655 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants, tend to have a more restrictive approach to the provision of education in prison. By contrast, Norway, with 3,735 prisoners, equating to just 63 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants, has one of the lowest rates of imprisonment in the world. At the same time, Norway is considered to have one of the most progressive systems of education in prison in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Prisoner numbers alone do not tell the full story, however, as punishment in general, and imprisonment in particular, are not evenly distributed throughout society. It is widely recognized that, throughout the world, minority populations and marginalized groups are over-represented in

**5** The data on prison numbers comes from the World Prison Brief prepared by the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (ICPR). ICPR relies on monitoring bodies, regional standards agencies, national governments, journalists, civil society organizations, economists, academics and social researchers to collect data. However, it concedes that there are gaps in available data, including the omission of entire categories of prisoners in some countries. In China, for example, there are no data on the numbers detained pre-trial or prior to sentencing. For more information, see <https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data>.

prisons (Armstrong and Maruna, 2016). Even within affluent societies, a disproportionate number of people from economically disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations and marginalized communities are arrested for wrong-doing, prosecuted, tried and subsequently imprisoned (Behan, 2018, p. 102).

An increase in a prison population does not always result from an increase in crime; it can instead be related to the introduction of new laws that criminalize certain activities, along with more punitive sanctions. Further, it can be related to how criminal justice institutions treat minority and marginalized populations. Pickett and Wilkinson (2009) have identified a compelling link between imprisonment and income inequality, with the rates of imprisonment higher in more unequal countries.

Internationally, racial and ethnic minority populations are disproportionately imprisoned and punished. In the USA, for example, one in every 10 African American men in his 30s is in prison on any given day (The Sentencing Project, 2020a). In 2017, Black people represented 12 per cent of the U.S. adult population, but accounted for 33 per cent of the sentenced prison population. White people, meanwhile, accounted for 64 per cent of adults but 30 per cent of prisoners. And while Hispanic people represented 16 per cent of the adult population, they accounted for 23 per cent of prisoners. The rate of imprisonment varies widely too. There were 1,549 Black prisoners for every 100,000 Black adults – nearly six times the imprisonment rate for whites (272 per 100,000) and nearly double the rate for Hispanics (823 per 100,000) (Gramlich 2019). While the USA is regularly cited in the literature due to the extraordinary numbers of minority populations who are incarcerated, it is not unique. In England and Wales, Lammy (2017, p. 3) found a ‘greater disproportionality in the number of Black people’ in prison than in the USA. Despite making up just 14 per cent of the population, Black and minority ethnic (BAME) men and women make up 25 per cent of prisoners (Lammy, 2017, p. 3), while 51 per cent of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds (Grierson, 2019). Further, young Black men and women are eight times more likely to be convicted of minor offences than their white peers (Inside Time, 2020).

Similarly, indigenous people across post-colonial societies are over-represented in prisons (Ryan et al., 2019). However, data on the imprisonment of indigenous people is more limited, even in the USA (Mauer, 2011). Research by the Prison Policy Initiative (PPI) (2020) found that it was difficult to locate data on the rates of imprisonment for Native Americans because of an ‘unfortunate tendency to group Native Americans together with other ethnic and racial groups in data publications’. Indeed, the U.S. Census Bureau does not distinguish between tribes and therefore classifies the Native American population as a single category. While census data reveals that Native Americans are over-represented in the criminal justice system in the USA, the overall scarcity of data means that they are often excluded from comparisons with other racial and ethnic groups. This has made it hard to appreciate the effect of mass incarceration on Native American people (PPI, 2020). Where available, however, data on prisoner numbers reveal that this group is significantly over-represented in prisons. In South Dakota, 9 per cent of the overall population was reported to be Native American, yet they made up 29 per cent of South Dakota’s prison population. In Montana, the Native American population is approximately 7 per cent, but accounts for 19 per cent of the state’s male prison population and 33 per cent of its female prison population. While in Minnesota just over 1 per cent of the state’s residents are Native American, they account for 9 per cent of the prison population (Anonymous, 2013).

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners accounted for just over a quarter (27 per cent) of the total Australian prison population. The total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population aged 18 years and over in 2016 was approximately 2 per cent of the Australian population. The proportion of adult prisoners who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ranged from 8 per cent in Victoria (535 prisoners) to 84 per cent (1,393 prisoners) in the Northern Territory (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

In New Zealand, Māori men and women make up over 52 per cent of prisoners (New Zealand Department of Corrections, 2020) despite only constituting 14 per cent of the national population. New Zealand’s

imprisonment rate currently stands at approximately 180 per 100,000 inhabitants. However, the rate rises to approximately 700 prisoners per 100,000 in the case of Māori inhabitants (New Zealand Department of Corrections, 2016).

In 2020, Canada's Correctional Investigator reported that, despite a decrease in the prison population, custody rates for indigenous people had 'accelerated'. He found that, in the previous 10 years, the indigenous prison population had increased by 43 per cent, whereas the non-indigenous prison population had declined by 14 per cent. Indigenous women now account for 42 per cent of the female prison population in Canada. The proportion of indigenous people behind bars represents over 30 per cent of the current prison population, while accounting for 5 per cent of the general Canadian population (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2020).

Along with the demographics of the prison population outlined above, jurisdictions with large numbers of incarcerated migrants (domestic and international) who are not conversant in the language spoken in the area in which the prison is located require extra resources to meet their language and wider educational needs. The proportion of foreign prisoners can have an impact on the allocation of resources within a prison school, and should (although it rarely does) influence the curriculum, syllabus and opportunities to learn the local language. Research indicates that as the numbers in prison increase in a jurisdiction, so too does the number of foreign prisoners (Ugelvik, 2014). Foreign prisoners have specific pedagogical needs, especially if they do not speak the dominant language where the prison is located. Along with language tuition, they may need an understanding of the local culture, and additional provision to prepare them for life after release (GHK, 2013, p. 54).

The number of foreign prisoners in any given jurisdiction depends on a range of variables beyond the criminal justice system: geographical location, economic activity, and the status of and societal attitudes towards those seeking refuge, whether for political, economic or social reasons. Foreign prisoner numbers can also be influenced by the jurisdiction's prevailing penal policy.

In Africa, the Gambia holds the largest percentage of foreign prisoners at 67 per cent. South Africa has 8 per cent and Madagascar has the lowest rate, at less than 1 per cent. The highest number of foreign prisoners in Asia is found in Macau, at 70 per cent, and the lowest in the Philippines, at less than 1 per cent (ICPR, 2020).<sup>6</sup> The number of foreign people in prisons throughout Europe varies: they make up just under 71 per cent of the prison population in Switzerland; 58 per cent in Greece; 23 per cent in the Netherlands; 22 per cent in France; and just under 2 per cent in the Ukraine and Poland (ICPR, 2021).

However, these figures do not tell the full story. Some jurisdictions encourage a hostile environment towards people from outside their country. This can reduce the numbers of migrants in the country, and, as a consequence, lower the numbers of migrants in prison. For example, the comparatively low proportion of foreign prisoners in Poland, according to Platek (2013, p. 194), is reflective of the low numbers of foreigners in the country, and ‘not because of Polish tolerances’.

### 3.6. Educational disadvantage and imprisonment

Prisoners worldwide ‘tend to have lower than average attainment and poor experiences of compulsory education’ (Tett et al., 2012, p. 172). An examination of the data in a number of jurisdictions bears this out. In Guinea, one report puts the number of prisoners who are ‘functionally illiterate’ as high as 90 per cent (Prison Insider, 2020). In Mexico, 56 per cent of prisoners left school early (Rangel Torrijó, 2019, p. 794). In their study of prisoners in the USA, Davis et al. (2013) found that 37 per cent of individuals in state prisons had attained less than a high school education in 2004, compared with 19 per cent of the general population aged 16 and over. Further, only 14 per

<sup>6</sup> Macau is a rather unique example, officially known as Macao Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China.





This painting, by artist Eddie Cahill, shows three female figures mourning the short lives of their sons, brothers and partners.

*Photo:* Tom Shortt

cent of state prisoners in the USA had at least some post-secondary education, compared with 51 per cent of the general adult population. In Brazil, out of nearly 500,000 prisoners, over half lacked literacy skills or basic education (Rangel Torrijo, 2019, p. 800).

Only 1 per cent of prisoners in Italy hold a university degree. The imprisoned population with literacy difficulties, or no educational certificate, is four times higher than the general population (Gonnella, 2013, p. 235). In Norway, among prisoners, there was a higher drop-out rate in comparison to the general population. Of prisoners under 25, over 85 per cent had not completed three years of upper secondary school (Eikeland, Manger and Asbjørnsen, 2009). In the Republic of Ireland, nearly 53 per cent of prisoners were in the Level 1 or pre-Level 1 category for literacy (the highest level being 5). The average literacy level among prisoners was much lower than that of the general population (Morgan and Kett, 2003, pp. 35–36). In England and Wales, one in five prisoners needed help with reading/writing or numeracy and 47 per cent of prisoners stated that they had no qualifications, compared to 15 per cent of the working-age general population. (Prison Reform Trust, 2015, p. 8). In the Netherlands, 27 per cent of early school leavers were at some stage suspected of committing a crime, compared to 7 per cent of non-school leavers (GHK, 2013, p. 61: cited in Behan 2018, p. 102).

Ludlow et al. (2019) reported that in Victoria, Australia, only 40 per cent of people in prison had basic literacy and numeracy skills. In Australia as a whole, 36 per cent of people released from prison had not completed their final year of compulsory secondary school education, while 18 per cent had completed only two years of secondary school education. The equivalent figure for indigenous people leaving prison in Australia was almost double this, at 30 per cent. In New Zealand, Ludlow et al. (2019, p. 30) reported that an estimated 57 per cent of prisoners had low levels of reading and writing skills and consequently had few or no formal qualifications.

### 3.7. Conclusion

This chapter considered the history of education in prison, and outlined the principles laid out in various international and regional declarations and agreements on the right to education. While recognizing that the notion of education in prison is a contested one, it settled on a definition based on the values and principles contained in the aforementioned declarations. It concluded with an examination of the demographics and common characteristics across prison populations internationally. Whether they suffer from economic disadvantage, institutional discrimination, structural inequity or bias based on their ethnicity or nationality, the people who end up in prison are acutely aware of their own particular circumstances, and these need to be reflected upon when developing curricula and delivering pedagogy. If prisoners are to have the same right to access education as other members of the community, we must first identify their needs because, as with all educational provision, an appreciation of the needs of the learner group is essential to creating a positive pedagogical experience. The next chapter examines how the nature of confinement, combined with an awareness of a learner group's characteristics, necessitates innovative approaches to the provision of education in prison.



This work, entitled *Transportation*, was painted by Eddie Cahill. It shows a line of small children moving towards a tall, imposing figure of authority and reflects the painter's experience as a child of appearing before a judge who sentenced him to years of detention in an industrial school located in the west of Ireland, far from his home and family in Dublin.



*Photo:* Tom Shortt

## **4. PEDAGOGY IN PRISON**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature on some of the key issues and debates relating to education in prison in the twenty-first century. It begins by outlining different aspects of prison schools in various jurisdictions. It then considers the rationale for an informal curriculum, which is the basis for education in many prison schools. As noted in the previous chapter, certain groups, in particular minority populations, are over-represented in prison and their specific needs must be met. Prisoners who do not speak the language of the country in which they are incarcerated require language tuition. The chapter then examines the availability of higher education in prison, before looking at the provision of library services, which play a crucial role in supporting education in places where people have no access to public libraries or the internet.

The final three sections of this chapter consider some of the complexities specific to the provision of education in prison, evaluating the extent to which state policies impact on the practice of pedagogy as understood by educators in prison. The chapter examines digital literacy, and the challenge of engaging in education in the modern world with little or no access to the internet. It analyses the role of education in promoting civic engagement and social integration, made more difficult in jurisdictions that enact legislation that excludes prisoners from civic life. Finally, it concludes with an examination of educators' concerns about being drawn into subjects and getting involved in programmes that are outside their pedagogical profession and areas of expertise.

### **4.2. The prison school**

Not all prisons are the same. Nor, indeed, are prison schools. While 'coercive confinement' (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, 2012) is the common characteristic, prisons differ in their levels of security and coercion. As we will see in

this chapter, education takes place in different ways and various locations throughout the prison as educators respond to the coercive conditions that define the prison setting. As with education in the outside world, education in prison differs across, and indeed within, jurisdictions depending on the category and security level of a prison, and on the penal policies that apply.

High security institutions, such as the Supermax prisons in the USA, house prisoners who spend little or no time outside their cells, have minimal, if any, contact with other human beings, and are given very few opportunities to engage in programmes, education or recreational activities. At the other end of the spectrum are open prisons, without bars on cell windows, and with no perimeter walls.

Penal cultures influence the prison experience for students, individually and collectively. The experience of imprisonment differs depending the level of security, the conditions of confinement, occupancy rates, activities and programmes available to prisoners, the rights of prisoners, the prisoner-prison officer dynamic, and educational opportunities.

Some prisons have stand-alone schools within the prison grounds that are located away from cells and accommodation blocks, and are equipped with well-stocked libraries and computer facilities. Other schools may have to use spaces that double as recreation areas or places of worship. In some institutions, there are no separate education facilities; prison wings serve as sites for education. In higher security and more punitive institutions, students have 'classes' on their in-cell televisions. 'Lessons' are beamed into a cell from inside or outside the prison, with the prison fulfilling its mandate of providing 'education'. Other prisons, meanwhile, are designed to be educational institutions built around therapeutic communities (TCs); these prisons emphasize that their remit is both therapeutic and educational.

Many researchers have identified prison schools in which the usual constraints associated with confinement can be overcome, or at least diluted. Warr (2016, p. 18) examined the 'emotional geography' of prison, arguing that, even within a coercive environment, 'different penal environments, or spaces within the prison, are designed to have very different

and specific functions and, correspondingly, are designed to evoke and provoke specific types of reaction and emotion'. The school can provide a space to eschew the established power relations within a prison. Instead of hierarchical structures, the school can encourage discourses of equality and mutuality, the values of education and interdependence, and soften the negative impact of confinement and coercion (Behan, 2018, p. 111). In his study of an English prison, Crewe (2009, p. 119) argued that prisoners who were enrolled in the school 'found sanctuary from the stresses of life on the wings and from the normal terms on which staff-prisoner relations were founded'. Prisoners regularly told him that the education block was 'one of the few zones within the institution that didn't "feel like a prison"'. Other studies have reached similar conclusions (see e.g. Behan, 2014a; MacGuinness, 2000). Although educational facilities were located within the prison grounds, the atmosphere there was different. Learners reported experiencing more positive and productive relationships with teachers and other prison and correctional staff assigned to the school area than with staff in the rest of the prison.

There are wide variations in employment contracts and conditions for educational staff in prisons internationally. Some are employed by the prison service, carry keys, must comply with official secrets legislation and are seen by students as part of the security apparatus of the prison. Others are employed by local or national education authorities on the same terms and conditions as outside staff. Educators consider the latter approach to constitute best practice, as it is in line with the Mandela Rules. According to Rule 104 (2): 'So far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty'.

Education is usually a voluntary activity for students. As adults, they should be able to choose to attend classes for a period of time that is determined by the subjects they take and their desire to complete an accredited module or to participate in activities that are part of an informal curriculum (see Section 4.2). The voluntary nature of prisoner participation in education is recognized by the Council of Europe in Education in Prison (1990, p. 160):



Adult education can only have a meaningful role if participation is voluntary. Efforts need to be made to allow prisoners to choose between taking part in education and taking part in work activities. Within the prison regime, education must have at least the same status, and should be given just as much practical support, as work.

There are wide variations in penal and educational policies internationally. They also differ within countries whose educational provision and penal policies are administered at a state, regional or local level (see Biao, 2018 for international perspectives). Education has long been a key element in the programmes available to prisoners in Norway and adheres to the best practice advocated in the Mandela Rules. In line with a policy of ‘normalization’, prisoners in Norway have the same rights and obligations as the rest of the country’s population (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2004). This ‘principle of normality’ is defined by the Norwegian Correctional Services (2020) as follows:

The punishment is the restriction of liberty; no other rights have been removed by the sentencing court. Therefore, the sentenced offender has all the same rights as all other[s] who live in Norway.

No-one shall serve their sentence under stricter circumstances than necessary for the security in the community. Therefore, offenders shall be placed in the lowest possible security regime.

During the serving of a sentence, life inside will resemble life outside as much as possible.

Everyone in Norway (whether or not they are in prison) is entitled to a primary and lower-secondary education. Local education authorities are responsible for education in prison, which is based on the same framework as the education available to Norway’s non-prison population (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2005). Unique characteristics of education in

Norwegian prisons include a lower student-teacher ratio and the option of 'follow-on' classes after release if a student does not complete his or her education while in prison (Langelid, 2015; Tønseth and Bergsland, 2019).

In Argentina, access to education for people in prison is regulated by a comprehensive piece of legislation on the right to education. People in prison have the same right to public education at all levels as the general population. Although prisoners are not permitted to access the internet, the law stipulates that every prison must have a library. Article 140 of Ley 26,695 contains an interesting legislative innovation: students who complete secondary education are entitled to 'early temporary release' (Banegas, 2018).

With the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa in the 1990s, the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 replaced apartheid-era legislation. Article 41 states that:

The Department must provide or give access to as full a range of programmes and activities as is practicable to meet the education and training needs of sentenced prisoners.

Sentenced prisoners who are illiterate or children may be compelled to take part in the educational programme offered.

South African prisons offer a variety of academic and vocational education programmes. These range from literacy classes and adult basic education (ABE) programmes to formal and non-formal activities (Vandala, 2018).

### **4.3. The informal curriculum**

As with all forms of education, the physical place in which education in prison occurs is important; however, in prison, the notion of space can be even more significant when establishing a learning environment. In prison, education can take place in various spaces, and each space can entail the adoption of a different educational approach.

As outlined in Chapter 2, many of those who end up within the criminal justice system have significantly lower levels of traditional educational attainment in the form of accredited examinations. Many prisoners have had negative experiences of education, or school, in their earlier years. Therefore, it is appropriate that alternative methods are considered as a means of attracting people in prison to school, to encourage them to engage in education in prison. This has led to innovative approaches to education, including the implementation of an informal curriculum. These alternative educational approaches foster socialization processes among students who may otherwise see barriers – personal, social or psychological – to participation in education. It also allows educators to inspire learners with the skills, ideas and, significantly, cultural capital associated with pedagogy.

In his study on education's contribution to a lifelong learning society, Downes (2014) examines why certain groups (including prisoners) are disproportionately deterred from participating in education. These deterrents, Downes concludes, can be: situational (i.e. beyond the control of the individual); dispositional (i.e. based on personal attitudes towards education); and/or institutional (i.e. derive from excessive bureaucracy or logistical conflicts). Further research is needed to determine precisely what barriers are preventing some prisoners from engaging in education (see Chapter 5).

As many prisoners previously had a negative experience of conventional schooling, the established curriculum may not appeal to them. Educators in prison innovate and create alternative programmes – both formal and informal – to attract prisoners to their school. The non-formal educational approach can often be more appropriate to meet the needs of the learner group. It can also be more transformative (Behan, 2018). Warr notes (2016, p. 24):

in order to mitigate these negative experiences and make student learning in prison different from that previously experienced, tutors need to move away from more formal processes of teaching and actually further encourage students to be actively involved in the development of their own learning.

The Mandela Rules emphasize that education in prison must consist of more than just classroom-based activities. Rule 105 states that ‘recreational and cultural activities shall be provided in all prisons for the benefit of the mental and physical health of prisoners’.

An informal curriculum should, moreover, be underpinned by the kind of artistic and cultural activities that have long played an important part in the education of adult prisoners. In Germany, for example, the Moving Bars project is a dance and movement initiative that prisoners engage in as part of a creative process of educational development and imaginative activity (Tandem, 2021). The Laboratorio Teatrale project in Italy develops links between prisoners and the local community. Prisoners perform in public theatres outside the prison and local residents participate in performances in prison (GHK, 2013, p. 26; cited in Behan, 2018).

In the Philippines, CPDRC Dancers is a collective of prisoners from the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC). Developed by the Cebu provincial government, it is compulsory for all 1,600 people housed in the prison, except the elderly and infirm. This prison’s unusual daily dance routines have attracted worldwide attention, with millions of hits on YouTube. In 2008, the British television station, Channel 4, broadcast a documentary on life inside the prison, entitled ‘Murderers on the Dancefloor’, and in 2019, Netflix created a documentary about the CPDRC called ‘Happy Jail’.

In 2012, Brazil implemented a law that enabled prisoners to reduce their sentences by reading books. The 1984 Criminal Enforcement Act (LEP) affirms that it is the duty of the state to prepare prisoners for their return to society. The law was modified in 2012 to guarantee prisoners one day of remission for every 12-hour block of study undertaken up to a maximum of 48 days of remission. This strategy, according to Torres da Silva, is part of a wider pedagogical process to re-socialize prisoners, helping them to develop into critical, informed readers while, at the same time, equipping them to live more independent lives after their release (Torres da Silva, 2017, cited in Krolak, 2019, pp. 19-20).

In a study undertaken in Western Australia, Giles et al (2016) find that education administrators in prison are increasingly investing their limited



### Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop (USA)

The Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop is a non-profit organization based in Washington DC, USA, for young people and adults in the criminal justice system. It uses books, creative writing and peer support to help young people incarcerated as adults to develop to their fullest potential. The goal of Free Minds is to empower young people in prison so that they can envisage different futures for themselves. By encouraging them in reading and writing while they are in prison, it is hoped they will also become voices for change in their communities.

Participation is voluntary. Many Free Minds members (as participants in the book club are known) report having had a negative experience of books at school, where they were required to study literature that did not interest them. Free Minds engages participants in reading by introducing them to authors and characters who come from similar backgrounds to their own, and who face similar obstacles in life. To select a book to read, book club members participate in a 'book ballot' to vote on four or five books chosen by facilitators.

Free Minds members who have been released from prison visit schools, universities, juvenile detention facilities and community groups in the role of 'poet ambassadors' to share their life experiences and poetry. The programme also connects members directly with schools and potential employers, and provides assistance and a supportive community of fellow Free Minds members.

Source: **Hanemann, 2017.**

human resources in education that is aimed at achieving improved labour market outcomes. It is hoped that these skills can help bring about a reduction in reoffending. However, in a limited number of studies on arts education, they argue persuasively that measurable outcomes are too narrow, and do not reflect the complex, but less quantifiable benefits to the individual and the community of studying art in prison. They conclude that 'better measures of all impacts of art studies in prisons are needed, including qualitative and humanitarian aspects' (Giles et al, 2016, p. 689).

Although an informal curriculum promotes alternative approaches to education, it can nonetheless equip students with skills that may be useful to them in a broader context. In Mexico City, Foro Shakespeare, an arts-based NGO, coordinates a theatre group made up of 22 actors in prison. Participation in the group requires training, a disciplined attitude, and physical and reflective work. Rangel Torrijo (2019) suggests that these elements of learning are as significant in their own right, outside of the 'rehabilitative' paradigm.

#### 4.4. Language tuition and migrant prisoners

The education of foreign prisoners has always presented its own issues. However, the need to provide language classes has become increasingly urgent given the rapid rise in the number of asylum seekers and economic or political refugees arriving in host countries – through official and unofficial channels – either because of conflicts (e.g. in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Myanmar) or due to economic disruption in many parts of the globe.

Thomas Ugelvik (2014, p. 107) noted that Western European prison systems are 'to varying degrees, waking up to the reality of having to cope with increasing numbers of foreign nationals in their institutions'. The provision of language instruction needs to develop to meet the needs of this growing population. However, despite obligations under Council of Europe and UN Declarations, few jurisdictions have obligations enshrined in law with regard to the education of foreign prisoners (GHK, 2013, p. 15). While resources for educational provision do not always meet the needs of learners and educators in the general prison population, the allocation of extra funding for language tuition is not always forthcoming. Prisoners who do not speak the language of the prison in which they are located can have difficulties in accessing services and facilities in prison. It can also lead to challenges in maintaining family ties, loneliness and isolation. Learners who do not understand the language of the country in which they are located are less likely to engage in the available behavioural programmes and/or access educational opportunities. The



## Building a better future (Bolivia)

In Bolivia, women account for approximately 8 per cent of the prison population. Two thirds are incarcerated for non-violent crimes, usually related to the micro-trafficking of drugs. Most come from low socio-economic and educational backgrounds, with the additional burden of being the main or even sole earner in the family.

A United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Programme encourages women to learn trades that will increase their self-sufficiency and take them away from traditionally female-dominated, low-paying sectors such as sewing, domestic services or the food sector. UNODC's innovative programme is currently being rolled out in Bolivia, focusing initially on a group of 50 female prisoners. These prisoners are trained to work in construction – an industry requiring a vast range of skilled specialists, including builders, metal workers, plumbers, pipefitters, electricians and carpenters. Following their release from prison, these women are encouraged to join the National Association of Women Constructors in Bolivia, which helps its members to promote their skills, find work opportunities and eventually launch their own businesses.

According to Mario Gonzales, director of the NGO in charge of training female prisoners, 'Training women prisoners is part of an integral process; not only are they receiving technical training, but they are also going to be empowered in exercising their rights, and upon release they can do better work and have a higher income, which will give them a higher quality of life'.

Source: **UNODC, 2018**

Loneliness and isolation further hinders them from connecting with services intended to help them following their release from custody (Hales, 2015, p. 28). With increasing number of migrant prisoners, the allocation of resources to meet their educational needs becomes more pressing. Significantly, a recent study indicated that language teaching for foreign prisoners is the issue that national policy-makers are most likely to consider 'not important' (GHK, 2013, p. 42; see also Behan, 2018).

## 4.5. Higher education in prison

Early forms of education in prison focused on adult basic education and vocational skills. Higher education tended not to be a priority. This was due in part to prisoners' educational backgrounds and low levels of traditional educational attainment, still prevalent in the student group outlined in Chapter 2. However, this lack of focus on provision of higher education in prison can also be a result of decisions on the allocation of limited resources and the penal priorities of policy-makers and legislators.

Political decisions, some of them designed to underscore a more punitive penal policy, have eliminated resources earmarked for the provision of third-level education in prison. In 1994, the United States Congress under the presidency of Bill Clinton passed the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act. This made incarcerated individuals ineligible for Pell grants, which provided financial aid to students who did not have the resources to attend college or university. The argument at the time was that it was unfair for prisoners to receive money from the country's already limited financial aid packages. In 2015, President Barack Obama announced a pilot initiative called Second Chance Pell to re-introduce a limited number of grants for prisoners. In 2020, the Trump administration announced that it would extend the pilot to allow more universities and colleges to participate in the Pell grants scheme (Douglas-Gabriel, 2020).

In the UK, the Open University has been providing prisoners with access to tertiary education since the late 1960s (Earle and Mehigan, 2019). In Poland, prison/university partnerships enable prisoners to study for a degree during their sentence. Working at the same pace as university students, these students study social work, specializing in 'streetworking', which focuses on using outreach techniques to work with marginalized groups such as sex workers, drug addicts and homeless people (Prisoners Education Trust, 2016). Some prisons use distance learning to overcome structural barriers to education. In Russia, the Modern Humanitarian Academy (MHA) provides distance education at all levels from primary through secondary education to higher education (BA, MA and specialist



degrees) and postgraduate programmes. Prisoners pay a reduced fee to participate in these programmes (Downes, 2014, p. 197).

In recent decades, the provision of education in prison has expanded with the burgeoning of university-prison partnerships. Despite a lack of public funds for third-level education, many universities have begun to provide education in prison as part of their community outreach programmes. In 1997, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program was established in the USA to bring college students and incarcerated learners together for semester-long modules. It now has more than 1,100 trained instructors in the USA and worldwide. Prisons and higher education institutions have collaborated to create opportunities for more than 40,000 'inside' and 'outside' learners (The Inside-Out Center, 2020).

In 2015, the University of Cambridge, UK, launched a similar initiative. The Learning Together programme brings learners in prison and probation settings together with students in higher education institutions. The objective of studying together is to learn with and from each other through dialogue and the sharing of experience (Ludlow et al., 2019).

These collaborative programmes share a central aim: to challenge perceptions among different categories of students, and promote collaborative engagement and dialogue. The Walls to Bridges (W2B) programme in Canadian prisons is based on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. Pollock's study on student experiences of Walls to Bridges classes noted 'how the program pedagogy of experiential learning and Talking Circle processes impacted student's awareness of privilege, marginalization and stereotypes, commitment to social change and action' (Pollock, 2016, p. 503).

By 2019, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) had provided funding for 3,000 prisoners studying both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Sabiu-Kaduna, 2019). In 2018, NOUN was one of the winners of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for literacy for its provision of educational programmes to prisoners. UNESCO instituted the prize with the support of the People's Republic of China in 2005 in order to reward outstanding individuals, governments and NGOs working to promote literacy for rural

adults and out-of-school young people, particularly women and girls (UNESCO, 2020).

Farley and Pike (2018) have highlighted the significant benefits of higher education for students, prisons, universities and wider society. However, they have also identified many difficulties with regard to access and support for all forms of higher education in the prison environment, particularly in the case of postgraduate students undertaking research and their supervisors. These are not the only challenges facing prisoners in higher education. While they are understandably motivated to achieve an academic qualification by the prospect of a more attractive future, the qualification alone does not guarantee success after imprisonment. Moreira, Monteiro and Machado (2017) found that, even when higher education opportunities were available to them, students' expectations remained low. The prospect of obtaining a higher degree did not allay their fears that the stigma of being labelled an ex-prisoner would negatively affect their ability to participate in society.

#### 4.6. Libraries in prison

Libraries are an essential educational resource for educators and learners alike. The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (IFLA and UNESCO, 1994) recognizes that:

[t]he public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.

As public libraries are not accessible to people in prison, it is important that each prison be equipped with a professionally run and well-stocked library. Prison libraries play a vital part in encouraging self-directed learning, reading, writing and recreational activities. As Rule 64 of the Mandela Rules states: 'Every prison shall have a library for the use of all categories



## From primary to tertiary education and beyond (Uganda)

In Uganda, more than 200 prisons house the country's 56,000 prisoners. The Uganda Prison Service provides a range of work-related, educational and/or recreational activities and facilities, including prison farms, prison industries, education programmes, music sessions and dance classes.

Luzira Prison in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, holds up to 3,000 prisoners, both male and female. Educational provision ranges from primary to university education, and includes a vocational trades programme. With school staff supported by prisoners, it has a recidivism rate of less than 30 per cent, which is far better than the average rate in many jurisdictions around the world. One recent report observed that 'over the past two decades, Luzira has gone from being a notoriously violent and squalid place, to one of the most progressive prisons in Africa' (Goldblatt, 2015).

Among those who have helped to achieve this is the Prison Education Project (PEP), which has partnered with Luzira Prison. PEP's aim is to reduce recidivism by offering a range of courses (Reese, 2019). A recent study of Luzira prison school found that, despite the positive efforts of learners and educators, a number of challenges remain that will resonate with those involved in education in prison internationally. These include poor infrastructure, a lack of scholastic materials, a poorly equipped library, limited academic programmes, prison transfers affecting prisoners enrolled in a course of study, limited time for revision, and overcrowded classes. Moreover, stress and depression were found to be prevalent among prisoners. However, the study found a 'rich opportunity in education as rehabilitative strategy since many prisoners have had an opportunity for free education, some have acquired several academic qualifications, some have been able to defend themselves in courts of law successfully, while others have continued to support their families through commissions received while still in prison' (Aheisibwe and Rukundo, 2018, p. 47).

*Sources:* **Aheisibwe and Rukundo, 2018; Reese, 2019; Goldblatt, 2015.**

of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it’.

In acknowledging the importance of educating the ‘whole person’ through a holistic adult education approach, *Education in Prison* (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 4) notes the crucial role of independent study, creative and cultural activities, and social education. It recommends that people in prison ‘should have direct access to a well-stocked library at least once a week’. Drawing on Krolak’s work in *Books beyond bars: The transformative potential of prison libraries* (2019), UIL stipulates that ‘the role of prison libraries needs to be recognized in relevant policy regulations’. Prison libraries, according to UIL, must have qualified library staff, sufficient budgets and resources. They should ‘provide an attractive, safe, friendly and welcoming’ space and ‘contribute to a literate environment that encourages inmates to develop, enhance and sustain literacy skills’ (UIL, 2020, p. 4).

Hence, a well-stocked library must be managed by qualified staff to ensure that prisoners have the same level of provision as citizens outside the prison context. Lehrman (2000, p. 1) found that the ‘most vital link in the operation of such libraries is having competent, well-trained, enthusiastic, and patient library staff equipped with the special human skills’ needed for dealing with prisoners and working in a penal environment. At the same time, a prison library must foster prisoners’ development more broadly. According to Finlay and Bates (2018, p. 125), the prison library is not merely a book-lending service; instead, it ‘offers a space where visitors can pursue their own recreational or educational reading interests’. The authors found that many prison libraries provide informal learning programmes, such as book discussion groups, creative writing classes and family literacy schemes. In an analysis of data gathered from Australian prisoners, Garner (2017) determined that people in prison experienced a form of escape through reading and when using their libraries, and that this was a highly valued experience. In her comparative study of literacy in prisons, Margarita Pérez Pulido (2010) further emphasized the importance of libraries, concluding that reading and writing are vital tools for

the ‘rehabilitation of disadvantaged population groups, including incarcerated people’ (2010, p. 131).

Krolak (2019, p. 13) summed up the world that libraries open up:

Prison libraries play an integral role in their function as educational, informational and recreational centres for the entire prison community. They are places in which people can gather to read, borrow books and carry out research, take part in organized activities, or simply enjoy the company of other people in a relaxed and safe environment. It is a space abounding with possibilities, all of which lend themselves to constructive ways of spending what all inmates have: time.

Her summary encapsulates the potential of prison libraries. Based on the public library model and staffed by professional librarians, prison libraries give learners the opportunity to innovate and take charge of their own learning. Within the constraints of confinement, the library space is an essential component of the scaffolding of education in prison.

## 4.7. Digital literacy

Digital literacy is perhaps one of the most challenging educational issues facing policy-makers today. It is also one of the most neglected aspects of education in prison in terms of both policy and practice, with many prison administrators and policy-makers resisting calls to allow prisoners access to the internet. Although education is a human right and digital literacy is key to accessing education in the modern world, restricted internet access continues to be the norm in risk-adverse environments where trust is low and exclusionary penal policies predominate.

As outlined in Chapter 2, many of those who end up in the criminal justice system have had negative experiences of education first time around, and thus have low levels of traditional educational attainment. Digital literacy is needed if they are to operate and communicate through a variety of media in the modern world. Digital skills are not only vital in



### **Münster's award-winning prison library (Germany)**

Libraries are an essential part of the cultural, social and educational infrastructure of any community. The prison community is no exception. As prisoners have little or no access to the outside world, libraries are a lifeline. They 'play an integral role in their function as educational, informational and recreational centres for the entire prison community' (Krolak, 2019, p. 13). As internet access is generally prohibited in prison, this eliminates the opportunity to research, source and retrieve materials necessary for independent study that has become commonplace in the community outside.

Following a competition involving public and university libraries across Germany, Münster prison library was named 'German Library of the Year 2007'. The library was redesigned in 2005 and has a professional librarian in charge. It holds 10,000 materials in 30 languages, including more than 2,000 foreign-language titles, to enable prisoners from more than 50 countries to read in their mother tongue. Its collection includes 2,000 audio books, CDs and DVDs. A range of reading materials is also available to cater to the needs of prisoners with varying reading and educational levels.

A study by Peschers and Patterson (2011, pp. 520–543) found that around 530 prisoners, i.e. approximately 80 per cent of the prison population, used the library. Additionally, 60 per cent of respondents said they read for an average of two hours per day, which far exceeded the amount of time that most had spent reading prior to their incarceration.

*Sources:* **Krolak, 2019; Peschers and Patterson, 2011**

the workplace; they are important for practically every aspect of social interaction, from using a smartphone to keeping in touch with family and friends, booking a holiday, ordering a take-away and shopping online. Furthermore, digital literacy is now an essential means of engaging in education outside the prison context.

Farley and Hopkins (2017) have studied incarcerated students' attempts to complete pre-tertiary and tertiary distance education

courses without internet access. They highlight what they see as the dichotomy of offering prisoners educational opportunities while denying them the materials, resources and access that they need in order to participate fully. This dichotomy is part of the 'limitations and contradictions of painful immobilisation as a core strategy of Australia's modern, expanding penal state', Farley and Hopkins argue, 'which encourages rehabilitation through education, while effectively cutting prisoners off from the wider digital world' (2017, p. 391).

Reisdorf and Jewkes (2016, p. 771) conclude that prisoners constitute 'one of the most impoverished groups in the digital age' and experienced profound social isolation as a result. Depending on their age and gender, as well as the length of their sentence, prisoners display high levels of either curiosity and enthusiasm, or fear and reservation towards internet-enabled technologies. Reisdorf and Jewkes (2016, p. 771) believe that greater exposure and secure access to digital technologies 'would be highly beneficial to prisoners who pose a low risk to society, especially during the rehabilitation and release phases'.

As most prisons across the world censor most or all of a prisoner's communications and thereby limit his or her contact with others, social isolation is a major problem among incarcerated people. As access to the internet is generally prohibited in prison, this eliminates the opportunity to research, source and retrieve materials necessary for independent study, as has become commonplace in the community outside.

#### 4.8. Civic engagement and social (re)integration

At the core of adult education is the goal of enabling students to participate, be that in the school, family, workplace or community. Education can boost confidence, engender resilience and motivate students to become more engaged in the public and private spheres. The UN and other transnational declarations contain a commitment to human and civil rights. Among them is Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and



## Second chances (Singapore)

The Kaki Bukit Centre Prison School (KBC) in Singapore opened in 2000. The prison houses a well-stocked library, classrooms and science laboratories. Classes, held five days a week, are taught by teachers seconded from the Education Ministry, along with part-time teachers and volunteers to support weaker students who require more help. A typical school day begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m.

Between 2011 and 2015, there was a 20 per cent increase in the number of prisoners taking N-, O- or A-Level examinations. The prison's curriculum is geared towards helping students excel at exams. Due to the dynamics of the prison regime, students have only one year to prepare for their O-Levels, compared to four or five years for students in mainstream schools. Those taking A-Levels can choose to sit their exams within one or two years. The school also offers courses in electronics and general education.

A 21-year-old student, who was four years into his sentence, explained his motivation to study for his A-Level exam: 'I think I've wasted my youth. Opportunities were presented to me, but I didn't see them [...]. In here, I started to worry about my future. Prison school is a second chance. I want to prove that I am a changed person' (cited in Anonymous, 2016).

Sources: **Oh et al., 2005; Anonymous, 2016; Tan, 2020.**

Political Rights (United Nations, 1966), which stipulates that every citizen shall have the right to 'take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives'. However, Article 2 allows countries and jurisdictions to derogate from the Covenant on the basis of existing domestic legislation, as it includes the stipulation: '[w]here not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures'. One of these areas of derogation pertains to prisoners' right to vote. For a variety of reasons that exceed the scope of this study, national legislation on this right varies greatly: some countries allow all prisoners to vote; others limit this right;



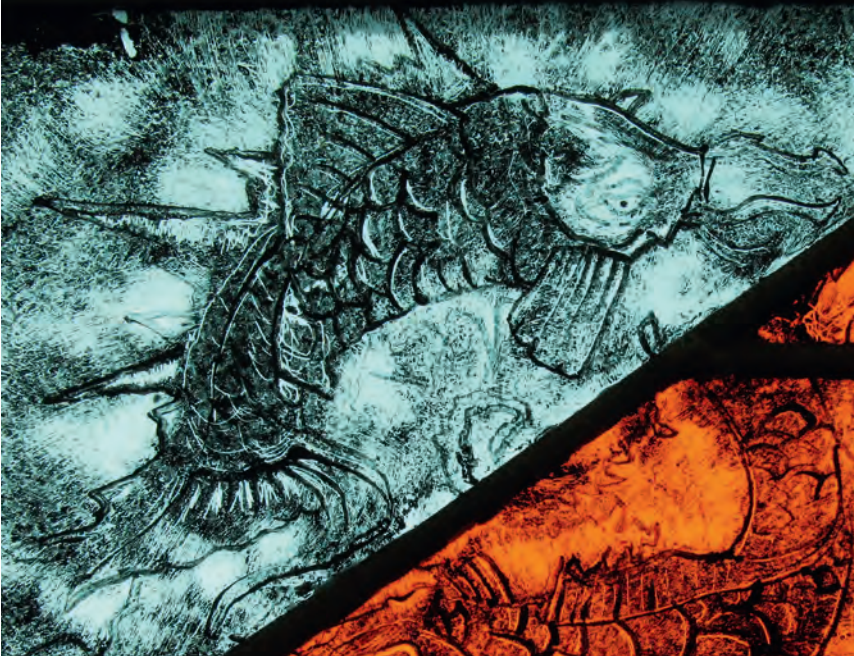
and some have enacted blanket disenfranchisement statutes whereby a conviction can lead to prisoners being banned from voting for life (see Behan, 2014b, chapters 1 and 2).

Mark Mauer argues (2011, p. 554) that the disenfranchisement of prisoners is generally premised on ‘assumptions about people in prison that portray them as qualitatively distinct from citizens in the outside world’. Such disenfranchisement reinforces the othering of prisoners, separates them from their community and can make social integration more difficult upon their release. The political and civil rights that a state accords its prisoners indicate its attitude towards including or excluding individuals both while they are incarcerated and, increasingly, after their sentence has been completed.

The right to vote gives prisoners the chance to remain part of the political community and to determine who governs, equal to other members of their community (Behan, 2014b). Countries that disenfranchise prisoners demonstrate a further mismatch between broader policy declarations and local practice. Rule 88 of the Mandela Rules states: ‘The treatment of prisoners should emphasize not their exclusion from the community but their continuing part in it. Community agencies should therefore be enlisted wherever possible to assist the prison staff in the task of social rehabilitation of the prisoners’. Uggen, Manza and Thompson (2006, p. 281) illustrate the contradiction caused by disenfranchisement when they suggest that denying the ‘full rights of citizenship’ makes performing ‘the duties of citizenship’ more difficult.

In jurisdictions that allow prisoners access to the franchise, prison schools encourage civic engagement in a variety of ways. In the Republic of Ireland and Norway, for example, prison schools offer academic subjects such as citizenship studies, politics and sociology, alongside facilitating activities designed to foster active citizenship (see the Irish case study on p. 80).

Aside from engagement in the franchise, active citizenship more generally is considered a public good in twenty-first century society, and it is widely encouraged among prison populations. However, citizenship is not an abstract concept that exists independently of the context in



This is another detail from a panel featuring two fantasy fish created by an artist and illustrator who participated in the art education programme at Cork Prison.

*Photo: Tom Shortt*

which it takes place and the people who engage in it. It is conceptualized and experienced very differently depending on a person's class, gender, race, life experience and levels of traditional educational attainment. The experience of imprisonment adds understandable challenges for those wishing to engage in active citizenship.

Even in those jurisdictions that prevent prisoners from voting, educators in prison participate in activities that encourage active citizenship and enable civic engagement, limited as it may be by legislation and confinement. Many prison schools understand that active citizenship assists with social integration, and thus seek to encourage, facilitate and organize such activities. A recent European study (Oglethorpe, Dewaele and



## Education for citizenship – citizenship as education (Ireland)

In 2009, prison teachers employed by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) in the Republic of Ireland, in conjunction with the Irish Red Cross, began to train volunteers enrolled in a Community Based Health and First Aid (CBHFA) programme. Originally, the CBHFA was initiated in countries with weaker and under-resourced health care systems. When the CBHFA programme was launched in Dublin's Wheatfield Prison, it was the first of its kind in the world. Its objective was to enhance the health and well-being of prisoners, and to promote hygiene awareness and first aid knowledge (CBHFA in Prisons, 2013). Now operating in all prisons in the Republic of Ireland, CBHFA volunteers provide peer-to-peer education across a range of activities. A study of the programme found that it had developed beyond the original goals of health promotion and well-being among the prison population. Participation fostered a sense of agency among volunteers and facilitated the development of a new, non-criminal identity. Further, the programme deepened volunteers' pro-social bonds with other prisoners, staff and families (O'Sullivan, Hart and Healy, 2020).

Red Cross volunteers were particularly active during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the initial period, prisoners were to some degree cut off from the concerns around the risk of infection being discussed in the outside world. These volunteers were thus active in engaging with prisoners to discuss the need for the prison to cancel visits and severely reduce out-of-cell time. In contrast to other jurisdictions, where there were significant outbreaks of COVID-19 among prisoners, none of the 3,705 prisoners in Irish prisons tested positive for the virus during the first wave of the pandemic. As reported by RTÉ, the national broadcaster, '[o]ne of the key components was education where 2,300 staff and 450 prisoners learned about infection control and had to practise what they were taught. Through peer-to-peer learning they promoted hand hygiene techniques and coughing etiquette. Prisoners spoke to other prisoners about making the environment safer, staff did the same with their colleagues'. As a result, the Irish Prison Service submitted a paper to the World Health Organization as a model of best practice for keeping COVID-19 out of prisons (Conneely, 2020).

The CBHFA is an example of citizenship education in action. Through a collaborative process between educators and learners, this project has been transformed from focusing on health and well-being to fostering active citizenship more broadly.

Sources: **Conneely, 2020; O'Sullivan et al., 2020**

Campenaerts, 2019, p. 5) points out that ‘active citizenship has the potential to be an extremely powerful force for good in prisons’. It continues:

Many prisoners have committed crimes that affected other people and may feel alienated from and by society. Active engagement in prison can be an antidote to this, as well as to the negative psychological effects of imprisonment. Engagement during a sentence can help people prepare to re-enter society, able to contribute, participate and belong. Active citizenship has an enriching effect: individuals build knowledge, skills, empathy and a sense of empowerment, and communities are strengthened by citizens joining together towards a common purpose.

Active citizenship under the unique conditions of the penal environment comprises volunteering, charitable works and peer-to-peer support that allow prisoners to participate in their community and in society as a whole, both inside and outside the prison environment. Active citizenship is promoted in penal institutions and prison schools across England and Wales (Weaver, 2018), where the overwhelming majority of prisoners are legally prevented from voting. In the USA, where only two states allow prisoners to vote, Inderbitzin, Cain and Walraven (2016) and Inderbitzin, Walraven and Anderson (2016) detail a range of activities that allow prisoners to make a positive contribution to the community inside and to society outside the prison.

These are examples of ‘rehabilitation’ in action. Citizenship on the inside gives prisoners the opportunity to rebuild the community bonds that were broken with imprisonment. It also prepares them for a law-abiding life, with the potential to contribute positively and productively to society, both while they are imprisoned and following their release. In his study of transformative education in Canadian prisons, Duguid highlights the importance of citizenship-related activities. He finds that the ‘key words that seem to characterize successful prison programs, programs that do contribute to transformations from outlaw to citizen, are “participatory”,

“democratic”, “reciprocal”, “community”, and “authentic” (Duguid, 2000, p. 246). Costelloe (2014b, p. 33), meanwhile, emphasizes the importance of citizenship education to social (re)integration more generally:

simply placing civic and citizenship classes at the core of the prison curriculum is not enough. And of course, simply promoting and providing a citizenship forum is not enough either. To make citizenship education more meaningful and educative, to ensure it is a learning process rather than just a learning practice, prison education must be grounded in an ideology that is focused less on enabling prisoners know their place in society and more on enabling them to re-conceptualise their place in society.

This encapsulates citizenship in action, citizenship as education. It encourages a new identity, from prisoner to student and from convict to citizen.

#### 4.9. ‘Deradicalization’ programmes and education

In the twenty-first century, there has been a proliferation of non-state actors (sometimes with support from states) engaging in violent activities against civilians and states in order to pursue political, religious or ideological aims. This upsurge in violence has led to the imprisonment of perpetrators who continue to profess their beliefs and, in many cases, seek to spread them among their fellow prisoners. In response, governments and prison authorities have created a range of programmes to encourage perpetrators to abandon their professed ideology and, above all, to prevent them from passing their ideas on to their fellow prisoners. These programmes are variously described as ‘deradicalization’, ‘Countering Violent Extremism’ (CVE) and ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’ (PVE).

Some researchers have argued that prisons have become both a battleground and a breeding ground for radicalization. According to one study, ‘the usefulness of prisons as universities for terrorists [...] has not escaped Islamic radicals. They have become increasingly sophisticated in

their operational methods, especially in devising ways of recruiting and training those who spearhead their assaults' (Cuthbertson, 2004, p. 15). As it is only relatively recently that increasing numbers of people have been imprisoned for activities of this kind, Vejvodová and Kolář (2019) argue that prison staff inevitably still lack the understanding, knowledge and training they need to deal with violent extremism. They cite the Radicalisation Awareness Network launched by the Czech Republic in 2011, which 'is testing innovative educational modules and risk assessment tools, both of which support prison staff in recognizing the radicalisation of inmates'. A report from the USA (Lewitt et al., 2017, p. 22) advised the incoming Trump administration in 2017 that there was an 'urgent need to develop P/CVE programs within the U.S. prison system, especially given the high number of individuals convicted of terrorism-related offenses who are due to be released from prison within the next few years'.

The European Union has adopted a multi-agency approach, which includes risk assessments, risk management and re-integration programmes. Other responses have included countering ideology online and in prison; advancing inclusive education; and promoting democratic and open societies. These responses look beyond law enforcement and security measures to identify key actions that can be taken in order to counter ideologies that promote violence to achieve their aims, including:

[s]upporting the development of education and training programmes in prison (including vocational training) to enable detainees to ease their reintegration into society. This includes the 'exchange of best practices and policies in the field of the execution of penal sanctions' and the development of 'rehabilitation programmes for prisoners' (European Commission, 2016)

In countries in which governments have introduced policies and strategies to combat the use of certain forms of violence, there can be an expectation that educationalists will become part of these 'PVE, CVE, deradicalization'

programmes, most of which are directed towards certain ideologies and focus on specific forms of violent activities, usually by non-state actors. While promoting the values of tolerance, respect, diversity, understanding and dialogue are at the core of adult education, some educationalists fear that being drawn into these programmes could be counter-productive and undermine these values. There may be a role for these programmes in the case of certain people, but it is outside the remit of education, and the skill-set, training and professional knowledge of educationalists. It is intruding into areas of practice outside educators' expertise.

Mandating educators to partake in these programmes and embrace their ethos is thus not without its critics. Based on the experience of teaching politically aligned prisoners in the Republic of Ireland, O'Donnell (2016) outlines a set of philosophical and ethical principles that should underpin education. She argues that education 'must not be subordinated to security and intelligence agendas on pragmatic, educational and ethical grounds' (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 53). In an analysis of Prevent, the UK's strategy for 'deradicalization', O'Donnell (2017, p. 177) rejects what she sees as the 'securitisation of education, effected through initiatives in counter-terrorism such as Prevent', which in turn led to what she terms 'pedagogical injustice' for learners and educators.<sup>7</sup> She contends that 'bringing counter-terrorist legislation into education undermines the educational endeavour'. By re-framing the Prevent agenda in the language of therapy, resilience and well-being, she notes:

**7** The United Kingdom government's strategy includes the Prevent programme. According to the UK government: 'Prevent is part of our counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. Its aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism [...] Within this overall framework the new Prevent strategy will specifically: respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it; prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address' (pp. 6–7). See [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf).

indicators guiding its implementation that might otherwise be seen as illegitimate or illegal forms of profiling are given credence in the spheres of education and other domains which demand pastoral care from professionals. By targeting ideas instead of focusing on violence, Prevent undermines educators.

## 4.10. Conclusion

This chapter has set out some of the key issues affecting education in prison in the twenty-first century. The creation of an informal curriculum constitutes an educational response to the needs of its specific learner group. This chapter has furthermore highlighted the importance of equipping prisons with well-stocked and professionally managed libraries. It has considered the necessity of providing language instruction to students who are not fluent in the language of the state in which they are incarcerated. Mindful of the challenges surrounding the provision of education in coercive institutions, and cognizant of the needs of the incarcerated learner group, the chapter has examined the difficulty of engaging in education in the modern world without access to the internet. It has also noted that penal policies which restrict prisoners' rights have an impact on education. However, even in jurisdictions that deny people in prison the right to vote, educators and learners have tried to overcome these constraints and create spaces and opportunities for active citizenship. The final section of this chapter has looked at the challenges faced by prisons and educationalists in the wake of a more recent rise in the numbers of people convicted for violent acts in pursuit of ideological and political aims. Chapter 5 will consider how some of these challenges may be overcome, and provide recommendations as to how the ideals behind 'education for all' (Perreault, 2020, p. 5.) can be transformed into a reality.





The artist who created this panel bred canaries and here seeks to immortalize the prize-winning bird he bred prior to his incarceration. While lacking a formal education, the artist, a participant in the art education programme at Cork Prison, compensates with rich talents and sophisticated skills in diverse areas of his life.

*Photo: Tom Shortt*

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this literature review on education in prison has been to assess the current state of knowledge on the topic by describing different approaches, analysing key issues, and deriving good practices and lessons learned. At the same time, however, it also identifies a number of recommendations, which are included below. It should be noted that these recommendations are by no means exhaustive; they are intended to serve as a starting point for further elaboration.

### 5.1. Policy

Although it is essential that education should be facilitated and supported by penal policy-makers and prison managers, specific policies on education in prison should be devised by national ministries of education and/or local education authorities.

Education in prison should always be optional, and it should be treated in the same way as other vocational and work activities.

Resources and facilities should be provided to enable prisoners to continue their studies post-release. Once prisoners have completed their sentences, legal or institutional obstacles should not prevent them from continuing their education.

### 5.2. Funding

Adequate funding must be allocated in order to equip each prison with a fully resourced school. Additional resources are needed to cover the provision of education for prisoners with specific educational needs, such as literacy/numeracy difficulties.

### 5.3. Curriculum

A holistic curriculum is needed in order to meet the social, physical and cultural needs of prisoners. This includes creative and cultural activities. In view of the over-representation of minority and marginalized populations among prisoners, it is essential that the curriculum recognizes and embraces their history, culture and identity.

### 5.4. ICT connectivity

Digital connectivity must be assured and digital literacy promoted among learners, both as a prerequisite for modern pedagogical practice, and so that learners can access educational resources beyond the prison confines. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the shift to online learning and resources and, with it, the need to enhance digital literacy among the imprisoned population. Related security concerns can be addressed through technology that prevents people from accessing toxic sites or, where necessary, provides offline access only to digital resources.

### 5.5. Civic engagement and active citizenship

Education in prison can draw on pedagogical methods that prepare students to be active citizens and acknowledge their agency, namely by implementing and resourcing non-formal learning. This includes the promotion of citizenship in action, both in the learning space and throughout the prison.

### 5.6. Language teaching

There are significant numbers of people in prison who do not speak the language of the country in which they are located. This necessitates the provision of language classes. Learning another language can also empower students in prison to engage more openly with others and with the wider world.

## 5.7. The library

An adequately resourced prison library staffed by accredited library professionals is central to educational activities. In prisons with a large foreign population, books in various languages should be made available.

## 5.8. Future research

This literature review has identified a number of research gaps that offer rich seams of study for future research.

Educators and learners should engage in collaborative research in order to co-produce knowledge, and to identify challenges and propose solutions that foreground prisoner experiences. Collaborative projects could, for example, examine learners' views on the type of education that they feel they need; the barriers that prevent them from engaging in education; and the extent to which the educational and language needs of foreign people in prison are being met.

Women experience prison and engage in education differently. As a result, further research is needed in order to determine whether their needs are being met in prison schools.

Further attention must be paid to the training needs of teachers before they embark on a career in education in prison, and additional resources must be provided in order to train them. They should have continuous access to upskilling and professional development opportunities.

More research on the educational and cultural needs of minority and indigenous populations is needed.

In line with a holistic adult education approach that responds to the needs of the 'whole person', future research could focus on family learning and the ways in which it could be facilitated and further developed in the prison context. This is an area of particular importance to parents in prison seeking to maintain contact and sustain relationships with their children.

As much of the research presented here focuses on the English-speaking world and the Global North, more extensive research in other languages and on wider geographical areas must be undertaken.

Finally, as prisons differ, even within a single jurisdiction, it is important to research the impact of local institutional dynamics and national penal culture on the provision of education in prison.



The artist, a participant in Cork Prison's art education programme, creates a map of Cork City tracing its river channels and bridges from memory. The work expresses his sense that he has lost access to the urban landscape that is intrinsic to his life and identity. He represents himself now as a shadow or a spectre in that environment.

*Photo: Tom Shortt*

## 6. CONCLUSION: WHY EDUCATION IN PRISON?

This review began by laying out the rationale for this study and elucidating its aims and objectives. It then briefly detailed the history of education in prison. It subsequently outlined the principles underpinning education in prison contained in international declarations and conventions. Following this, the review emphasized the importance of understanding the specific characteristics of learner groups. In particular, it highlighted the complexities and challenges facing educators and learners in prison, which include limited or negative prior experiences of education; restricted or non-existent access to the internet; the need to reject managerialist or utilitarian approaches to education; and the widespread denial of prisoners' rights, including the right to vote. It underscored the importance of well-resourced libraries and looked at the strategies and approaches adopted by educationalists working in penal environments.

There are myriad reasons why education in prison is necessary. First, education is not just about the accumulation of knowledge or the acquisition of skills; it also enables personal fulfilment. Education enhances individuals' lives, opening up a world of reading, culture, history and identity that helps us all make sense of our lives. It enables us all to make meaning of the world we live in. People who engage in education are more likely to participate in a public activities: volunteering; attending plays, films and concerts; getting involved in sport; and playing an active role in their communities. Families, communities and society benefit from groups of individuals who engage in education, outside and inside prison.

Imprisonment is essentially about exclusion – from family, friends, the community and society. Education, on the other hand, is about inclusion. How do we navigate this dichotomy and create a space in which prisoners can engage in education in a place of coercion? It is likely that the provision of education in prison will always be a challenge. Structural and institutional impediments to the creation of positive pedagogical spaces are inherent in a coercive environment. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles,

many people participate successfully in education in prison. As the case studies in this review have demonstrated, prison schools offer learners and educators opportunities to engage in pedagogy together. The process can be both a challenging and a rewarding one, but, above all, it has the potential to be transformative.

One of this review's most significant findings has been the mismatch between the commitments professed in international and regional declarations and agreements, and the ways in which these commitments have (or have not) been translated into the provision of education in prison. With a few notable exceptions, they have not been embraced by state or regional policy-makers, which can in turn impact negatively on local practice. If the principles laid down in international declarations and standards are to serve as the benchmarks by which the provision of education in prison is measured, then greater efforts are needed to transform these ideals into reality. The principles included in international declarations are undoubtedly ambitious, but they should be more than aspirational. Perhaps the nature of imprisonment is such that it will always stand in the way of transforming these principles into practice. However, this should not prevent educational and penal systems from striving to make them a reality.

In order to make 'education for all' more than a noble aspiration, and to provide a robust education system for those confined in penal institutions, there needs to be a re-examination of penal policies, strategies and pedagogical approaches in many jurisdictions. The widespread mismatch between principles and policy is partly due to the competing agendas, foci and resource allocation between penal policy-makers and education-ists (see Rangel Torrijo and De Maeyer, 2019). When such a clash occurs, the ethos of punishment tends to win out over the values of pedagogy. It is vital that this mismatch be addressed, as penal policy affects how education is defined; how resources are allocated; how many teachers are employed; and what kind of curriculum is adopted in prison. Given the large numbers of potential learners with acute educational needs, there is a strong argument to be made that additional resources should be allocated



to this 'hard-to-reach' group. The aspirations enshrined in various international documents will only be realized if policy-makers take steps, both politically and financially, to ensure their implementation.

A fresh approach to penal policy would foreground pedagogy over punishment. It would start by investing in education and other social and public services in communities. As the introduction to this review made clear, the funding allocated to prisons takes away from the resources that pay for the construction of public schools, youth facilities, hospitals, care homes and all of the infrastructural elements on which resilient communities depend. New policies must break out of the straitjacket of seeking solutions to the harm caused by those who commit crimes within penal policy and criminal justice systems alone. There is a need to consider how harm can be reduced through social justice initiatives, rather than focusing essentially on criminal justice responses.

Incarceration negatively impacts on an individual's life chances, even after a sentence has been served. A new approach to penal policy demands that we reframe the language around prisons and prisoners. It also entails confronting and resolving difficult questions with regard to the re-integration of prisoners into society after release. Although physically excluded, people in prison are nonetheless members of our communities and of society as a whole. Ultimately, consideration must be given to strategies designed to reduce the number of people being sent to prison, including possible alternatives to incarceration including, for example, restorative justice, reparations and community-building.

Adult education enriches peoples' lives. It helps build inclusive communities and create sustainable societies (UIL, 2014). Lifelong learning is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge; personal fulfilment; and consciousness-raising. It is about engaging, enabling and empowering. Despite the challenges and obstacles that this review has identified, education in prison can be part of these ambitious endeavours. Even within coercive environments, there is the potential to create the space for education that can engage, enable and empower. This potential, as with all adult education, lies not within the walls of the

prison or the structural context, but within the human spirit and the promise of growth. Education can open up the possibility for all learners to enrich their lives, fulfil their human potential, and make a positive contribution to civic life, thus creating a healthier, more inclusive, more fully developed and better society for all.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Professional organizations for educators working in prisons

- Australasian Corrections Education Association  
<https://acea.org.au/>
- Correctional Education Association  
<https://ceanational.org/>
- European Prison Education Association  
<https://www.epea.org/>
- International Corrections and Prisons Association  
<https://icpa.org/>
- Penal Reform International  
<https://www.penalreform.org/>

### Appendix 2: Journals of interest to educators working in prisons

There are numerous journals that contain papers related to education in prison. These journals cover various subject disciplines, from criminology through sociology to adult education. The following are journals that deal specifically with, or include significant contributions on, education in prison.

- *Advancing Corrections:*  
*Journal of the International Corrections and Prisons Association*  
<https://icpa.org/advancing-corrections-journal/>

- *Journal of Correctional Education (JCE)*  
<https://ceanational.org/journal/>
- *Journal of Correctional Healthcare (JCHC)*  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jcx>
- *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/hjsp20/current>
- *Journal of Higher Education in Prison (JHEP)*  
<https://www.higheredinprison.org/journal-of-higher-education-in-prison>
- *Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry (JPER)*  
<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jper/>
- *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP)*  
<http://www.jpp.org/>
- *Practice – The New Zealand Corrections Journal*  
<https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/statistics/journal>



unesco

Institute for  
Lifelong Learning

This publication focuses on some of the unique characteristics and challenges concerning the provision of education in prison, including: the emergence of an informal curriculum; language tuition in prison; access to higher education; the availability of library facilities; digital literacy; civic engagement and social (re)integration; and prison programmes for education. It also analyses commitments made through international and regional declarations and agreements. Furthermore, it examines penal policies, strategies and pedagogical approaches established in jurisdictions around the world. Finally, this review provides sets of recommendations to local administrations and national government on education in prison.

