



Initial teacher training project for teachers and instructors in prison and offender education

Preliminary Project Report

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- those prisoners whose experiences are described here.



1 INTRODUCTION: LONCETT AIMS AND CURRENT INITIATIVES

The London Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (LONCETT) is one of eleven centres operating across the country, funded by the then Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) for three years. This is part of a national strategy to identify, develop and share best practice, provide models for improving the quality of teacher training and support teacher training providers. Led by the Institute of Education, University of London, LONCETT is a collaborative partnership across London.

LONCETT's objectives are to expand access and improve recruitment and induction to initial teacher training (ITT), increase emphasis upon specialist pedagogies in ITT and continuing professional development (CPD), improve specialist mentoring and workplace support and foster and sustain teacher-education communities across London.

LONCETT supports three research projects linked to curriculum development for teachers based in three contexts:

- Vocational skill teachers in further education and work-based learning;
- Teachers and tutors in prison and offender education; and
- Teachers and tutors in adult and community learning.

This working paper reports on research undertaken in the first year of the project into the needs of teachers and tutors in prison and offender education in London with reference to the new requirements for teacher training in the sector. In line with reforms set out in *Equipping Our Teachers for the Future* (DfES, 2004) new ITT qualifications and standards affect teachers and trainees across the lifelong learning sector. From September 2008 new teachers within the sector, including general further education (FE) and work-based learning (WBL), adult and community learning (ACL) and prison education, are required to attain Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status. New requirements and opportunities for CPD for individual teachers are included among key priorities in a workforce strategy for the sector (LLUK, 2007).



2 OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

This working paper is the first in a series of three papers which will explore pedagogic concerns of teachers within prisons and how resources may be developed to support their professional practice. Focusing on the needs of teachers employed within London prisons, it aims to take into account some of the geographical, socio-economic and institutional factors affecting the prison population in London.

There are 140 prisons in the UK. London has eight prisons, including one young offenders' institution, six male and one female prison. Education of offenders within prisons is currently provided by the Prison Service (HMPS), the Offender Learning and Skill Service (OLASS) and a number of private and voluntary agencies. Each prison has its own organisational structure and provision of service. Due to the separation and relative isolation of different prison environments, teachers employed in prisons have had few opportunities to come together within networks or to share and discuss practice. A further aspect of this separation is that education and training classes in prisons are taught and delivered by a combination of teachers from the lifelong learning sector and vocational instructors mainly employed by the Prison Service. These two main groups of teachers are employed under different conditions by different agencies, and according to anecdotal accounts, each has allegiance to rather different kinds of culture, tradition and ethos regarding learning, teaching and training.

Research into the nature and organisation of education within prisons has been minimal. There is a growing literature (McDonald, 2008) on the recent policy decisions aimed at transforming offender learning in the UK but little research has focused directly on processes of teaching and learning. As far as the project is aware, even less work has been carried out on the distinctive needs of those who teach in prisons.¹

Current training provision and practice across London prisons varies significantly. Due to differences in the organisational practices of the Prison Service and OLASS, implementation of reforms following *Equipping our Teachers for the Future* (DfES, 2004) is being applied on different time scales, albeit with a view to all professional practice eventually meeting current legislative requirements.

A comprehensive overview of the numbers of trained staff in prisons, of their qualifications and the range of subjects taught, has not as yet been undertaken. In broad terms it can be said that OLASS providers are in the process of training employed staff. The current pilot Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) provision which will be reported on in the second stage of this project, is one example of this. Prisons are themselves responding to the legislation according to a time-scale that is influenced by priorities as perceived by the Prison Service. This is influenced by a desire to maintain



educational provision whilst simultaneously releasing staff for training.

Until recently, most prison instructors (employed by HMPS) who deliver vocational training were not trained, although some have been trained as 'instructors' by HMPS training unit, and at least 20% of gym instructors were required to be trained under the previous Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) regulations. The remaining cohort of teachers, employed since 2006 under OLASS provision, are subject to the same regulations as 'mainstream' FE teachers.

Findings from interviews carried out for this project indicate that the main routes for teachers entering the prison education workforce are through voluntary work, through employment as prison officers with a responsibility for training in a workshop or PE, or following general teacher training on a Postgraduate Certificate in Education/Certificate in Education course. No training customised to the particular needs of those teaching in prisons is currently available. Despite the recognition that the teaching workforce needs to be appropriately qualified (SIU, 2004), areas of difference and commonality between the needs of teachers within a prison context and teachers in general FE colleges and other settings in the lifelong learning sector have not yet been thoroughly explored.

Some of the specific needs of prison educators have begun to be explored in this project which was set up in direct response to the nationally recognised need to ensure that teachers are better equipped to be effective practitioners in the range of learning contexts within the lifelong learning sector.

2.1 Project aims and key research questions

In its first year of research into the needs of teachers in London's prisons, the project focused on investigating possibilities for expanding access to initial teacher training (ITT), improving recruitment and induction of teachers, and increasing the emphasis upon specialist pedagogies appropriate to the prison context in both ITT and continuing professional development (CPD).

The research was led and carried out by the initial teacher training team at City and Islington College and a project manager from St Giles Trust, with support from the Department of Continuing and Professional Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. The project collaborated with OLASS North and East and OLASS West.

At the start of the project, seminar discussions organised by LONCETT confirmed the decision to focus on three main areas of concern identified by practitioners and managers, and to address the following questions in the research:

- How can the isolation of trainee teachers within prisons be reduced and replaced by a network of communities of practice? The term 'community of practice', now so frequently used that it seems to have entered common parlance among some education practitioners and teacher educators, was used by Lave and Wenger (1991) to refer to work practices and common assumptions shared among people working in the same setting. By extension, as in Wenger (1998), it can usefully also refer to the shared and developing practices of practitioners who are simultaneously members of multiple communities of practice. In this latter sense, it can suggest dynamic and interactive possibilities for sharing and developing practice within and across offender



institutions (e.g. through specialised CPD and networking activities) as an alternative to the isolation felt by many prison educators whose professional identity has hitherto been restricted within a single and confined work setting.

- Which pedagogic concerns are specific to prison education and to the teacher training associated with it? At the outset of the project it was evident that two major pedagogical concerns were so significant that they appear to determine the quality of learning and the learning environment in prison in fundamental ways. Existing literature (e.g. Uden, 2003; Bromley, 2006; Corston, 2007) highlights the fundamental issue that in prison the primary identity of those who participate in education or training is as an **offender** rather than as a **learner**. This conflictual definition affects many aspects of learning in prisons. The second major factor relates to the emotional load that learners bring to the classroom, which also impacts significantly on their learning.
- What effective strategies can be developed to address the concerns above through development of ITT and CPD materials and new forms of training? This practical aspect of the project was seen as being directly linked with and informed by the underpinning research activities.

2.2 London's prisons

The study was carried out in the context of London's eight prisons (out of a total of 140 nationally), which hold at least 10% (more than 7,000) of the country's prison population. London prisons share particular features that are not found in prisons in the rest of the country. Some significant features and facts specific to London's prisons include the following:

- 50% of the prisoners are not sentenced;
- 66% receive sentences of under a year;
- 28% are foreign nationals compared with 13% in the rest of the UK prisons;
- Significant numbers of prisoners do not have English as their first language; there are therefore high levels of unmet ESOL needs among prisoner learners;
- There are increasing numbers of 'lifers' and ISPP (Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection) whose 'educational' requirements are different;
- Average stay in London prisons is six weeks (in one remand prison in the study it is 28 days, in another, three months);
- Overcrowding (Wandsworth, for example, is among the 10 most overcrowded prisons in the UK with 150% occupancy in 2006); and
- There is a particularly high staff turnover in London prisons.²

The particularity of the London context needs to be seen in relation to the national picture. Research carried out by the Bromley Trust, and presented in their Bromley Briefings (2006, 2007), provides a regularly updated descriptive analysis of UK prisons at a national level against which the London prison environment and context needs to be understood.



Salient features of the national context include the following:

- England and Wales have the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe at 143 per 100,000 of the population;
- By 2004 two in three people (67%) leaving the overcrowded prison system have been re-convicted;
- 60% re-offend within two years;
- 22% of those held on remand before trial in 2003 were acquitted or not proceeded against;
- The number of women in prison has more than doubled in the last decade;
- 60% of the incarcerated population in London prisons is made up of remand prisoners; and
- The suicide rate for men in prison is five times greater than for men in the community: '... 20% of men and almost 40% of women entering custody say they have previously attempted suicide.' (Bromley, 2007:9).

The Bromley Briefings also highlight particular issues affecting certain groups within the overall prison population. Available data suggest that the emotional problems experienced by female and young offenders are significantly greater than those of the prison population as a whole. Thirty percent of young female prisoners claim to have been sexually abused and a high proportion of young men and women are parents already when arrested.

For female prisoners who are mothers the experience of being separated from children may have a significant impact on all aspects of their experience in prison, coupled with anxiety over what happens to their children while they are serving their sentence, since 'Just 5% of women prisoners' children remain in their own home once their mother has been sentenced.' (Bromley, 2007:16).

The Briefings also highlight a pattern of increasing instances of recorded mental health problems in prisons:

- Nationally 72% male and 70% of female sentenced prisoners suffer from two or more mental health disorders; and
- 7% male and 14% female sentenced prisoners have a psychotic disorder (14 and 23 times the level of the general population)³.

The prison population also scores highly in indices of social exclusion and deprivation. Indices of social exclusion and deprivation are all greater in the prison population than within the general population as evidenced by the facts that 27% of prisoners are likely to have been in care (compared to 2% nationally), 32% are likely to have been homeless (compared to 0.9% nationally), and they are more likely to use drugs (66% compared to 13%) and alcohol excessively (63% compared to 38%).



2.3 Prisons for women in London

One prison in London caters for women offenders. Corston (2007) discusses factors of women's imprisonment and emphasises both the unsuitability of imprisonment as a measure for dealing with their problems as well as the inadequacy of the prison system in responding to women's needs in custody.

Such assessments have considerable implications for the teachers of women in prisons. Current training available to teachers does not include any introduction to the specific barriers to learning that women face. This underscores the response made to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) prospectus by the North and East London OLASS quadrant, which argues the case that women need an extended and potentially different educational provision (OLASS North and East London, 2007).

2.4 Educational background of prisoners

The profile that learners in the prison population present further highlights some of the challenges faced by teachers. Evidence of significant and extensive educational need is indicated by the statistics shown in Table 1. Such figures suggest significantly low levels of self-esteem among prisoner learners, a factor which not only impairs learning potential but which also impacts on the 'emotional load' which a prisoner brings to an education class.

Table 1 Education background of prisoners

Characteristic	General population	Prison population
Regularly truanted from school	3%	30%
Excluded from school	2%	49% of male and 33% of female sentenced prisoners
No qualifications	15%	52% of male and 71% of women
Numeracy at or below level 1	23%	65%
Reading ability at or below level 1	21-23%	48%
Unemployed before imprisonment	5%	67%

(Bromley, 2007)



Research undertaken by the DfES Offender Learning and Skills Unit (2006) indicates that just under a third of the prison population is attending education classes at any one time.⁴ The government's Social Exclusion Unit (2002) suggests that prisoners who do not take part in education or training are three times more likely to be re-convicted.⁵

The particular features of London prisons together with the national statistics clearly indicate some of the profound difficulties involved in the delivery of qualifications and general education in prisons. The literature suggests that teaching staff within prisons and prisoner learners themselves face a concentration of barriers to learning unique to this particular environment.

2.5 Earlier studies on prison education

Although the literature that relates to the education of prisoners is not extensive, the literature that exists highlights some crucial issues. This project has been shaped and informed by a number of studies and policy documents that have been produced in the last decade (see McDonald, 2008 for a review). An outline of the complex recent history (still uncompleted) of the transfer of responsibility for education in prisons is summarised below.

Responsibility for prison education was transferred to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2001 and then subsequently transferred yet again to the LSC in 2006; the latter amidst concern on the part of the Education and Skills Committee about the lack of an 'overarching strategy'. A number of policy documents (SIOU, 2004; DfES, 2006; OLASS, 2007) focus on the need to create continuity in education and training amidst conditions of constant change and overcrowding in prisons, and confirm practitioners' understanding that key procedural mechanisms for creating a more stable educational environment in prisons are initial assessment procedures and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), both of which need to follow the prisoner through the system. Key policy documents and policy reviews (e.g. *DfES Improving Offenders' Learning and Skills Delivery Plan*, 2003; Uden, 2004; ALI/QIA, 2007) emphasise the huge range of needs amongst the least qualified and skilled of those in custody.

From an organisational perspective, education and training in prisons is highly complex. This is identified in the report on the implementation of OLASS, a year after it was set up. The report describes some positive aspects of recent changes such as more targeted provision, funding increases leading to additional teaching hours, some provision becoming more 'offender-led', and greater communication and partnership working, e.g. links with employers (Halsey et al., 2006). However, it also suggests that new forms of multi-agency collaboration have suffered through lack of clarity of roles, the overlapping nature of responsibilities and the clash of different cultures and policy agendas arising from differing perspectives.

Historically, there have been few links between prison education and training and 'mainstream' FE. Uden (2004) recommends in general a closer policy alignment with the broader widening participation policy agenda. The LSC proposal for bringing offender learning into line with the post-16 sector envisages a strategy which would seek to ensure that 'teaching and learning are much improved to a standard that understands the context and [a] learner profile [which is] more tailored to individual needs' (LSC, 2007:27).



While prison education is broadly recognised as being significantly different from mainstream teaching and learning, there is much variation within prison education itself, and several studies emphasise how different prisons can create very different environments for learning. Depending upon a complex array of factors, the culture and atmosphere in different prisons and the attitudes of prison officers can produce very different conditions for learning. Braggins' study tellingly reveals how both access to and quality of provision can vary significantly between prisons, with for example, a prisoner commenting on one prison: 'Books are harder to get in here than drugs' (Braggins, 2003:33). Another prisoner is quoted as saying of his prison: 'Prison is a poor man's college. This is the worst gaol, but if you were in HMP X or HMP Y you could turn your life around' (Braggins, 2003:46).

Braggins (2003:46) also highlights the disadvantageous effect of the geographical separation of formal learning within the prison context, and suggests that the whole prison context should be seen as a site for learning, since 'to focus purely on education within the classroom, as if in a vacuum away from the rest of the prison, would be to miss much of the learning which takes place throughout the prison'.

The Open University has long experience of providing higher education in prisons. Its *Open teaching toolkit, Supporting students in Prison* (2000) provides a valuable model for staff induction and also gives revealing insights into how a particular prison environment and culture can do much to make learning either a positive and rewarding experience or a negative and dispiriting one.

It is against this shifting and complex background of isolation from the mainstream world of FE and training, multi-agency work, shifting priorities and fragmentation both of the education training provision itself and the prisoner's own learning that this exploratory study into the needs of teachers and new teachers in prisons has been undertaken.

¹LLU+ (of London South Bank University) has recently provided training for prison educators, and undertaken research on ILP and Induction as part of its ESF funded project 'Capacity Building and Quality Improvement in Offender Learning' (completed July 2008).

²This London-specific information was gathered from discussions with prison educators and managers, and from an ESF-funded project, 'Exodus - Ex-offenders discharged under supervision', 2006-7.

³Some recent research (Guardian Society 25/6/08) indicates that twice as many women as men offenders have neurotic disorders, but half or less have psychotic disorders. The figures may vary but the underlying issues and problems are persistent and significant. [Reference provided by OLASS manager]

⁴An exception to this national average is the single women's prison in London which has around 90%+ of its prisoners in 'education'. [OLASS Manager interview]

⁵While it can be suggested that this convincingly highlights the importance and significance of education within prisons, it is evident from interviews with prison education managers that many factors affect educational participation and outcomes in complex ways. For example, in one London prison industry workshops offer shower and telephone facilities that the education department cannot offer, and this acts as a major incentive in the selection of activities. Also, in all prisons, most 'labour' attracts a higher rate of pay than education, and 'workers' are entitled to two sessions a week of discrete education paid at the same rate as their work. In addition, most workshops now embed or at least contextualise Skills for Life (SfL) in their delivery, and participants in 'embedded' SfL are not always counted as 'education learners' because of the 'double counting' avoidance. Furthermore, the physical restrictions of the building often prevent education departments from enrolling more learners. Enrolling new learners can sometimes only be achieved at the expense of progression for existing learners – which is 'a real dilemma' for prison education managers.



3 METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

3.1 Constraints

The research design had to take into account a number of constraints, including:

- access to sites where prison education and training takes place is restricted;
- prisons generally and different categories of prisons have different systems for organising and managing education and training provision;
- conditions of service vary for different categories of teachers, trainers and instructors within and across different prisons; and
- prison educators have extremely variable experience, training and qualifications, and there is great variability in the range of subjects taught in different prisons.

It was recognised that the research would need to define and explore a very specific context for learning, one in which learner identity itself was questioned i.e. is a prisoner-learner primarily an offender or a learner? Also relevant is that this is a context in which at least three separate categories of teachers/instructors are identifiable. Staff are employed under different conditions and quality is assured by different agencies:

- College staff (quality is monitored through college evaluation procedures);
- Voluntary sector (there is evidence of innovative practice, but this is not much monitored); and
- Prison Service (teaching staff are subject to different conditions and management structure).

It was acknowledged that it was not necessarily a straightforward matter to get agreements and permissions for the research. This is due to sensitivities relating to security and the overall high media profile of issues relating to prisons, the different perceptions of prison managers, teaching staff and prison officers about prison education, and the very different conditions of teaching staff – depending whether they were ‘in-scope’ (employed and managed through OLASS), or ‘out-scope’ (employed by the Prison Service).

The particularity of the London context was recognised as a key factor affecting prison education in the capital’s prisons. Practitioners within the project team had a clear understanding that prison education in London is harder to manage, more constrained, less innovative than elsewhere, in particular due to the high level of ‘churn’ (movement of



prisoners) and the unpredictability of their length of stay in any one prison.

The potential value of a quantitative survey to investigate the numbers of teaching staff across London prisons, their qualifications, and the range and levels of subjects taught, was considered. However, the complexity of the context precluded a quantitative approach at this early stage of the project, and it was recognised that the more urgent need, and indeed the main focus of the first stage of the project, was to concentrate on curriculum development within the new ITT framework. The priority was to undertake research which would underpin the key objectives of the project: developing and piloting new PTLLS and CPD modules; and creating new curricular elements and adapting existing ones, so as to train new teachers and better meet existing prison teachers' professional development needs, and equip them to deal more effectively with the specific challenges of teaching in this very demanding context.

3.2 The participants and process

Qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with teachers and managers in four London prisons and a case study of one other London prison were undertaken in the initial stage of the project. Of these five prisons, one was a women's prison, and the others were all Category B, male, local prisons¹.

Each prison was approached as a particular pedagogic community with its own organisational and procedural features. The varying features, which make each prison a unique learning environment, include:

- the overall approach to learning and education (which is crucially influenced by the vision of the prison governor, who can 'make or break' any initiative, development or strategy²);
- the organisation of access to education;
- the purpose of the custody (e.g. remand as opposed to sentenced);
- levels of security (closed or open prisons);
- the average length of sentence; and
- the gender of those in custody.

In addition, the literature and anecdotal accounts suggest that the culture of, and attitudes to learning in different prisons can vary significantly both according to the category of the prison and to local conditions and history. A qualitative approach to the collation of data enabled the wide range of variables across different prisons to be taken into account.

As a means of exploring the validity of the assumptions with which the project started out, initial meetings were held with representatives of the management of education from several prisons (including both male prisons and a female prison but not a young offenders' institution). These meetings were attended by HMP and OLASS managers from five prisons with representation from another prison by a member of the teaching staff. The issues identified were then discussed and refined in relation to findings from the



literature. Based on these discussions, the team drew up a framework of questions for use in semi-structured interviews with teachers. The interviews were carried out mainly face-to-face with teachers in prisons by three members of the research team.

The three researchers involved in the interview process frequently had a prior link to the people they interviewed. This ranged from being part of a voluntary provider of education to having trained some of the teachers in earlier ITT courses. The researchers noted responses to the interview questions by hand and the notes were then transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. Interviews were therefore not transcribed verbatim, but a very close rendering of the interviewees' words was produced, and significant quotations were noted. The fact that interviewers and interviewees shared knowledge and understanding of the context facilitated the process of data collection.

The process of data collection was cumulative, and opportunities for extending the range of interviewees were taken when appropriate (e.g. one prisoner was interviewed when the opportunity arose.)

Evidence presented in this study draws on a number of sources, including:

- An ethnographic case study based on one Category B male local prison (see Appendix 1);
- Semi-structured interviews with 13 teachers from a cross-section of teaching staff in four prisons, including:
 - teachers in the education departments funded through the LSC under the auspices of OLASS linked to FE colleges, i.e. 'in-scope' provision
 - instructors in vocational areas ('out-scope' provision) who are employed by the prison and who frequently deliver vocational workshops in which the prisoners are employed (a form of work-based learning)
 - instructors employed by the prison to teach subjects that are 'out-scope' such as leisure activities, gym and PE
 - a voluntary tutor employed by a charitable trust
 - a peer tutor;
- Skills for Life (SfL) subject specialists employed by OLASS who often work alongside, or parallel to, the vocational instructors in the workshops (where language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills are embedded within vocational instruction and training activities);
- Heads of Learning and Skills managers who are employed by HMPS and who oversee all education provision, especially vocational workshops and physical education;
- Education managers who are employed by OLASS providers and who have responsibility for SfL and all 'in-scope' provision sometimes including some vocational provision as well;
- A Governor responsible for vocational instructors;
- A prison officer;



- A gym principal officer; and
- A prisoner.

3.3 Data analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews was analysed using a procedure of thematic analysis that drew on the work of Cooper and McIntyre (1993) and their seven-stage iterative process of categorisation. This analysis led to the identification of a number of main themes. For the most part, these themes were in accord with key issues emerging from the literature review of prison education and the findings from the case study. Given the small size of the initial sample, it is recognised that the potential for generating theories based on these data is limited.

¹See Appendix 1, *Background and Context* for details on prison categories

²The frequent change of prison governor makes continuity of implementation difficult and patchy.' [quotation from Head of OLASS at one prison]



4 FINDINGS

4.1 Emerging themes

Themes which emerged from the initial thematic analysis were grouped under a set of headings that included organisational, cultural and pedagogical factors. This followed a typology suggested by Fuller and Unwin (2002) in their study of restricted and expansive learning environments in a school-based teacher training/professional development setting. Presenting the themes in this way allowed their relative importance to be examined and gauged as factors which influence the context of prison education, the training needs of staff, and the possibilities for creating a positive learning environment within which prisoners can learn and progress. These factors are listed below.

Organisational factors

- Rigid, hierarchical structure within which education often has a low priority;
- Management structure and lines of responsibility dominated and determined by security priorities;
- Security routines and procedures controlling prisoners' availability and movement, and taking precedence over their commitments as learners;
- Geographical separation of education from the rest of the prison;
- Overcrowding and 'churn' affecting availability and ability of prisoner-learners to attend classes;
- In some cases, strong divisions between 'out-scope' and 'in-scope': education/training organised by the Prison Service and by OLASS (mostly FE);
- Managers hold responsibility for a wide curriculum area, often much wider than in FE colleges;
- Staff are employed on a range of contracts and conditions;
- Recruitment of teachers – lack of professional status and clear routes into employment for prison educators;
- Very variable availability of initial assessment data and ILPs as essential tools for tracking progress and establishing continuity in learning; and
- The pivotal role of the prison governor in determining the extent to which a custodial setting can be managed to create positive conditions for learning.



Cultural factors

- Confined, time-bound, physical environment – entirely different from other environments and making for an unsettled learning environment marked by disruption and discontinuity;
- Different cultures and attitudes towards education and learning in different custodial settings, some of them distinctly negative;
- Conflict between the prisoner-learner's relatively fragile identity as learner and the dominant, legally imposed status as offender;
- Significant impact of external circumstances on prisoners' lives and feelings; and
- High levels of 'emotional load' affecting dynamics of learning and teaching.

Pedagogical factors

- Discontinuity in individual learning;
- Fluctuating attendance and composition of learning groups ('unsettled learning environment');
- Relatively fragile identity as learner (low self-esteem, lack of confidence, poor basic skills);
- Motivation of learners – generally low but with significant exceptions;
- Motivation of teachers – often positively influenced by rewards of helping prisoners overcome barriers to learning;
- Making teaching, materials and content relevant: e.g. employability, linking to prisoners' current situation and aspirations, embedding LLN and functional skills;
- Dealing with challenging students and situations;
- Dealing with 'emotional load' – prisoners' practical and emotional support needs;
- Attributes of experienced prison educators: flexibility, inventiveness, commitment, confidence;
- Teachers' training needs and their attitudes towards pedagogical skills, professional experience, and qualifications;
- Peer tutoring as a key strategy in some areas of work; and
- Differentiation – learning groups characterised by extremely wide range of individual needs.

It is envisaged that as the 'iterative process' of data analysis proceeds, the categories will be added to as new themes emerge, and also that some may collapse as more precise or comprehensive categories emerge. The categories and findings will also be used to inform the evaluation of the forthcoming pilot PTLLS training courses for OLASS teachers



and for Prison Service teachers in the next phase of the research project. Below are salient themes that emerged from the analysis to date.

4.1.1 Strategies for teachers to cope with the 'emotional load' of learners

One of the factors that differentiates prison education from the teaching and learning that takes place in mainstream FE and other learning and skills settings is the emotional state of the prisoner as a learner. The nature of the 'emotional labour' involved in managing offenders and their learning in settings which can be highly emotionally charged can usefully be explored and analysed by referring to Hochschild's original work in this area (1983), and to more recent studies examining 'emotional labour' in health care settings (Smith, 1999; Hunter and Smith, 2007). It is apparent from the initial research that this factor is of key importance in prison learning contexts.

Women offenders in particular are affected by the separation from their families and children; they are often uncertain about who is caring for their children and are faced with future uncertainty as to the realistic opportunities of being reunited with them on release. Findings from the interviews suggest that external circumstances weigh heavily on all prisoners' feelings and emotional state.

Overwhelmingly, all the teachers interviewed acknowledged the emotional load which prisoners present. All agreed that prisoners had emotional needs unique to this environment; no one questioned the basic premise. For example one interviewee commented:

'I have to deal with some heavy emotional issues that my students present.'

As part of their employment nine out of 13 teachers viewed dealing with the emotional load and being aware of prisoners' emotional issues as integral to their role as teachers:

'I try to be aware of the students' state of mind...'

'You have to be sympathetic if students are upset.'

Four teachers said they were prepared to offer individual support and guidance and if necessary make referrals or interventions on behalf of the prisoner to improve their situation:

'You need to give them space and perhaps discreetly ask them if they want to speak to somebody or need to be referred. I mention it to the manager if a student seems to be very upset.'

'I direct students to the right person for that kind of support. I am told about ACTT form students who may be self-harming and need to be carefully monitored.'

(ACCT = Assessment, Care in Custody and Team Work)

Four teachers emphasised the importance of understanding the limits of support and the boundaries of their role in relation to emotional issues:

'I am aware of the boundaries of my role and that I must not become too familiar with students.'



Three of the prison teachers interviewed mentioned the impact upon themselves of having to deal with the 'emotional load' learners can often carry with them in a learning situation. Clearly the teachers benefited from being able to talk to other colleagues about what they had experienced, but one teacher felt that it would be preferable to have this instituted on a more formal basis:

'Sometimes it is difficult not to 'take it home'. Ideally there would be a regular opportunity to off-load within your team and to your manager... At the moment, most debriefing is done on an informal basis with colleagues.'

Two instructors interviewed, who had both previously worked as prison officers, though acknowledging the 'emotional load', preferred not to get involved with prisoners on that level:

'I don't get involved, just help with the practicalities.'

'I'm used to it. A sense of humour helps.'

All the teachers interviewed acknowledged the significance of the emotional load that a prisoner may carry, most commented on contributing factors such as the stress of overcrowding and isolation from family and friends, and the majority saw dealing with these issues as a fundamental part of their job. However, prison teachers do not receive any specific training or support in this area apart from that which they receive informally from their colleagues and managers. It may be that lessons could be drawn from debates about the inclusion of emotion management awareness in the training of Nurses and Care Workers and the development of the 'emotionally intelligent practitioner'.

4.1.2 Motivation of learners

Teachers regarded the motivation of the learners as an issue central to their teaching. Factors affecting individual learners' motivation are highly complex and variable; motivation can fluctuate significantly depending on circumstances, such as the type of prison and the stage at which the prisoner is (remand, pre-hearing, awaiting sentence, sentenced, pre-release), as well as on earlier experiences of education and the expectations raised by sitting in a classroom. One manager commented that concentration span can be very limited and that some prisoners may find the fact of being confined in a small space with others generally unnerving, and may fear being the target of bullying and victimisation by other learners in the group. In addition, in many male prisons, the packed breakfast will have been eaten the previous evening and the learner may have to spend three hours in a classroom (with a short break) on an empty stomach.

Frequently education may appear attractive to prisoners quite simply because the alternative to attending an education class is to remain locked in the cell, or because it presents one of the few opportunities for a prisoner to interact with non-uniformed staff. A prisoner, interviewed about his motivation for attending education courses, highlighted the lack of any alternative activities in this environment and deemed even attending a course below his level of skills and abilities as preferable to not participating at all.

'At first I was given a job in the paint shop in the prison, which was mundane and



repetitive work. The only way I could get out was to apply for a low level course in the education department.'

The interviews revealed that teachers employ many different means to keep the learners interested in attending classes. One way of raising learners' motivation that several teachers identified was to relate learning to the 'real world' by making the subject relevant to prisoners' experience and providing a qualification or skill that would be useful to them on release. Teachers recounted positive feedback from prisoners about the 'real skills' they were developing, such as:

'When I get out of here I'm going to re-tile the bathroom'.

Visual and performing arts projects were also highly valued for the sense of achievement they provided for both teachers and learners.

Several teachers stressed the importance of making learning a positive and pleasurable experience, building rapport with learners and especially treating prisoners with respect as being prime motivating factors when teaching in this environment:

'...by offering them a space in which they are treated with respect.'

'Having class debates and a range of activities to make the learning fun.'

Another strategy that three teachers emphasised was the importance of providing one-to-one support and encouragement to keep learners motivated:

'Listening to their worries about studying and offering constructive support to ensure they complete assignments.'

4.1.3 Strategies for dealing with learners' challenging behaviour

Although behaviour management was an issue for the prison teachers, all the experienced teachers interviewed appeared confident in dealing with challenging behaviour from their learners. As an effective method of establishing acceptable behaviour, some teachers mentioned the use of ground rules with learners or a group contract with which to enforce rules among themselves when necessary. Such techniques are commonly used in mainstream FE teaching; however, their use in this particular environment may suggest a revealing point of reference for comparing and contrasting teaching and learning in different settings: custodial and mainstream.

Three teachers mentioned having to exclude learners from classes due to their misbehaviour, but this was a last resort that did not need to be employed very often.

'...I find very few issues of behaviour management occur in class, possibly due to the fact that as this is a prison, many prisoners are aware of the limitations but also because I am very clear about what I will find acceptable. This is always done in a positive and an upbeat manner where praise and encouragement take precedence over criticism.'



4.1.4 Rewards of being a prison teacher

Notwithstanding the challenges and difficulties faced by being a teacher within a prison environment, all of the interviewed teachers found aspects of their roles particularly satisfying. This sense of satisfaction usually related to helping learners overcome barriers to their learning that in many cases were due to their having had poor previous experience of education at school. Seeing their learners develop skills, progress through different stages, often when they did not expect to, and gain in self-confidence, was especially rewarding:

'Offering prisoners the opportunity to step outside of their usual role of 'prisoner' and giving them a chance to develop their skills that may not have previously been used or known.'

'It is great when you keep the learners interested and motivated and see them leave the classroom with a smile.'

Also important was to be able to recognise these barriers and have strategies to help learners surmount them:

'One of the most satisfying parts of the job is being able to recognise the students' barriers to learning and knowing how to help them overcome these barriers.'

'They always then ask about literacy or language barriers with written work and their struggles with these and I say we will overcome it if they come to the course with the right attitude and are prepared to put in effort.'

4.2 Training needs of teachers

4.2.1 As perceived by prison teachers

From the interviews with the prison teachers it was clear that most of them would have appreciated more specific training when they first began teaching in how to cope (a) with the particular demands of teaching within a prison environment, and (b) with helping learners to acquire particular skills.

Context-specific demands included dealing with the unpredictability of the timing of classes (often due to security incidents that delay or prevent the unlocking of prisoners to attend classes), and the need for skills and awareness to deal with learners' emotional support needs which can affect their ability to learn. Challenges identified by some of the teachers included:

'Working in an oppressive environment...within a strong hierarchical structure where decisions can get made without consultation with relevant parties, resulting in us being told what we are to do.'

'Dealing with the learners can sometimes be very challenging. The students sometimes lack motivation because they have personal issues that prevent them focusing on the tasks at hand.'

Most of the teachers interviewed lacked training in teaching functional skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT and other 'essential' or 'key' skills) and 'soft' skills such as employability and



skills for working with others. Only four of the 13 teachers interviewed had received training in delivering functional skills, while only two had had training in how to teach 'soft' skills.

4.2.2 Training needs as perceived by managers

Attitude towards training

In general, the qualifications and experience of staff who deliver the wide range of prison education and training provision are varied and not always consistent with their roles. Interviews with managers revealed that teacher training in prisons is inconsistently accessible as a result of varying degrees of access to training offered by OLASS or other training providers. In addition, some staff are reluctant to undertake training as teachers since they have traditionally perceived their role more as workplace managers than as teachers. This applies mainly to those involved in the vocational workshops; however, such attitudes appear to be gradually changing since vocational skills are now accredited and recognised within the qualifications framework. A highly valued recent development is the Open College Network, London Region (OCNLR) Skillstrain, which is supported by the LSC and National Offender Management Service (NOMS), and provides for prison officers and instructors to be trained as trainers and/or assessors.

Differentiation and the use of ILPs

Most groups in prison have a wider range of ability than is common in mainstream FE classes. This raises the question of how staff can be trained to differentiate between learners and meet their needs. Braggins (2002) noted that only one third of prison managers receive prisoners' records following transfer. This remains an issue and was focused on by some managers in their comments on the use and value of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). Staff have ILPs in place but they are not always used meaningfully. As one Education Manager expressed it:

'If teachers could be convinced of the usefulness of ILPs then the learner could take ownership of them to drive their learning forward in collaboration with their teachers in a meaningful way'.

To be effective the system requires that the ILP meaningfully identifies current learning needs and priorities and can then accompany the learner if s/he moves to a different prison or is released on probation. In some cases the recent use of the Quantum system allows data to be transferred electronically whereas earlier experience showed that transfer of information concerning the learner journey was often severely delayed. (Staff training in the production and use of ILPs has recently in part been provided by LLU+ (of London South Bank University) under their project 'Capacity Building and Quality Improvement in Offender Learning'.)

Skills for Life pedagogy

Whereas SfL specialist teachers in general hold adult literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) qualifications, many generic teachers do not have the appropriate qualifications to support learners in these areas. In some prison workshops, LLN skills are embedded in vocational training by specialist tutors. All managers said that vocational staff had until recently received no pedagogical training



and the majority were still untrained. Provision of specialist training in LLN would raise the possibility of offering a more holistic approach to teaching and learning across different areas of prison education.

One manager mentioned teaching styles as an area for development saying that, on occasion, class activities were worksheet-led and offered little variety in teaching and learning methods to the learner. Development of cross-curricular project work would in their view make the teaching more relevant from the point of view of the learners.

Dealing with fragmentation of the learning experience

Three education managers identified the need for their staff to be able to prepare session plans that can stand alone as well as being part of a series. This addresses an aspect of the problem of the frequent interruptions to prisoners' education caused by the unpredictability of most prisoners' length of stay in any one prison and by the need to manage the legal process of preparing for and attendance in court, as well as preparation for release or transfer.

Half the managers referred to the need for staff to be able to draw boundaries and to carry the emotional load in the classroom. Classroom management was not identified as a need because disruption tended to be more 'subversive than overt' in the form of bullying.

They also reported that training in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) would be useful both at the outset and for progression purposes.

The findings thus reveal that although many issues could be addressed through resolution of organisational aspects of the provision there is much that could be improved through specific and specialist inputs into teacher training.



5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS AND YEAR TWO

The study has revealed a complex web of organisational, training and personal issues that does not lend itself easily to any one method of analysis nor any single way of developing strategies for supporting the professional development of teachers in prisons.

Future work of the project will include an exploration of strategies to address the concerns and issues identified here through development of ITT materials and innovative training paths. The new ITT framework presents the opportunity not only to develop resources for use in the PTLLS qualification but also to develop an option/CPD module for the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) qualification. Training could also be developed to support teachers in dealing with the emotional load of working with adults in custody. A pilot PTLLS course developed by LONCETT is being delivered from April 2008. This will focus on the production of training resources that reflect the context of the prison environment.

ITT contextualised to prison education offers the opportunity for experienced teachers in prisons to develop skills and expertise as mentors. Specific training for mentors in prisons could be developed in addition to that already envisaged by FE colleges and, by extension, OLASS. Further, there is a need to develop both the personal literacy and numeracy skills of generic teachers and resources for supporting prison instructional officers who deliver vocational training in workshops.

Finally, the LONCETT project offers the opportunity to establish a communicative prison education network in London. For those working in prison education a network would provide a route through which their specific concerns can be voiced and addressed and that will in the long term contribute to alleviating the isolation and low profile that has been a feature of this challenging but valuable work.

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6 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CPD	Continuing professional development
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills
DTLLS	Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector
FENTO	Further Education National Training Organisation
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
HMPS	Her Majesty's Prison Service
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ITT	Initial teacher training
LLN	Language, literacy & numeracy (cf. SfL)
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
OCNLR	Open College Network, London Region
OLASS	Offender Learning and Skills Service
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PTLLS	Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency
QTLS	Qualified Teacher Status Learning & Skills
SfL	Skills for Life (National strategy for literacy, language (ESOL) & numeracy)
SIU	Social Inclusion & Offenders Unit



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8 APPENDIX 1 - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF FACTORS IMPACTING ON PRISONER LEARNING IN A LARGE LOCAL CATEGORY B ADULT MALE PRISON

Maria McNicholl

This ethnographic study was completed for the Excellence Module as part of the Masters in Teaching in the Post-Compulsory Sector at the Institute of Education, University of London. The tutors were Tony Nasta and Norman Lucas.

The report is presented in its entirety here as it was originally submitted. The work belongs to Maria McNicholl and no editing has been undertaken.



8.1 Introduction

"In several respects, the prison must be an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus; it must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude to work, his every day conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind; the prison much more than school, the workshop or the army... is omni-disciplinary."
(Foucault 1977:235)

Prisons, prisoners, crime and punishment make headlines on a daily basis, the prison population is increasing at an alarming rate, overcrowding is putting immense pressure on services and more prisoners are self-harming and committing suicide. As a prison teacher I valued the opportunity to examine directly how these alarming headlines affected prisoners' education. Since July 2007 I have been involved in a project called LONCETT (London Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training), researching and developing the needs of prison teachers. Although the focus of the project is on prison teachers it became apparent that, while researching this area, assumptions were being made about prisoner learning; thus an examination of factors affecting prisoner learning seemed a logical place to start a piece of research about prison teachers' development as the two are so closely linked. I also intend this piece of action research to contribute to a larger dissertation related to the LONCETT project and hope that it will form the foundation or springboard to a larger piece of work relating to prison teachers' development. My overall aim was to record if prisoners were accessing learning opportunities and if not why not, this was partly in response to the statistic that only one third of the prison population access education at any one time (Bromley Briefings 2006:33). I was also interested to explore where and what prisoners were learning and who was teaching them, as I knew that much informal learning takes place outside "official classes" provided by education contractors, and that prisoner learning is a highly complex matter. My interest therefore was not just in the education staff but anyone who taught in the prison, officers, chaplains, drug and alcohol counsellors and peer teachers (prisoners) as they all contribute to prisoner learning.

I chose to use an ethnographic approach to research this subject, which was championed by Goffman in the 1960s, like him I was an "insider" in a total institution and I knew that this gave me unique access. I kept a diary as I completed my every day work in the prison, recording any activity that related to prisoner learning, including conversations and meetings. I have acknowledged the limitations of ethnographic research, the ethical issues and the advantages and disadvantages of being an "insider", for example objectivity could be compromised (Denscombe 2005:93), being known in one role and conducting research could be seen as ethically compromising and undermining people's trust. I therefore consulted the BERA (British Educational Research Association) guidelines and in accordance with them always explained what I was doing and sought official permission from the prison, however I do work there so staff were open and forthcoming in a way they would not have been with a stranger. I also recognise that my research is only a limited snapshot of a particular place and time and so applying any generalised findings is problematic. To increase the level of objectivity of my research I used texts and documents that revealed the situation in our prisons today. Each prison is different depending on location, type, and governance, however I hope I have demonstrated that some characteristics are universal.



Exploring a theoretical base for my research initially took me outside traditional, educational literature to specific prison and institutional based theorists such as Foucault and Goffman. Their writing helped me comprehend how prisons developed and what a complex environment they are. Foucault, especially, showed me that education in prison has always been sited at the centre of rehabilitation and is still quoted as a key purpose in a prisoner's sentence plan by the prison service today, therefore theories relating to prisoner education would have to embrace this wider notion of learning and the influence of purpose and the wider community. Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach reflected this broad notion of learning in a prison environment and his followers Leont'ev and Engestrom with their Activity and Expansive learning theories further embraced what learning looked like in a total institution. Exploration of another strand of Vygotsky's original theories, an anthropological approach, developed by Lave and Wenger again gave context and meaning to learning in a prison environment. Although these theorists were exploring learning in the workplace their ideas could be transferred to a prison setting, Lave and Wenger's theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation, for instance, is particularly relevant to a prisoner's journey from "Newcomer" to "Old Timer" during his/her sentence. Likewise Engestrom's Activity Systems reflect the complexity and multi-faceted influences on how prisoners learn. I also felt that these two theoretical strands emerging from Vygotsky's ideas gave context to my research questions and a framework through which to explore them:

- Who is learning in a prison?
- Why do prisoners learn?
- Who is teaching them?
- What are they learning?
- How do they learn?

My research was carried out from October 07 and initially I planned to write an observational diary over a period of 2 months recording any incidents, activities and conversations that impacted on prisoner learning, however once I began recording I couldn't stop, it seemed as though the very act of observing and recording revealed more and more layers of prison life. This phenomenon also occurred when reading documents and texts relating to prison education, new information was revealed almost daily in news bulletins, prison related websites, officer periodicals and prisoner newspapers. My issue became not "Where to start" but "Where to stop"! My research base was a large local category B male prison in a metropolitan area. This prison is affected by all the current pressures on services and resources: overcrowding, understaffing, budget cuts, high occurrence of mental health issue, drug and alcohol addiction, poor literacy and negative experience of formal education among prisoners, coupled with the urgency to implement new government sentencing criteria. All these issues have an impact on prisoner learning. However not all my research resulted in negative conclusions I also discovered examples of good practice, innovation, motivation and extraordinary commitment to learning from staff and prisoners in the face of huge obstacles.



8.2 Background and Context

"This whole offending cohort is disproportionately composed of the poor and the poorly educated. It is disproportionately black. Very large numbers suffer from mental and physical illness and from drug or alcohol dependency." (Uden, 2003:1)

Before exploring the theoretical basis of my research, my methodology or my findings, I think it is appropriate to provide a picture of the prison environment. My research was conducted in a local prison; this does not mean that the prison serves the local community but the local courts, which in a metropolitan area could be any court in the city. The prison was a category B type prison: this means it houses all types of offenders except those who have committed extremely serious offences, however serious offenders could be transferred to a category B prison when they have served some time in a Category A establishment, to put it bluntly a category B prison would house any offender from a shop lifter to a murderer. The following information was captured in 2006 & 2007 from an ESF (European Social Fund) project called Exodus (Ex-offenders discharged under supervision), which provided resettlement services to prisoners being released into London. Although the information relates to London prisoners, it is transferable to prisoners in prisons in metropolitan areas and therefore relevant to my research. All the information was recorded on the Exodus Website (see references).

"80% of London prisoners are released from prisons outside London."

"The average stay in a London prison is 6 weeks."

These statistics provide an impression of the constant movement of prisoners around the country and their isolation from their families and communities, which would impact negatively on any continuity in educational terms.

"50% of London prisoners are not sentenced."

"66% of London prisoners are sentenced to under 1 year"

Prisoners who haven't been sentenced (half the London prison population) are often unable to access educational courses or services because their stay in any prison is so precarious due to court appearances and transfers to another prison from court, likewise those serving under one year face an unpredictable stay, they could be released early on HDC (Home Detention Curfew) or ELC (End of Custodial Licence), the Government's new early release scheme.

"28% of London prisoners are foreign nationals"

"1 in 3 London prisoners were not in settled accommodation prior to custody"

These two facts provide an indication of the requirements of the prisoners, for instance, if nearly a third of prisoners are foreign nationals this puts enormous strain on language support services and ESOL provision. The second figure indicates that a high proportion of prisoners are not entering prison from a settled environment and are likely to have many other problems associated with homelessness such as isolation, drug and alcohol addiction and mental health issues.

The Bromley Briefings is produced each year by the Prison Reform Trust and provides



credible research findings on prisons and prisoners in England today. The following information provides data on the level of self-harm and mental health issues suffered by many prisoners.

"The suicide rate for men in prison is five times greater than that for men in the community....20% of men and almost 40% of women entering custody say they have previously attempted suicide." (2007:9).

"72% of male and 70% of female sentenced prisoners suffer from two or more mental health problems" (2007:27)

All these factors will have a huge influence on how prisoners learn and on who teaches them coupled with the fact that many prisoners have had, either a negative experience of formal education, or little previous experience of education at all, as over half of all male prisoners have been excluded from school (2007:37). Added to this is the low self-esteem many prisoners feel in relation to learning and their own abilities.

"Half of all prisoners do not have the skills required by 96% of jobs and only one in five are able to complete a job application form." (2007:37)

The characteristics associated with social exclusion and deprivation are all greater within the prison population than the general population, for example prisoners are more likely to have been in care (27% compared to 2%), they are more likely to be homeless (32% compared to 0.9%) and they are more likely to use drugs (66% compared to 13%) and alcohol excessively (63% compared to 38%) (2007:35).

Finally I would like to highlight the pressure on resources due to overcrowding,

"The average number of people held two to a cell certified for one in 2006/07 was 17,974, up from 9,498 in 1996/7. The number held three to a cell designed for two was 1,113." (2007:7)

Yet the Government continues to implement budget cuts to these services,

"...a system currently facing 3% budget cuts despite the fact that is expected to house more people than ever." (Francis Crook, Director of the Howard League, Guardian 02/01.08).

A further budget cut has been announced for 2008/9. All these facts and figures provided a context in which I explored how learning occurred and how this unique environment affected that learning.



8.3 Literature Review and Critical Analysis of Literature

"How can one analyse and interpret data that record and describe human behaviour and discourse." (Engestrom in Chaiklin & Lave 1996:64)

Most theories about how people learn refer to designated learning environments such as a schools or colleges, however the primary purpose of a prison is not to educate but to rehabilitate and reduce re-offending.

"Prison Service statement of purpose: Our duty is to look after them with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release." (Braggins & Talbot 2003:11)

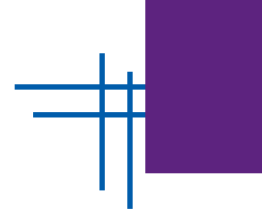
Although the Prison Service views education as an integral part of rehabilitation, learning is not encouraged for its own sake but to contribute to the overall aim of reducing re-offending.

"Prison Service Order Number 4205 states: The purpose of education within a prison is to address the offending behaviour of inmates by improving employability and thus reduce the likelihood of re-offending on release." (2003:12)

I therefore related my own research to theories that emphasised the importance of context, environment and purpose upon learning. These theories embrace the whole "situation" in which the learner finds themselves; they were first championed by Vygotsky, who identified the importance of social, historical and cultural influences on learning. Following his influence Leont'ev and Engestrom developed the Activity Theory that highlighted purpose and complexity. I also related my findings the anthropological strand that also developed from Vygotsky's original theory through Lave and Wenger with their emphasis on Communities of Practice, peripheral participation, the learner's journey and identity. Although these theories were mainly developed in a workplace environment, not a prison, there are many transferable concepts especially given that the primary purpose of an employee, like that of a prisoner, isn't necessarily to be educated. I found theories on situational learning particularly relevant to the prison environment because they emphasise the intricate nature of learning, how it is not just about individual cognitive development but about people interacting with each other, the environment and the multifaceted nature of complex institutions. These theories reflected four main strands that are pertinent to my own research: firstly the complexity of the prison environment; secondly the purpose of prison; thirdly the conflicts and conflicting situations that arise in prison and finally the influence of the physical landscape on learning.

Although these theorists did not use prison as a research base the complexity of the environment reflects the holistic, multi-layered approach of Lave, Wenger, Engestrom and other champions of situated learning. At any one time only one third of prisoners access formal education (Bromley Briefings 2007:37) therefore an enormous amount of learning in a prison occurs outside the education department in more informal settings, on the wings, in the Chapel or Mosque, during association with other prisoners etc. Vygotsky emphasised that it is interaction with others that is a crucial element of learning and Engestrom extends this by placing

"...context rather than individual cognition at the centre of our understanding of



human thought and activity.” (Tusting & Barton 2006:39 on Engestrom 1997).

The idea of prison as a multi-layered system with prisoner learning occurring in different spheres is supported by recent research on the role of prison officers in education, who view their contribution, though unacknowledged, as essential to the development of prisoners.

“Officers were not particularly interested in the formal curriculum delivered by education departments...They tended to perceive as ‘educational’ anything that helped prisoners change their lives for the better.” (Braggins & Talbot 2006:8)

Theories of situated learning are relevant to a prison community because they embrace the whole of human activity in all its messy reality and they provide meaning in an overwhelmingly complex context. It would be difficult to interpret any aspects of prisoner learning without taking into account the totality of a prisoner’s experience.

“Theories of situated learning do not separate action, thought, feeling, and value and their collective, cultural-historical forms of located, interested, conflictual, meaningful activity.” (Chaiklin & Lave 1996:7)

Lave and Wenger’s theories on ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ propose that an individual in a new environment begins a journey from ‘newcomer’ to ‘old timer’; this resonates in the prison environment where new prisoners are literally met at the gate by an ‘old timer’ who provides essential advice and information. Entering prison is like landing on another planet even the simplest tasks on the ‘outside’ are complex and different: how to make a phone call, what to wear, how to wash yourself and your clothes, sometimes even accessing the toilet can be problematic!

“...over days, weeks, years every aspect of a person’s life can be regulated, when they wake, sleep, what they eat,...religious practices. This complete reformatory lays down a recoding of existence very different from the mere juridical deprivation of liberty.” (Foucault 1977:236)

The ‘old timer’ is known as an ‘Insider’ and, in the prison where I work, we train Insiders in Advice and Guidance (Level 3 NVQ). This work is not formal and the learning is not delivered in or by the education department but it is essential.

“Formal learning in institutions... being merely ‘the tip of the iceberg’ ...informal learning is often necessary to do the job, while formal learning is often dispensable.” (Trusting & Barton 2006:30 on Coffield, 2000)

The “job” here could be interpreted as how to survive in the prison, a priority, especially for a new prisoner. The Insider is a prisoner himself and this type of peer learning is something that Lave and Wenger champion as being a highly effective means of imparting information, learning and good practice (Situated Learning 1991:93). In this way, though not consciously, a prison fulfils some of the criteria that define a community of practice as peer learning at all sorts of levels and types is prevalent throughout the prison, to positive and negative affect.

“The prison makes possible, even encourages the organisation of a milieu of delinquents, loyal to one another...where there is a prison, this is an association... And



it is in 'these clubs' that the education of the young first offender takes place." (Foucault 1977:267)

Wenger defined a 'Community of Practice' as...

"...being a group of people who regularly engage in activity in pursuit of some jointly negotiated enterprise, thereby developing a shared repertoire of ways of going about things." (Tusting & Barton 2006:18 on Wenger 1998)

I think the prison as a whole could be interpreted as a complex system of interlocking communities of practice with a shared enterprise: 'rehabilitation of prisoners' and shared practices: 'prison regime and rules'.

"A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from society for appreciable periods of time, together, lead an enclosed, formally administered...life. Prisons serve as a clear example..." (Goffman 1961:11)

The prisoner is at the centre of this community interacting with peers, chaplaincy, officers, governors, instructors, teachers, drug and alcohol counsellors, nurses, etc each with their own agenda and each providing a different learning curriculum for the prisoner.

This concept embodies other aspects of prison, its purpose, the identity of the prisoner and the resulting conflict. Wenger characterised communities of practice as having a shared purpose and Unwin and Fuller (2003:9) develop this further, claiming that all learning in the workplace is valid and valuable as it contains shared primary objectives. To a certain extent this is also true of prisons, which all share the joint purposes of rehabilitation and reducing re-offending. Engestrom's interacting activity systems identified 'object of activity' or purpose as being a key component in learning, he recognised that the reasons why people engage in learning have a powerful impact on the learning itself. This stated purpose, though unifying all staff working in a prison, also creates potential for all sorts of conflict and conflicting identities. The teacher in the education department may view prisoners on her course primarily as learners, yet the prison staff will view them as offenders, even the purpose of education could be a source of controversy as, for the prison service, the main purpose of education being to teach prisoners how not to re-offend, rather than the acquisition of knowledge. Engestrom's studies of the medical community highlighted the conflict that doctors experience of "having to be cost efficient producers on the one hand and healers or consultants on the other hand." (Chaiklin & Lave 1996:72 on Engestrom). He claimed, "Activity systems are characterised by inner contradictions". The Prison Service presents an ideal example of a system rife with "inner contradictions" as the Service today attempts to accommodate conflicting Government agendas to increase incarceration while also reducing prison budgets. Within this complex and conflicting environment prisoners can have multiple identities, as an offender, a learner, an 'old timer', a helper, or a peer supporter and their growth and development occurs on different levels in different communities within the prison.

"... learning involves the construction of identities....learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon....(but)...learning must be understood with respect to a practice as a whole with its multiplicity of relations." (Lave & Wenger 1991:114)



As well as addressing the dichotomy of learning between inside/cerebral and outside/social, situated learning theorists took into account the physical environment and viewed that as influencing learning in the wider sense. Fuhrer, for example, discusses how the physical environment can influence the development of newcomers, literally how people are grouped together and what physical barriers exist is highly significant (Chaiklin & Lave 1996:201). Foucault (1977:257) describes the new prisons built at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which are still in use today, as "buried in architectural masses and guarded by the secrecy of administration." He emphasises the two most important physical characteristics of these prisons as being the hidden, enclosed setting and the fact that the design meant that prisoners could be constantly watched from a central point. Things have not changed a great deal as this recent article from the Guardian (27/02/08) demonstrates:

"...a vast Victorian creation of a medieval castle, built in 1851. The wings radiate from a central hub so that prisoners can be observed without knowing they are being watched."

As the prison population has grown and the provision of formal education has become an intrinsic part of that growth, extra activity has had to be accommodated outside the main building, thus creating the need for prisoners to be moved, often across open yards, to access classes. A physical barrier often exists between the prisoner and the education department and movement is reliant on the availability and compliance of the prison officers who have to accompany prisoners when they are outside the main building. The idea of prisoners learning outside formal classes and the notion of education not being part of the "real work" of prisons reinforces the view that most prisoners learn in their day-to-day environment, on the wings informally.

"One prisoner-learner suggested that to focus on education experienced purely within the classroom, as if in a vacuum away from the rest of the prison, would be to miss much of the learning that takes place throughout the prison." (Braggins & Talbot 2006:13)

Although the theorists I have discussed developed their ideas from research based in very different environments to prison, for example among Yucatec Midwives in Mexico (Lave & Wenger 1991:67), their ideas relate to my experience and research in prison. It is a theory that embraces a prison as a community of practice, expanding learning into all sorts of situations that face prisoners on a daily basis and recognises the complexity and conflicts of those situations and human interactions.

"Within this model, adult development and adult intelligence must be reconceptualised as comprising practical knowledge and expertise, not cognitive process alone, and learning is something that happens through sustained engagement in this practice." (Tusting & Barton 2006:16 on Scribner's Milk factory studies 1983/1997)



8.4 Research Philosophy, Methodology & Methodology Critique

"Or as Montaigne, over four hundred years ago, put it succinctly, 'saying is one thing; doing another' " (Robinson 1995:191)

In previous research based in the prison I have used quantitative and qualitative methods, conducting surveys and interviewing participants, and though both are valid methods, I was aware that people, and prisoners especially, wanted to please me, to say what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. This time I anticipated that my research would reflect the realities of prisoner learning in the prison, I wanted it to expose the core, the inner workings of this complex environment so I decided to record my observations on a daily basis from October 2007. I recorded any events that impacted on prisoner learning and any relevant conversations with prisoners and staff, and discussions of meetings relating to education that I attended in the course of my work in the prison. I could only record by writing as, for security reasons, the use of recording equipment or cameras was forbidden. In an effort to maintain objectivity I deliberately expressed my observations using flat, factual language avoiding overly descriptive emotional or judgemental expressions. Ethnography presented an appropriate means of communicating the realities of prison life.

"A major advantage of observation as a technique is its directness. You do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes you watch what they do and listen to what they say." (Robinson 1995:191)

Although ethnographic research is time consuming (Bell 2005:17), as I was based in the prison for the duration of my research I was able to integrate it into my own work routine. Some ethnographers have to go through a lengthy period of acceptance within the community they are studying, this wasn't an issue as I was already known and accepted as a worker in the prison. My subjects were "so accustomed to the presence of the observer that they carried on as if she were not there." (Robson 1995:191). I deliver training to the prisoners and manage a resettlement project though I actually work for a voluntary sector organisation, not an educational provider or the Prison Service, which makes me an "outsider" inside, and provides a level of detachment and involvement. I was, however, aware that this approach raised ethical issues and therefore consulted BERA and followed their guidelines.

"Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported." (2004:6)

Ethnography, as a method, is appropriate in a complex environment like the prison because it is a "holistic approach, which stresses processes, relationships, connections and interdependency among component parts." (Denscombe 2005:4). I also felt that this method related to my theoretical framework as situated learning theories identify the complexity of how people learn, and the importance of analysing the whole learning environment. However the more I observed and recorded the more there was to record as Bell (2005:20) states:

"...understanding comes in layers; the longer we are in the environment, the more



layers appear to surface and the choice of when to close down, when to go with a... definitive analysis can be painful."

Knowing when to stop was definitely an issue for me and once I started recording observations there just seemed to be more and more that I could record.

Another potential difficulty with this type of research method, especially when the ethnographer is an 'insider', is the ethical question of how honest one should be with the participants. There is a famous ethnographic study of clandestine homosexual activity in a public convenience where the researcher kept his identity hidden which he justified by arguing that "any conceivable method...has at least some potential for harming others." (Humphreys 1970:169). He continues to explain how each researcher has to make their own judgement "weighing possible social benefits against possible cost in human discomfort." In my own case, in line with the BERA guidelines, I explained my purpose and received permission from the prison governor; I informed participants that I was completing research and gained their permission before recording anything they did or said. I also assured anonymity for all parties and stressed that the location would not be revealed, as I would only state the type of prison. Nobody refused me access though I did still feel as if I was being covert and tried to ensure at all times that I represented incidents and people as honestly as possible and presented their views and opinions, not my own.

Silverman (2003:7) points out that all research is bound to be biased and influenced by our assumptions, he poses the dilemma that authenticity is impossible because "what is authentic is culturally defined". In answer to this I can only say that I did examine my assumptions and the effect of my gender, for example, on the research. As a female in a male prison it is obvious that I can never even be mistaken for a 'real insider', as some of my male colleagues have been! I think the important factor is to recognise and acknowledge the limitations of my method, in that the interpretation of any data collected will be influenced by my gender, background, opinions and those of the participants involved.

"...all data are mediated by our own reasoning as well as that of participants. So to assume that 'naturally occurring' data are unmediated data is, self-evidently, a fiction." (2003:287).

Yet ultimately the advantages of ethnography by far outweighed the concerns:

"It is flexible

It studies what people are doing in their natural context.

It is well placed to study processes as well as outcomes

It studies meanings as well as causes." (2003:258 on Hammersley 1992:125).

In the 1960s Erving Goffman conducted a famous piece of ethnographic research in a total institution, "Asylum". He explained how normally people sleep, socialise and work in different places but in a total institution "all aspects of life are conducted in the same place under the same authority." (1961:17). Goffman promoted observation as the most appropriate method for studying life in a total institution such as prison. In prison all



questioning, even by an insider, is viewed with suspicion and participants easily become guarded, on the other hand being watched is an integral and established part of the system.

To triangulate the data collected from ethnographic methods I studied documentation, including official research findings provided by the prison service and credible research produced by charities such as the Prison Reform Trust and the Howard's League. I discovered a close link between my ethnographically collected data and that gleaned from more official documents, the latter supported the former, I therefore concluded that my observations could claim some level of credibility



8.5 Research Findings

In analysing the data collected from both ethnographic observations and prison related documentation I have identified 6 key themes:

Prisoner Movement, Overcrowding and Staff Shortages:

These three factors have an enormous affect on whether prisoners can access any learning in the prison, not just formal education courses but wing activities, peer learning and services such as support with drug or alcohol issues. I observed many examples of prisoners not being able to move to another part of the prison to access classes or even being able to leave their cell (see Appendix diary entries 31/10/07, 04/12/07, 09/01/08). "Prisoner Movement" also refers to prisoners being moved randomly to other prisons which can happen at any time and staff have little or any control over this, a private security company is responsible for prisoner transfers and often there is no co-ordination or continuity in terms of a prisoner's sentence plan, the priority is available space. This situation is even more pertinent for those prisoners who aren't yet sentenced, who could spend a year in the same prison awaiting trial or be moved after one day. Obviously this has a negative effect on education in the prison and is very disheartening for a teacher (10/12/07). The main reasons for the constant movement of prisoners to other prisons and the restriction on their movements within a prison are overcrowding coupled with understaffing. My conversation with the Senior Officer responsible for prisoner movement around the prison (17/10/07) reveals the huge frustration staff experience because they believe their job is impossible, given that "the prison regularly operates at 40% below required staffing levels." Prison overcrowding and consequently the pressure on any resources in this environment exacerbate the situation even further.

"There's only a 100 places for 1,200 inmates." (Braggins & Talbot 2006:31)

This aspect of prison life is supported by documentation. The prison service website and the Bromley Briefings (2007) both provide evidence of a prison population in continuous flux, "6 weeks is the average stay in a London prison", and a service so stretched and overcrowded that prison cells are regularly and inappropriately used to house prisoners. The Director General of Prisons on a recent visit to a London prison (08/01/08) expressed concern at the magnitude of staff shortages and the high staff turnover. In such circumstances what or how a prisoner learns is not a priority as this officer pointed out:

"Our first responsibility is to keep them in custody ...At the end of the day our job is about security, running the core regime." (Braggins & Talbot 2006:22)

These factors also provide some explanation as to why only one third of prisoners access education at any one time (Bromley Briefings 2006:37).

Incidents:

"There's blood, death and trauma here, like real life but more concentrated." (2006:23)

My observations recorded constant interruption to prisoner learning due to incidents such as a TB outbreak, a stabbing and a suicide. It is not surprising that there are many such incidents, and in fact credit to the dedication of prison staff, that these incidents don't usually escalate.



"What's always missed is that we have to deal with a lot of severely mentally disturbed people and we have no training." (2006:23)

As I explained my observations were conducted in a male category B prison in a metropolitan area so the range of prisoners' issues and requirements are enormous, with prisoners coming and going to court, being sentenced, facing transfers and deportations the situation is bound to be volatile. The overwhelming and varying needs of the prisoners themselves (one third of all prisoners in London are foreign nationals, 70% have mental health issues, 60% of prisoners have below level 1 literacy level etc. Bromley Briefings 2007) are often contributing factors in such incidents, which usually lead to prisoners being kept in their cells (30/11/07, 10/01/08, 15/01/08) and puts enormous emotional and practical strain on teaching staff and officers.

Government Agenda:

The Government Green Paper "Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment" (2005) established the trend which continues today of ensuring that all education and training in prisons should be work focussed.

"Prison Service targets for the number of prisoners achieving different skills qualifications were significantly exceeded in 2005-2006. Prisoners achieved 146,053 key work skills awards and 42,520 basic skills awards." (Bromley Briefings 2007:37)

This trend and its influence on prisoner learning was reflected in my own research, for example my conversation with the prison's Head of Learning and Skills (03.10.07) revealed his plan to change all education to 'Employment Skills' and concentrate resources on training prisoners for employment. In my six years teaching in prisons I have seen the reduction of delivery of creative courses such as pottery, drama and art, which have been replaced by accredited vocational courses.

Government policy not only influences what is taught in prisons but whether there are enough resources to teach prisoners. Budget cuts imposed on the prison service by the Government are directly affecting the delivery of education because to accommodate these cuts the prison is reducing its core week so from April 2008 only essential activity will take place on Friday afternoons. This means that prisoners will spend Friday afternoons, as well as most of the weekend, in their cells with little opportunity to access learning. According to Paul Tidball, President of the Governors' Association this means that prisoners will be spending more time locked up than they did 40 years ago (Inside Times Jan 2008).

"The most serious problem facing the Prison Service is the very tight resourcing over the next three years....spending 3% less..(and)...extra inflationary pressures because of the increasing cost of many of the things we buy." (Phil Wheatley, Director General, HM Prison Service, Interview in Converse Newspaper Dec 2007)

Positive Change and Motivation:

The analysis of my research data highlighted some of the positive aspects of prison education, for example the level of enthusiasm among prisoners for learning and the commitment of the teachers.



"If I'd had teachers in school like the ones I have had in here my life may have turned out very different...It's a couple of teachers that have made me think about turning my life round and doing something more worthwhile." (23/11/07)

Also amid, what to an outsider may seem like complete chaos, I observed some extraordinary examples of good practice and innovation, such as the voluntary Yoga Teacher, delivering her class on the wing to prisoners (07/10/07) or the Education Departments plans to produce 'in cell learning packs' (10/03/08). This is supported by Braggins and Talbot's research on the role of the prison officer in education, which revealed a wide variety learning occurring in prison at any one time.

"A list of all the opportunities for learning to take place in a prison, not all 'formal or conventional learning' e.g. peer education, offender behaviour programmes, quizzes and activities on the wings delivered by officers or chaplaincy, social, personal and health education day-to-day on the wings by officers." (Braggins & Talbot 2006:13)

Despite lack of resources and an unpredictable environment I observed prisoners, teachers and officers approach learning activities with enthusiasm, creativity and dedication.

Physical Barriers:

As the prison population has grown and Victorian establishments have been adapted to accommodate more modern developments, education and vocational training has become physically marginalized and is often delivered outside the main hub of the prison, sometimes in Portacabins. This is the case in the prison where I work and my observations highlight the number of times access to education and training is disrupted because prisoners have to be accompanied to classes (17/10/07, 11/12/07, 09/01/08). This physical separation also means that learning taking place elsewhere in the prison isn't viewed as 'real learning'.

"The idea that 'education' is a place to take prisoners to, where they will spend their time in classrooms is firmly rooted in the organisational structure and culture." (2006:13)

As the reference above demonstrates the physical separation influences attitudes towards learning in prison and encourages education to be seen as an activity unconnected to the main business of the prison.

Yet some of the best practice I observed was when learning took place in the main prison within the daily regime, such as that delivered by the Yoga Teacher or the Education Department's initiative to deliver ESOL classes on the wings (10/03/08).

"The notion that a prisoner can be learning while doing something else (such as working in the kitchens or gardens)...has taken some time to become accepted in prisons." (2006:13)

Culture and Conflict:

In my conversation with the Head of Education (23/10/07) she highlighted how her team often feel "pulled in two opposite directions...because of the very different agendas of the College and the Prison." The main focus of the College is on learning, the gaining



of skills and qualifications whereas the main focus of the prison is security, protecting the public and reducing re-offending. I have previously mentioned how the prisoner is viewed primarily as an offender, not a learner, in this environment and I often observed a cultural conflict between uniformed staff and education staff in their differing attitudes towards prisoners.

“It is very difficult for a prison officer whose feet are firmly planted on the ground to deal with this floating academia that drifts in and drifts out” (Braggins & Talbot 2006:47)

It was also obvious talking to prison teachers how much involvement and personal commitment most of them felt towards their learners (10/12/07, 11/12/07, 09/01/08). If the College/Prison conflict is external this conflict is internal, to encourage a prisoner to learn and develop requires a very different attitude towards that prisoner than that advocated by the majority of uniformed staff.

“Until the officers value education for themselves they’ll find it difficult to value it for others. Until that’s sorted there won’t be any change.” (2006:11)

Yet my research demonstrated that on a day-to-day basis the attitude of the officers is crucial to the level of accessibility to learning experienced by prisoners. My research clearly identified conflicting cultures within the prison and very differing attitudes towards prisoners depending to a large extent on the role of the member of staff: officer, teacher, chaplain, drugs worker etc. and this impacted on how, when and where prisoners were able to learn.



8.6 Conclusion

Ultimately the success of this piece of research rests on whether it has fulfilled its original purpose in providing the LONCETT project with credible evidence from which to develop further research on prison teachers' development. I think that I have convincingly argued for the validity of my methodology, namely ethnographic research, by demonstrating how all data collection is subject to bias and how this method is particularly suitable to my circumstances and the institutional environment in which I work. I also believe that the theoretical framework provided by Vygotsky, Engestrom, Lave and Wenger places prisoner education firmly in the domain of situated learning, as these theories truly embrace the complexity, conflicts and multi-faceted aspects of prison life. My research findings have been further justified by more official documentation provided by the prison service and other credible research sources, such as the Prison Reform Trust. Finally I would like to emphasise that the experience of recording my observations in the prison was ultimately a life affirming experience and I am left with the utmost respect for the staff and prisoners of this institution. I am grateful to them for allowing me to access into their lives.



8.7 Appendix – Detailed Results

Since October 2007 until May 2008 I recorded my observations of any activities in the prison that impacted on prisoner learning and any conversations or meetings related to this subject. Here are a range of examples of my entries.

03/10/07

A prisoner stabbed another prisoner yesterday on B Wing so today is total shutdown as officers search for the weapon. No prisoner movement so no attendance at education classes. All prisoners remained in their cells all day except to collect their meals.

I went to see the Head of Learning and Skills who had been re-structuring the education provision diagrammatically on the whiteboard in his office. He had decided that 'Education' was to be changed to 'Employment Skills' and that all effort should be concentrated on training prisoners for employment. When prompted for reasons he said that because of the 'churn factor' (the short and unpredictable length of prisoners' stay in the establishment) it would be better to concentrate on developing practical skills.

07/10/07

Went to see a prisoner on the rehabilitation wing, he is completing a drug rehabilitation programme during his sentence. He was attending a Yoga class on this wing. The class was being delivered by a teacher from a voluntary organisation and taking place on the wing so prisoners didn't have to rely on officers to accompany them to the education department or the gym. The class was well attended and when I talked to the prisoner later he said how popular it was and that the prisoners took it very seriously and enjoyed the activity enormously.

10/10/07

Conversation with one of my students who said that he has served 8 years in 13 prisons during that time he admitted that he had dealt drugs while inside and tried to corrupt officers. However he had made a conscious decision in the last year to stop using drugs and change his life patterns away from drugs and crime to do something more worthwhile on release. Recently he has completed several relevant courses in the prison which have supported this aim.

"What motivated your change?" I enquired

"I'm getting too old for this game." He replied.

He is 47 and now says he really wants to prevent people making the same life choices he made and consequently the same mistakes.

14/10/07

I had a conversation with a tutor who delivers an accredited course that helps prisoners access voluntary work in the community on release or from open prisons. This course is unsuitable for sex offenders as to a certain extent it trains prisoners to work with vulnerable people in the community. The tutor had interviewed and accepted a candidate for the course who she said seemed highly suitable. However on checking his offence she



discovered he is actually serving a sentence for a very serious sexual offence but had obviously tried to disguise this fact from his fellow prisoners. Sex offenders are normally housed in a separate area but he was in the main part of the prison. She had to explain refuse his application for the course.

17/10/07

Conversation with the Senior Officer responsible for ensuring that prisoners access education and employment related activities within the prison. He claimed to be feeling very over-burdened and de-motivated as he believes his job is impossible, for example he said that the prison regularly operated with 40% below required staffing levels and so there just aren't enough prison staff to ensure prisoners attend classes. He can only ensure that essential activities are completed such as food provided, access to showers, legal visits, family visits etc.

23/10/07

Conversation with the Head of Education from the college who provides the education programme in the prison:

She said that all her teachers are really busy but she is encouraging them to complete relevant teaching qualifications and supporting them in this aim. She felt that difficulties arise because of the very different agendas of the college and the prison and feels pulled in two opposite directions.

23/11/07

In depth conversation with a prisoner who is serving a long sentence and is a self proclaimed 'serial offender', about his experience of education in prison. He said that if he had had teachers at school similar to those who have taught him in prison his life may have been very different. He claimed that a handful of inspirational teachers he has met in prison have convinced him to change his attitude and behaviour and encouraged him to complete courses that will make him more employable on release.

30/11/07

Death in custody: a prisoner hung himself and was found dead when unlocked this morning. The whole wing has been shut down all day while investigations are conducted by the police and the prison ombudsman. No prisoners on that wing (over 200) were able to access any education classes.

04/12/07

Conversation with the Head of Learning and Skills: He claims his problem is not just funding, he has £30,000 funding for training for pre-release prisoners (within 3 months of release) but he can't organise delivery of relevant training because of the prison layout, at the moment pre-release prisoners are scattered all over the prison so many can't access relevant training and resettlement services. He wants to re-organise the prison so that all prisoners approaching release are resident on the same wing and then all services can be delivered on that wing.



10/12/07

A prisoner who was in the middle of an accredited course was transferred to another prison following a court appearance. He was anxious to complete the course, as the qualification would help secure him a job on release. The tutor looked at 2 possibilities:

Could he continue the course in the new prison?

Could the work he had completed so far be sent to an Education worker there?

However both possible solutions were problematic, the other prison was in another part of the country in another prison region, under a different area management, and education was delivered by a private company not a college. It proved impossible to contact another teacher or transfer his records to the new prison.

11/12/07

Tutor began the class at 1.30pm, prisoners are unlocked at 1.15 so all the prisoners were in the class by 1.30 except one. Tutor rang the wing, and was informed that officers were too busy to bring the prisoner until 2pm (the prisoners had to be accompanied to the class which is in another part of the prison and involves crossing a yard). Tutor in a dilemma, as she needed to present the subject to the whole class:

Does she begin and give the absent student individual support to catch up?

Or

Does she wait and try to keep the others occupied until he arrives, then adapt her session plan accordingly?

08/01/08

Director General visited the prison today and he highlighted 3 main concerns in his report on the prison Intranet:

- Prisoners' dissatisfaction about implementation of what they view as stringent Government policy such as IPPs (Indefinite Public Protection), recalls (recall to prison for those released on licence), and more hostile parole board hearings.
- The magnitude of staff shortages.
- The high staff turnover due to transfers, retirements, resignations and dismissals.

09/01/08

Tutor had organised a new accredited course for prisoners, she had recruited the learners and made arrangements to ensure they were on movement lists, meaning that they would be unlocked and able to attend the class. She was fully prepared but after waiting 30 minutes no prisoners had arrived. She didn't have access to a phone where she was teaching so had to go to the wings (another 10 minutes) to find out why no prisoners had come to class. On arrival at the wings an officer told her that the prison was operating on "patrol staffing levels" because of staff shortages and that consequently no prisoners were being unlocked. She tried to persuade the officer to unlock her students (9 in all) but there was "absolutely no way".



10/01/08

Hostage situation on B Wing: A foreign national prisoner has taken his cellmate hostage as a protest against deportation. No movement all morning.

14/01/08

Attended Quality Meeting at the prison. The following items were discussed:

- Wing officers aren't unlocking prisoners or promoting courses.
- The prison database is antiquated and not co-ordinated with education or work activities.
- Prisoners aren't accessing library or education classes, numbers are low.
- Due to cuts in prison service budget there will be no activities on Friday afternoons. Prisoners will only be unlocked for visits or prayers in the Mosque.

15/01/08

Prisoner diagnosed with TB. Staff in the hospital wing are all wearing protective facemasks. All prisoners are being tested, no movement, no education.

18/01/08

Tutor delivering an accredited course complained that 2 prisoners didn't attend her class, one was in court, one on a visit. This means that the tutor will have to meet them between classes and coach them. As it is an accredited course and the prison will only hold (keep the prisoners in that prison) for 3 months so every class is vital for every learner to achieve the qualification.

23/01/08

LAG worker has secured a prisoner a job for release but he has no accommodation. There are no "free beds" available in any hostels in the city on the day of his release. Temporary Bed & Breakfast will have to be organised, however given the high rent it will be impossible for him to work and pay the high rent on temporary accommodation, he literally can't afford to work and have accommodation. He has to make a choice; he chooses accommodation that he can only afford if he is claiming benefits.

07/03/08

Instructor from Workshop arrested at prison gate in possession of Class A drugs. Workshops closed at beginning of the next week as everywhere is thoroughly searched. No access to vocational classes for 2 days.

10/03/08

Attended Quality Meeting at the prison, the following items were discussed:

- Prisoners on employment related courses have to be cleared by security, but there is a back log waiting to be cleared and so not many prisoners are accessing these courses.



- The Gym and Workshops are producing schemes of work with the Education Dept that include embedded skills for life.
- A new online assessment for new prisoners is about to be implemented.
- Number of prisoners accessing education fluctuates considerably.
- ESOL for foreign national prisoners will be delivered on the wings and there are plans to develop ESOL materials for prisoners to learn in their cells so it will be easier for them to integrate into an ongoing class.
- Art therapy is being delivered for prisoners in the Health Care wing.
- There are problems delivering education to the prisoners in the Care and Segregation Unit.
- There is pressure for space for training in the prison.



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