

# EVERY POSSIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITY: THE CAPACITY OF EDUCATION IN PRISON TO CHALLENGE DEHUMANISATION AND LIBERATE 'THE WHOLE PERSON'<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

'Adult education' thinking envisages 'the full development of the human personality', offers many learning opportunities, and recognises learners' individualities and capacities to transform their lives. This philosophy and practice is as valid within prisons as in the community outside, a view asserted in Council of Europe and United Nations documents. Research from many countries into what learners in prison value most from their study supports this perspective, but punitive penal policies limit the possibilities adult education offers. Policy implications include recognising education in prison as a right rather than a privilege, and ensuring a wide curriculum is offered to all.

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## Introduction

The nurturing of education in prison is bound up with larger issues in penal policy. So, while this paper will concentrate on the education of those in prison, it will also discuss shifting thinking and policies on prisons, which of course impact on education. However, the focus will be on the concept of adult education: its distinctive philosophy and methodologies, its wide curriculum and capacity to transform lives, and the enormous potential it holds for imprisoned men and women. Yet, the achievement of that potential will be facilitated or hampered depending on the policies being pursued in the wider penal system, what can be called the 'penal climate'. Like the other climate, this can vary widely with time and place and tends to have serious effects on many things, including 'the quality of the harvest' that those involved in education in prison try to gather - and, of course, their morale!

## The Concept of Adult Education

'Penal climate' will be discussed later, and indeed what may be seen as '*penal climate change*', but the initial focus of this paper will be on adult education. My own experience in the field began in Manchester, England, in 1975, a year that saw the launch of a national adult literacy campaign in Britain, which sought to address what was then a substantial but largely hidden phenomenon of reading and writing difficulties among the adult population. The campaign enabled many to throw off burdens of fear and self-doubt that had oppressed them for years. Teaching approaches tended to be very different to those used with children in schools. Adults who came forward seeking help with some aspect of reading or writing were very often remarkably bright and interesting people who had usually kept their problems well hidden. Learning was built with them around their strengths and interests; different methods were used as they suited different people; students were encouraged to pursue their own objectives, to draw on their life experiences and cultures, to learn at their own pace and in their own way and to help and support each other.

Following Paulo Freire (1972a, 1972b), teachers attempted to facilitate people in discovering that language was theirs, their means to express themselves, understand and change the world, and affirm themselves, their lives and their communities. The differences between school-based approaches and the teaching of adult literacy following Freire's thinking is sharply illustrated in Kathy Boudin's descriptions of participatory literacy in a women's prison in New York (Boudin, 1993; 1995).

What these men and women in Manchester gained from participating in education was far more than the technical skills of reading and writing. Vastly more important was the positive change in their sense of self - 'I'm not stupid after all, I can learn', 'I have things to say, a story to tell' - and the confidence that grew with that. So often also, they experienced a great burden being lifted from them; they would say 'I thought I was the only one'. Certainly, they learned skills, but the less tangible personal developmental aspects, and the relief and new perspectives achieved, were much more important.

Combining teaching with research, I explored with 18 adult literacy learners their views on what caused their difficulties, how their lives had been affected, and their experiences of learning. What was striking was that those interviewed saw *the overcoming of stigma and growth in self-confidence* as the most important things gained from learning, rather than the technical improvements in reading and writing. (Warner, 1983; Gatehouse Project, 1983). Such small-scale ethnographic research chimed fully with major research by Charnley and Jones (1979) evaluating the national adult literacy campaign. Their original plan was to conduct quantitative testing, but early in their project they

realised a qualitative approach was much more meaningful. They produced what became a famous book, *The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy*. The title is important: they found that the crucial success *in the eyes of the adult students themselves* was not improvement in literacy skill as such, but what these authors called "the enhancement of self-image" (p.171).

What adult literacy students saw as their achievements obviously varied, but the most important in the eyes of most were, as Charnley and Jones put it, "in the affective personal or social achievement domains", things like how they felt about themselves, confidence, self-esteem, capacity to relate to others and to the world. Importantly, the researchers saw such developments as "synonymous with the general aims of adult education" (p.178). American writer Jack Mezirow (1990) uses terms such as 'emancipatory learning' and 'transformation' to describe such breakthroughs.

However, these important things are not very susceptible to measurement, or accreditation. A key principle in evaluation in adult education – to borrow a phrase current in adult education circles from at least the 1980s – is '*to make that which is important measurable, rather than that which is measurable important*'. Managerialism, whether in the fields of Criminal Justice or Education, tends to look for the measurable rather than the important. This issue, and the way accredited courses can be prioritised over non-accredited learning, will be examined later. It is important to be clear about our concept of success. So, it was with these issues in mind that Charnley and Jones said, "the literacy campaign was not a matter of skill-training but of adult education with special reference to literacy" (p.178). Their idea of adult education, one that is widely understood, is about a much wider and deeper development of the person than just the acquisition of certain knowledge or skills.

### **Educating the 'Whole Person'**

The Council of Europe had a similar concept of adult education in the community (Council of Europe, 1987), which they transposed in the exact same terms into their policy document on education in prison: "Education in prison shall aim to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context" (Council of Europe, 1990, p.8). This idea of offering education to 'the whole person' underpins the Council's stipulation that those in prison should be offered "a wide concept of education" (1990, p.13), or "educational programmes which are as comprehensive as possible" (2006, 28.1). A further rationale for a wide curriculum is a practical one: different aspects of education attract different people, and once people join in for one type of learning they often then move on to others.

The Council of Europe is clear that education in prison has wider purposes than attempting to get prisoners to stop committing crime or get them into jobs. It sets out three 'justifications' (Council of Europe, 1990, p.15). The first is to limit the damage done to men and women by imprisonment, i.e. to help them cope with and survive the experience. Secondly, since a high proportion of those in prison have had very limited and negative past educational experience, they are seen to be now entitled to special support to address their educational disadvantage. The third purpose is to support them in turning away from crime.

A United Nations report (Munoz, 2009) echoes the Council of Europe clearly, asserting that education in prison:

should be aimed at the full development of the whole person requiring, among other things

prisoner access to formal and informal education, literacy programmes, basic education, vocational training, creative, religious and cultural activities, physical education and sport, social education, higher education and library facilities. (p.7)

This UN report reiterates: "All persons [in prison] should have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality" (p.9), so echoing very closely Council of Europe thinking and policy.

### **The Rewards from Study in Prison**

What is it that men and women get from education while in prison? And does their experience match the above aims? There has been considerable research in this area. William Forster (1990) interviewed university students in several prisons in England. They described a great range of 'rewards' from their study. Forster noted how they emphasised the effect "upon their personality and attitudes" (p.25), "the marked feeling of cultural change" (p.26) and *valued being regarded as students rather than prisoners*. One man said: "It's a life-line – it reaches outside. I'm a member of the University and that means that I'm still a member of the human race" (p.27). So, as with the adult literacy students mentioned earlier, the most significant achievements were, not skills or knowledge or qualifications as such, but rather less tangible things in the affective and social domains.

In the intervening years, education in prison in England has been narrowed and diminished in many ways, reduced to a focus on skills in the workplace (Costelloe and Warner, 2014). However, a counter-tendency is evident in a recent 'Special Edition' of the *Prison Service Journal* devoted to 'The Transformational Potential of Prison Education' (HM Prison Service, 2016). That issue has extensive testimony from former prisoners, criminologists and the Prisoners' Education Trust, a body which supports study in prison and after release. All of these, in one way or another, make the case for the wider and deeper form of education being discussed here. A great deal of research has also been conducted into education in prison in the five Nordic countries, centred at the University of Bergen. Such research has looked, for example, at prisoners' educational backgrounds, preferences and motivations, and reinforces the need to adhere to broad educational purposes (Eikeland et al., 2009).

In contrast to the Nordic countries, the prison context is very different in the USA. Kaia Stern's *Voices from American Prisons* (2014) is highly critical of imprisonment in her own country: its dehumanisation, isolation and 'social death', and the *thinking* that underpins these features. Yet, the way those she interviewed describe how education had helped them echoes themes very similar to those that emerge in Europe. Typical is the Boston University student in prison who says the experience "does so much more than teach. It builds self-esteem... creates hope... opens doors in life that were once closed... we found that there are people in the world that actually care about us... want us to success" (Stern, 2014, p.165).

Clearly, in the very particular context of US prisons, Stern is identifying once again the importance of gains in "the affective personal or social achievement domains" (Charnley and Jones, 1978, p.178) central to adult education. However, the dominant approach currently in 'correctional education' in the USA is to evaluate study in prison by narrower and more instrumental objectives, such as a reduction in recidivism and/or the gaining of employment after release (for example, Steurer, et al., 2001). Yet, even when measured by these more restrictive criteria, research suggests that study in prison is likely

to be very effective.

Stern summarises the extensive research there is on this aspect in the USA, including longitudinal studies: time and again, in study after study, participation in education is associated with reductions in recidivism by significant amounts. This pattern appears most marked the higher the level of education: "the higher the degree attained, the lower the recidivism rate" (p.161). In the light of this finding, the decision by the Irish Prison Service in recent years to abolish the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) course in the high-security Portlaoise Prison, to cut Open University participation across the prison system by more than half, and to prohibit masters courses with the Open University would hardly seem to be best practice, or evidence-based policy. Desistance from crime is not the primary purpose of education in prison, yet education does strongly support that process.

So, for those who ask, 'what works?', and call for 'evidence-based policy making', the answer is very clear in relation to education in prison. Extensive research in many countries points clearly to a wide and deep form of education, that includes but goes well beyond skills training or accredited courses, that follows the adult education model, and that tunes into Council of Europe and United Nations policies. In Ireland, there is some excellent research in this area. In just asking 'What do people in prison get from education?' we can point to at least four high-quality PhDs, by Anne Costelloe (2003), Cormac Behan (2014), Jane Carrigan (2013) and Geraldine Cleere (2013). While each of these researchers interviewed people in different prisons, and each was concerned with answering separate theoretical questions, all probed why those in prison participated in education, and what they gained from it.

A small flavour of typical comments from their interviews will be given here, mixing quotations from the four studies. Suffice to say that all the comments again point beyond instrumental purposes of education to its benefits in relation to surviving the 'detrimental effects' of prison, personal development in its widest sense, or gaining some hope for a 'good life' or 'making good' in the future. In other words, what those in prison say they get from education, in Ireland as elsewhere, matches very clearly what the Council of Europe and the United Nations envisage:

At first, it was like something to do, ya know, something to keep me occupied. And then, sort of, it just progressed.

I was sick of sitting around listening to all the drug-talk [in the prison wings], non-stop, banging on every hour of the day, it was wrecking me head.

I have two teddy bears in there now that I made... when I get a family visit, I don't like walking out empty handed to the kids... so whatever I make I hang on to, they look great, they're better than what you get in the shop.

When you come up here [to the school] they don't treat you like you're a prisoner. They just treat you like you're normal... I get treated with respect when I come up here... treated like an adult.

The school is an oasis... an oasis of civility which one doesn't always find at the end of the

stairs...

It makes you more than a junkie or whatever, a robber or a scumbag that others might think... I've learned a lot of things and how it's alright to know things and explain yourself.

Doing the education has made me realise I am an individual, separate to anyone else. Like the school has given me more information, not just about learning from books but also about myself and how to deal with situations.

Motivation is often complex and multi-layered, as in this quotation:

My motivations for studying in prison are many; the combination of boredom, wanting to please others and restore some of their pride in yourself, and awareness that your offspring may someday look to you for assistance with their studies, being conscious of your own ignorance and lack of knowledge, a stubborn streak which keeps you going in the face of adversity or when told you're not capable, wanting to keep your head down and get on with things quietly, as a means of escape, anything to keep your mind focused and as far removed from reality as possible, to promote a sense of self-confidence, to experience the pleasure of learning and gaining knowledge simply for its own sake, not to mention costing the authorities money. (Costelloe, 2003, pp.139-140)

Another insightful Irish source is a research report, *Unfamiliar Voices* by Aislinn O'Donnell (2011). This investigated the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) course in Portlaoise Prison, which ran for nearly 25 years until it was terminated in 2011. It had high levels of participation both among paramilitary (or 'political') prisoners and more conventional (or 'social') prisoners. Drawing on interviews with key stakeholders involved over these years, and in particular those still in prison or who had been in prison, Professor O'Donnell aimed to "evaluate the qualitative nature of the educative experience... thus offering a richer story than one that might be offered through more restrictive criteria of evaluation born of performance and audit based models of education" (p.1) – taking, in fact, an approach very much like that of Charnley and Jones (1979) in relation to the adult literacy campaign. Her report conveys the remarkable success of that (non-accredited) course for the many long-term prisoners who participated in it.

There are many accounts by men and women who are or have been in prison which document their experiences of significant awakening or change through some form of education. It is important that we pay attention to them to understand this process, and how the triggers for the breakthroughs can vary greatly. Jimmy Boyle, who had long been involved in serious crime, tells how he discovered something extraordinary in himself through producing work in clay in Barlinnie Prison in Scotland:

I felt great pleasure in creating the sculptures and knew that I had stumbled onto something within myself... and was knocked out by the depth of feeling when I completed a piece... I worked at a prolific rate with most of the work based on the expressions of my soul with pain/anger/hate/love/despair/and fears embodied in it. This was very important for me as a person because it allowed me to retain all these very deep emotional feelings but to channel them in another way – sculpture. (Boyle, 1977, pp.250-1)

Another, perhaps more typical, account of being drawn into education while in prison is that of Martin Keane (1995). Having been expelled from school without any qualification at the age of 15, he “began... to dabble in various subjects” in the school in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, but “really it was just a method I employed to enable me to pass the time” (Keane, p.28). Then, something like transformative change came for him when he spent over three months rehearsing for and performing in a play. It was, he says, “exhilarating, and gave me a massive confidence boost” (p.28). He began to take learning more seriously and in time undertook Open University study – but the crucial breakthrough that first moved him forward happened in drama. This was at a time when non-accredited educational activity such as drama and accredited courses such as those of the Open University had parity of esteem in Irish prisons, and each was regarded by authorities as a valid route by which people could progress.

The Prisoner Learning Alliance in England explored with many prison teachers what they perceived to be the main benefits of learning in prison. It is striking that they saw the most important benefits, not as skills or qualifications, but deeper less tangible things such as confidence, motivation, team-work, communication, self-awareness and creativity. Former prisoner learners highlighted similar aspects, in particular “awareness, self-belief and identity” (Prisoners’ Education Trust, 2016, p.5).

The overwhelming logic of research, experience and progressive policy point to prison systems offering every possible learning opportunity to all in prison. As far back as 1931, a Director in the Federal Bureau of Corrections in the USA, Austin MacCormick, said that we should “consider the prisoner as primarily an adult in need of education and only secondarily as a criminal in need of reform... [Education’s] aim is to extend to prisoners as individuals every type of educational opportunity that experience or sound reasoning shows may be of benefit or of interest to them” (MacCormick, 1931, p.12). Facilitating interests is crucial. John McVikar, once a notorious gangland leader in England (who became an academic sociologist), said: “nowadays it is not so much that I find crime repugnant as that I am *more interested in other things*” (emphasis added) (quoted in Duguid, 2000, p.92). Shouldn’t a prison service be encouraging interests, trying to open every possible door, not restricting or closing opportunities, or making things conditional?

### **Penal Climate Change**

Such insightful learning can happen in even the most oppressive or restrictive prison, some people can survive the worst conditions. The United States experience, among others, shows us that (see Stern, 2014). Yet, such exceptions do not take from the basic fact that more and better learning will thrive in a better penal climate; and the more punitive and the less humane the climate, the less good learning will there be. So, penal climate is important, it affects the extent to which the potential offered by adult education can be optimised or not, as a case-study exploring developments in Ireland will illustrate.

David Garland tells us that there has been a shift in recent decades from traditional thinking and practice around prisons, which he calls ‘penal welfarism’, to “more punitive... more security-minded... more offence-centred, more risk-conscious” ways of doing things (Garland, 2000, p.175). ‘Penal-welfarism’ is, of course, something of a contradiction in terms (controlling people on the one hand, helping them on the other) but that precisely describes the thinking about prisons (if not always the practice) in Ireland, as in many other countries, up to the mid-1990s. It is a restrained approach, expressed in one Irish government report as “minimum use of custody, minimum use of security and

normalisation of prison life" (Whitaker Report, 1985, p.90), but the thinking can be found in other policy documents, such as one which stated that there should be a rebalancing of 'care/custody' in the direction of more care and "strengthening of health care and of the psychological, educational and training elements"(Report of Expert Group, 1997, p.13). As in other countries, the establishment of open and pre-release prisons, and indeed whole-hearted support for an education service with adult education aims and a wide curriculum, were very much products of this outlook.

There is a debate as to how far there has been a shift towards greater punitiveness, as described by Garland, in the Irish penal system. While there is strong evidence of penal climate change in Ireland, there are also penal climate change deniers. Yet, some significant negative developments in recent decades are undeniable, and most of them have adversely affected the learning opportunities open to those in prison (Warner, 2014). The prison population in Ireland went from approximately 2,050 (in 1995) to 4,600 (in 2011), dropping to about 4,000 in 2018. Prison conditions, never good to start with, worsened in several important respects: cell-sharing, for example, went from about 28% to 60%, but has now eased to just under 50% - still in blatant defiance of the *European Prison Rules* (Council of Europe, 2006, 18.1 – 18.10). Several prisons have become unmanageably large, and education facilities have not kept pace with the addition of large new cell-blocks, so that for many in prison access to education has been substantially reduced (see Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2012, chapter 3).

Perhaps the most significant shift may be found in the way officialdom perceives people held in prison. Where once the Irish Department of Justice referred to those in prison as "members of the community" and "valued members of society entitled on release to a constructive place in society" (Department of Justice, 1994, p.22), they are now, to use Garland's words, "less likely to be seen in official discourse as socially-deprived citizens in need of support; they are depicted instead as culpable, undeserving and somewhat dangerous" (2000, p.175). It is important to stress that what is envisaged here is a significant *change of emphasis* in the penal climate, rather than any absolute change. The way 18 to 21-year-olds are now treated in the Irish prison system (young men who in the past were included in the term 'juvenile') is one outcome of such regression: they are now scattered around large closed adult prisons with little regard for their level of maturity or vulnerability (Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2016).

Such regressive change influences what it is that education can achieve. Perhaps it is now best to develop this point in a European context, recalling the deep purposes and wide curriculum that the Council of Europe and United Nations (and indeed the European Union) envisage for those in prison. An article titled 'Prison Education Across Europe: Policy, Practice, Politics' in the *London Review of Education* looked at four ways in which education in prison tends to fall short of these more holistic and encouraging approaches, all of the reductions being related to diminutions in the perception of the person in prison (Costelloe and Warner, 2014).

Firstly, if people in prison are perceived as *undeserving* (one of the features Garland noted), that makes authorities dis-inclined to provide good education. Such attitudes were in part behind severe cuts to educational provision, and reductions in access, in Irish prisons. At its crudest, the depiction of men and women in prison as undeserving can be seen in language such as that used by a former Minister for Justice in Ireland who referred to prisoners in general as "thugs and scumbags" (Lonergan, 2010, p.217). However, the perception of them being undeserving is there also, perhaps



more subtly, in approaches which see education as *a privilege* or reward for compliance, rather than *a right* to which they are entitled as set out by the Council of Europe and the United Nations. An example of policy built on people in prison being conceived *as citizens* and entitled, *as of right*, to education can be found in the Norwegian White Paper, *Another Spring* (Norway Ministry of Education and Research, 2005).

A second way in which the education offered can be narrowed or hollowed out arises when we only see the person as an 'offender'. There can be a tendency then to over-focus on programmes that are presumed (often without too much evidence to back them up) to 'address offending behaviour'. There is a salutary tale from Canada that should warn us of the folly of restricting education in this fashion, when the highly successful Humanities programme run by Simon Fraser University in British Columbia was terminated by the federal authorities, to be replaced by courses misguidedly presumed to tackle 'criminogenic' factors (Duguid, 1997, 2000). In similar fashion, Irish prison authorities now speak of "re-engineering services [to prisoners] designed to address the factors that contribute to offending" (Irish Prison Service, 2016, p.14).

A third way in which prison education tends to be diminished is when there is an over-focus on, or prioritisation of, training for work. Here, people are regarded as feckless and thus must be made to work. There are echoes here of the concept of 'hard labour' from olden days; and stronger echoes of some more modern welfare policies, especially in Britain. In England, Lord Filkin, at one time a junior Minister for Offender Education, said: "The sole priority of education is to get offenders into work – anything else is a means, not an end" (OCR, 2005). With this outlook, important elements of education are ignored or reduced. Moreover, such an approach is severely out-of-line with that set out in the European Prison Rules: "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" (Council of Europe, 2006, 28.4).

Lord Filkin's thinking can be contrasted with that of K. J. Lang, for many years Director General of the prison service in Finland. After setting out the severely deprived backgrounds of most of those in his prisons, he said that all the efforts of the prison system "should be analysed as to their ability to support, uphold and redress the self-esteem of the prisoner" (Lang, 1993, p.67), thinking that is very much in tune with the adult education approach. Yet, traces of what might be termed 'Lord Filkinism' may be found in many prison systems. For example, in Ireland there are differential payments to some of those in work or work-training as compared to those in other education (in clear breach of the European Prison Rules); and the Prison Service's guidelines for Open University selection in Irish prisons now state that a course applied for must lead to the attainment of "work-related skills".<sup>1</sup>

Finally, education in prison tends to be restricted when there is an over-emphasis on accredited as opposed to non-accredited courses and activities. The logic of the broad aims implicit in developing 'the whole person', the logic of Council of Europe and United Nations policy documents, the logic of research and experience in a range of countries is that learning opportunities in prison should be as wide and as open as possible. Very often, the things that 'work' for people in prison, that connect with them, that spark a flame and get them (in McVikar's words) "interested in other things" are those that are not easily measured or accredited. Often, breakthroughs come in areas such as the arts, as in the

<sup>1</sup> Irish Prison Service circular, 'IPS Guidelines for Prisoners applying for Open University', no date.

sculpture Jimmy Boyle described or the drama Martin Keane spoke of, or in film-making in Portlaoise Prison (O'Donnell and Cummins, 2014). They may come in social interaction, which is one of the big strengths of classes whereby students learn to cook together, or in health and well-being activity (say, yoga, or projects involving the Red-Cross) or in reflections on oneself, one's life or society (such as sociology, philosophy, etc.). Or what about the crucial intangible aspects of literacy learning described earlier – growth in self-confidence and overcoming stigma – how does one measure those?

Awareness of the dynamics of learning, especially among adults, underpinned policies which afforded 'parity of esteem' to accredited and non-accredited courses and activities in Irish prisons for many decades. It is of concern that accredited courses are now prioritised - and the pressure has come as much from the world of Education as from that of Justice. The educational effort in prisons, which used to be a bird flying on two wings, is now trying to fly on just one. That doesn't work very well.

### **A Vision for Education in Prison**

Such diminutions to education arise largely from ways of thinking that break with the best traditions in both adult education and progressive penal policy - two traditions that are remarkably complementary, since each is based on concepts of human rights and social inclusion. There are, of course, other barriers to participation in education, often quite literally physical ones. There can be a lack of adequate educational facilities, or reduced access to them because of segregation or overcrowding or prison staff shortages.

This paper has attempted to communicate the full potential education in prison can offer, by referring to research and the experiences of those held in prison, and by drawing on the perspectives one finds in the Council of Europe, the United Nations and elsewhere. Yet, one of the best statements as to what education in prison is about can be found in a document produced by the European Prison Education Association (EPEA). Under a heading 'What we stand for', it calls on us to look beyond narrow objectives:

The EPEA promotes a student-centred approach to prison education, one that is focused on the development of the whole person... this can be best achieved by providing a liberal education within a broader curriculum... the EPEA recognises the power of education to transform the lives of prisoner students by broadening their sense of possibility, expanding their sense of a larger humanity, liberating them from the confines of unexamined assumptions, and providing them with a language of critique and possibility... prison education can support the prisoner towards successful re-entry into society by cultivating a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation necessary for active citizenship. Importantly, we advocate that prison education should not be limited to the acquisition of work-related skills and the upgrading of qualifications but incorporate the opportunity for a significant change in understanding and worldview. (European Prison Education Association, 2007).

### **Conclusion: Implications for Policy and Practice**

Earlier, some of the various ways in which the education offered in prison may be limited or restricted were indicated. Rather than being available to all as a right, education may be regarded by authorities as a privilege 'targeted' at the few. Even when education is in theory provided to all who want it, its quality and orientation may fall very short of what is envisaged by bodies such as the Council of

Europe and the United Nations. Several curtailments of this kind were referred to: men and women in prison being perceived as unworthy of extensive genuine education; learning opportunities designed primarily “to address factors that contribute to offending”; a curriculum that is too restricted to training for work or other instrumental purposes; or education limited to a narrow range of accredited courses.

This concluding section will outline three key implications, for policy and practice, of adhering to an adult education approach to learning within prisons, as advocated by international bodies:

(1) Education must be seen as a right to which all in prison are entitled.

The education to which all in prison have a right should be aimed at “the full development of the human personality” (Munoz, 2009, p. 9), and the nature of that education should be aligned to adult education principles, purposes and practice. This is most likely to be achieved when the educational bodies offering learning opportunities within prisons are those that provide such adult education also in the wider community, as advocated in the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2006, 28.7)

(2) A wide range of educational opportunities and activities must be available.

The ways in which people become open to learning, develop interests or seek to nurture their talents are as varied as people themselves. The logic of this reality is that the education provision in prison should offer multiple opportunities. Thus, a Council of Europe Recommendation stipulates that “the range of learning opportunities for prisoners should be as wide as possible” (1990, p.8); and the European Prison Rules state that 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” (2006, 28.1). In similar vein, the United Nations sets out a very rich and multi-dimensional picture of what should be available to people held in custody. The aim of these approaches is to enable the development of “the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context” (Council of Europe, 1990, p.8), or “the full development of the human personality” (Munoz, 2009, p.9). Provision should not be restricted to objectives such as ‘reducing re-offending’, training for employment or other instrumental purposes, nor to what is easily measured through conventional accreditation.

(3) For education in prison to fully achieve its potential, penal policy must prioritise helping over punishment and be socially-inclusive, rather than reinforce the demonization of people held in prison.

The potential that education in prison offers can only be fully realised within prisons and prison systems that achieve a certain measure of decency, humanity and social inclusion in their conditions and in the way those held within them are perceived and treated. The extent to which this potential can be realised is also dependent on policies that seek to be helpful to all in prison and that allow a wide range of ‘normal’ activities, including (as well as specifically educational activities) those that enable people in prison to be connected to society at large. Principles such as ‘normalisation’, ‘openness’ and ‘the exercise of responsibility’ (sometimes called ‘self-administration’) underpin such better prison regimes. These principles have been developed and implemented, for example, in Denmark (Danish Prison and Probation Service, 1994) and in Council of Europe policy such as that relating to the management of long-term prisoners (Council of Europe, 2003).

People develop best when they feel included in a supportive community or society, and when they

can nurture what K. J. Lang calls "their stronger points" (Lang, 1993, p.66). On the other hand, when people are demonised, negatively stereotyped, treated as 'other' – as people in prison often are in the public sphere and within the institutions – their sense of self and their sense of their potential are diminished. The better the prison environment, the more scope there is for education to flourish. And the more holistic education can flourish within a prison, the more positive and humane the overall regime can be (see Wynne, 2001; Lorenz, 2002).

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