



# Burning issues for Prison Educators

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# Overview of Session

- Background and context
- Aims of the research
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions – towards new pedagogies for prison education



# Background

- The policy context:
  - OLASS (2005);
  - currently a review of learning for offenders in custody and community
- The place of education in prison:
  - part of the 'regime'. Education is *part* of offender provision. This creates issues that impact on the prison educator and that are not found in other FE environments
- Prison education in the West Midlands:
  - 11 prisons; maximum security to 'open'; one women's prison
  - Single OLASS contract holder – The Manchester College
  - TMC employs around 300 prison educators

# Overview of the research

- Funded by LSIS - Excellence, Innovation and Improvement Fund
- Specific Objectives
  - To design a specialist initial teacher education DTLLS framework
  - To establish a West Midlands network of practice for prison educators
  - To produce evidence and data to inform development of tailored CPD for prison educators

# Method

- 4 settings representing range of prison categories (we need to list types):
  - A Category C Male Training Prison (population 720)
  - A Category B 'Local' Prison (population 1450)
  - An HMP / YOI mixed Adult and Young Offender Prison (population 624)
  - An Open Prison
- Focus groups and 'diamond nine' sort activity
  - 10 questions agreed through a Steering Group for the Focus Groups
  - 9 statements for the 'diamond' activity
- 25 prison educators participants
  - All employed by the OLASS contract holder

# Characterising education in prison



Strong resonance with literature

- Organisational factors
- Cultural factors
- Pedagogical factors

(Jeanes et al 2009 –  
see also McDonald  
2008)

# Organisational Factors

Security comes first.

. . . I remember you telling me which key went into which lock because I couldn't figure out how to do it and there's so many, I think there's about thirty two key turns before you get to the education block . . .

. . . I teach Drama in an afternoon . . . . in four weeks I have to have a show but then they disappear to court and they'll be on visits and I might see one for five lessons out of sixteen so they might fall behind a lot but you've just got to do it.

Going through the regime you know that they will be coming to you once they're unlocked in a morning and you know what time they go back but you get yourself set for when they're going but then you're goverened by the regime of when they come back and unlock that door and let them out.

And they may change the time

And they may change time again so you've got to occupy those guys before they go, so you've always go to have something in reserve haven't you

# Prison cultures - (unexpected as everyday & the cult of the governor!)

And also the wings themselves, there's different governors on the wings; they've all got different ideas so one wing might not run the same as another wing; they've all got different attitudes.

...you'll hear the inmates talking about that and one will say 'I'm allowed to do this up on my wing' and another will say 'oh I can't do that'.

The other area that I think people ought to know about is working in one prison isn't like working in another.

I must say that's a really good point because thinking about the difference between the male and the female estate and it's all to do with the attitudes of the people that you're working with and you know remand and sentence that they're coming in and coming off drugs and everything.

# Pedagogical issues

. . . .I have been in training sessions where they bring you out a lot of things as a learning aid and we can't use any of them here, they're not allowed in here for security reasons . . . .

Magnetic things . . you couldn't bring in certain games and stuff because of what's in the box; there might be metal bits or things that they could sharpen . . . It does make it difficult to try and keep the lads interested . .

Things like scissors, crayons, chewing gum, silver foil.

Its simple things like a memory stick; it's impossible, or just a CD

I think we are isolated as far as technology is concerned with the fact that we can't access and everything is so internet based now with education and on-lin assessments and downloading your logbooks or whatever and we just don't have that facility . . .although we've got the virtual campus now, that is very limited access and obviously it is locked down, you can't research things as you would in a college . .

# Broader issues...

- Role
- Identity
- Values
- Professional practice
- Political context



# Routes in to prison education

I mean it just doesn't come up does it because people don't tend to know so really you start by the advert which in your case...

I would never have taken it as a career option no, I'd never really thought about it.

I'd never have thought about it as a career option either, it never occurred to me. I was teaching at a boarding school and needed a change because it was onsite 24/7 and I could just see myself compared to the other staff who had worked there for fifty years and had no life...but I would never have viewed it as a career option or never even thought about it.

Well I came in to the prison as a volunteer because I used to drive past the women's prison and it was at a time when I had four kids and I thought well I'll do a bit of teaching on a voluntary basis...I did that for a bit and then a job came up so I was just in the right place at the right time by chance.

# Role 1 “prison first, education second”

I found that in the vocational side, apart from the actual teaching you do a lot more of the prison work as well; you certainly do a lot more of the prison work...in terms of waste management or just the regime.

There's a lot to take on that side isn't there. Which is probably what people don't realise when they come into the prison [to teach].

It's two organisations that you're working with; the college and also the prison service

Yeah which is an interesting point in itself isn't it; that whole thing about always trying to marry those two.

And this business of the two Masters so you've really got twice the amount of paperwork

A lot of us work on our own so you have to be very conscious of who you've got with you and you've got to think out of the box; once you go into prison you forget the outside as you're in a different environment

# Role 2 – “more than an educator”

It's like being a psychologist and everything else all rolled into one.

Year's ago when they talked when prison education was gathering momentum and certainly when I started it started to change and they always talked about a secure college, it's supposed to be a secure college but you can't see it as that and whilst we do work within FE I'd say we were prison educators and there is a whole difference and as you said earlier about what are the similarities with a college and the word teach is probably the most..and the way that we deliver and probably qualifications are probably the same but other than that I think the approach and the planning and the way you use resources and what resources you can use are totally different.

It's like you can be seen as a mother figure or a father figure or a welfare officer

They do tend to be a lot more motivated towards education and vocational education, I've had comments in the past where some of them don't see us as uniform staff and some of them won't speak to the uniform staff.

# Role 3 - “Prison family”

I think it's important that people working in prisons realise that yes they're contracted to working in a prison but actually they're very much part of the that prison family and they're not working in isolation, they're very much part of that prison team and that's the big difference to FE that we're accountable to the prison in so many ways whether it's security or safeguarding the prisoners or whatever we can't just work as educators in education. We sit on sentencing planning boards and prison forums and it's part of the big picture, we work with the chaplaincy; we work with the gym; we work with other agencies so we're not just educators in education we are very much part of that prison team.

# Identity – “we are an elite group!”

I think we are quite different aren't we actually as I feel I have much more in common with colleagues in the prison than somebody now in a college or school.

I think it brings out other qualities in you as a person rather than another tutor, like we say you have to be a little bit streetwise and deal with things in a different ways

Yeah I think you can either do it or you can't. I don't think you can be half hearted about the job

I think you know as well with your gut feeling when you come in here whether it is for you and I think you know how to deal with certain skills and qualities...you've got to be mad! But yeah you've got to have a certain something

You have got to be very assertive and you have got to stand up for yourself and you can't be timid; its confidence and being outgoing

It's building a relationship and it's purely what you're trying to gain for them; it's being confident and assertive.

# Values

It's a case of you get guys coming through all the time and faces are changing and I think even if you just get one who moves and the course of his life, although you don't hear of that as such, they may keep in touch with one inmate and they can also get in touch with us to let us know their progress and then you don't hear of them again but if you hear that one of your guys who did the course and has gone off to university and got a really good job then that makes a difference

I heard of one that left my course and he has been released now and he is actually doing a job what he'd been taught and that's why you're there and you 'well he did learn something'

It's encouraging them and nurturing them and then letting them have a go because then they develop skills and move on.

If these guys have been knocked down and they come in here and see you taking a bit of time with them then that's what I like.

...it's not all about behaviour management and everything else it's teaching them skills but it's actually people skills

# Prison cultures – a dynamic environment

The positive thing is we're never bored! There is no groundhog day.

I find it very challenging and rewarding

I think that's what I personally enjoy because you have to think out of the box sometimes don't you and I think that's quite challenging and I think that's why most of us enjoy it really

# Professional practice – ‘behaviour’

Where I was teaching [before prisons] you could have a class and the student could just get up and go out of the room but it's not going to happen [here], they'll have a mobile phone and I've seen them in prison yeah but you're not going to have them trying to record the teachers on the mobile phone.


...if you're working in a college environment and if there is a problem then how long is it going to take for some security staff to deal with it...in the prison they're there and it's dealt with within seconds.

Where I was working there was no security as such, it would just be a case of deal with it and sort the situation out...whereas we've got alarms and radios here.

They're all adults over twenty-one though so you can reason with them and it's about classroom management.

You've got to have good man management skills and they've [new teachers] got to be able to deal with situations.

They do tend to be a lot more motivated towards education and vocational education, I've had comments in the past where some of them don't see us as uniform staff and some of them won't speak to the uniform staff.



# Structural issues – culture clashes

.. .I think the other thing as well is in smaller establishments were all pulling from the same pool of men and playing each other and saying ‘we want him because we want our class full’, ‘bricks want him because they want their class full’ . . . it can get quite fraught sometimes

The only reason your class is three and a half hours long is because the prison wants the prisoners unlocked for three and a half hours to get the most purpose for activity and this is where the Waited Score Cards effect what you do because its education, there’s no way we’d have a three and a half hour lesson because you know that after forty minutes they’d need a change but that’s where you’re Waited Score Card and time unlocked purposeful activity comes into play doesn’t it.

# Are we posing the right questions?

What is it that a prison educator has to do that is different or over and above what teachers in other areas of the lifelong learning sector have to do?  
(Jeanes et al 2009)

- Is bolt on/wrap around enough?
- Is the 'regular' lifelong learning sector the right starting point?
- Are strategies, resources and 'training' enough

# Reading our data – new paradigms new pedagogies?

- Understand teaching in prisons is a context bound social practice that needs theorising as such
- Prison teacher education as research based practice that provides rich descriptions of the dynamic space between 'regime' and the liberal humanist discourses ('androgogy') that characterise adult learning
- Teachers as knowledge makers, teacher education as knowledge making
- What's possible rather than what 'is'



# New DTLLS programme

- 2 X 15 credit level 6 option modules for generic DTLLS programme
  - Contextualising offender education
  - Teaching and learning in offender education