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# Innovative learning models for prisoners

edited by

**Francesca Torlone**

**Marios Vryonides**



Studies on Adult Learning and Education

– 4 –

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# Innovative Learning Models for Prisoners

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FRANCESCA TORLONE, MARIOS VRYONIDES

contributions by

Annet Bakker, Stefania Basilisco, Xenofon Chalatsis,  
Bushra Saadoon M.Al-Noori, Maria Toia

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## INTRODUCTION

*Francesca Torlone, Marios Vryonides*

More than a century ago Victor Hugo was famously quoted saying: «He who opens a school door, closes a prison». If this idea was true in the social conditions of the late 19th century it is very much alive and relevant in the wake of the 21st century. This idea is behind the research presented in this book, the product of a collaborative work between four educational institutions in four European countries and four penitentiary institutions in the same countries. All aspiring to the same notion: that education can act as a preventing mechanism against deviant behaviour. Indeed, education has the potential to strengthen individuals who have committed crimes in such a way so as to act as a shield against re-offending.

As indicated in the subsequent chapter the provision of some forms of education for prisoners is a basic feature of most penitentiary systems offering a great variety of skills and training in order to facilitate re-integration into society and to compensate for the social costs of deviant behaviour. The same chapter provides an overview of the current situation regarding prison education in Europe, and the rationale upon which the Pebble research project was based.

Chapter 2 presents the common feature of the educational profile of prisoners and discusses the challenges when planning training opportunities in prisons. This inmate profile is often a decisive factor that is linked with crime and recidivism.

The next chapter (Ch. 3) reports the relevant literature concerning the Training Needs Analysis and discusses the way with which the macro level (mission of the prison administration) and micro (individual prisoners who express it in respect to their path of re-education to support and drive) may be combined and applied in view of context constraints. The chapter concludes with a case study of Pescara prison (the *Casa Circondariale* in Pescara) where this approach was implemented and empirical data on training demand management process (2013-2015) are presented.

Chapter 4 presents the framework for learning a foreign language together with the need for inmates to learn both the language of the hosting country and other foreign languages while Chapter 5 discusses

the pedagogical methodology chosen to deliver a basic skills curriculum content for inmates. A blended learning approach was thought to be the best model for delivering an educational programme in the penitentiary system. After presenting the basic characteristics of a blended learning for facilitating a strong instructor-learner interaction in the learning process it suggests why blended learning, is ideal for prison education and specifically for a basic skills curriculum. This addresses the reality, as suggested in Chapter 6, of the fact that low levels of basic skills among the adult population in global scale. In fact as the chapter reveals, in Europe, this phenomenon involves at least 80 million citizens.

The book moves then to Chapter 7 with a presentation of how the Pebble programme was evaluated in order to provide partners with the kind of feedback that would make it applicable in a wider context. As suggested in that Chapter the evaluation process which was followed throughout the two years of the project (2013-2015) concluded with valuable findings and recommendations for future development, optimisation and improvement. The book concludes with a chapter on how International networks may support education in prison.

As a final comment in this introduction we may argue that such initiatives should be considered as a major social investment whose returns, even though not immediate, could have a lasting effect in most societies. Thus, policy makers and people with authority to implement penitentiary policies should consider the findings very seriously when planning educational programmes and setting up institutional frameworks for implementing them.

# CHAPTER 1

## EDUCATION IN PENITENTIARY CONTEXTS

*Xenofon Chalatsis*

### *1. Foreword*

Many differences in the cultures and in educational systems between the countries of Europe exist. Penitentiary and correctional systems also vary greatly, as does the definition of what constitutes prison education. However, despite all these differences, a number of generalisations can be made in relation to prison education. Prison education in its wide sense includes library services, vocational education, cultural activities, social education, physical education, as well as the academic subjects which are included in narrower concepts of education.

The provision of some forms of education for prisoners has been a common feature of the penitentiary systems. In Europe today, virtually all countries have education available in at least some of their prisons, although there is great variety in what is provided. This variety can be attributed to the different understandings on the aims and possibilities of prison education and on the general attitudes of society to people who are held in prison.

There are many reasons supporting the provision of education and training in penitentiary contexts. International legislation, conventions and recommendations exist recognising the right of prisoners to participate in educational activities while serving their sentences. Prison education has been considered as a means to bring benefits to both prisoners since they gain skills and competences which will facilitate their re-integration into society and to society as a whole since it reduces the social costs of crime. Prison education is linked to the improvement of employability among prisoners, an important factor which reduces the likelihood of inmates to re-offend and return to prisons. This chapter provides a brief overview of the current situation regarding prison education in Europe, including some key facts upon which the Pebble rationale was based.

### *2. Prison Education in Europe*

European countries have been making significant efforts towards quality prison education; however they face specific challenges when

dealing with the issue. They face the fact that the majority of correctional institutions are overcrowded with an average occupancy rate of 105% across the EU-27; the fact that inmates in European prisons form a significantly diverse group in terms of nationality, age, qualifications, skills and sentences; the fact that for many people, even in higher positions prison education is considered as a secondary issue, in comparison to other issues which appear to be more pressing and urgent; the fact that the use of new technologies in education and training activities cannot be adopted due to security issues. However, even though these challenges exist, research and evidence have shown that prison education brings substantial benefits to the inmates, such as higher levels of autonomy and self respect and the society as a whole, such as the cost-benefit ratio and the reduction of recidivism.

Below, specific facts and characteristics of prison education in Europe are presented, as an outline of the current situation regarding the issue. These facts provided the grounds upon which the Pebble project was built, developed and implemented in four European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Romania).

### *2.1 European Legislation and Policies*

Decisions and Laws regarding the right to education and training for all exist at a European level such as the Protocol no. 1 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 2)<sup>1</sup> and Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Moreover, seeing the person in prison as an equal member of society is central to the Council of Europe's penal policy in general and its prison education policy in particular. The Council's policy on prison education is set out most fully in *Education in Prison* (Council of Europe, 1990), and this is endorsed strongly in the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe-Committee of Ministers, 2006). Prisoners are regarded as entitled to a form of adult education as those in the community outside. The Council of Europe sees adult education as «a fundamental factor of equality of educational opportunity and cultural democracy», and sees it as promoting «the development of the active role and critical attitudes of women and men, as parents, producers, consumers, users of the mass media, citizens and members of their community» (Council of Europe, 1990: 12). According to the Council of Europe's policy, adult education is «seen to be about participating and experiencing rather than about the passive absorption of knowledge and skills; it is a means by which people explore and discover personal and group identity» (Council of Europe,

<sup>1</sup> <<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/html/005.htm>> (12/2015).

1990: 12). Thus, a key recommendation in *Education in Prison* is that all prisoners should have access to a wide curriculum, with the aim «to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context» (Council of Europe, 1990: 4). While such policy on prison education is clear, provision (and the philosophy behind that provision) varies considerably across countries. In some countries, comprehensive programmes of education that are well-resourced and based on Council of Europe principles are offered to all imprisoned individuals, while elsewhere there are only educational offerings of weak and narrow forms of learning. Generally, it can be said that placing prison education in the general framework of adult education, lifelong learning and basic competences acquisition (both key and transversal competences) provides the basis upon which initiatives, researches and pilot learning programmes can be organised, developed and evaluated, so that inmates have more opportunities to participate in educational interventions and benefit from both short and long term results.

## *2.2 EU Funding*

The role of prison education in the rehabilitation process of prisoners has been considered of major importance. Prison education offers prisoners the opportunity to engage in useful activities while imprisoned, constitutes a pathway towards secondary and post secondary mainstream education, improves their employment prospects after release, contributes to their smooth and permanent re-entry to society so that they become active in their local economies and societies, facilitates the process of their personal development and transformation and enhances their prospects of developing the motivation, autonomy and responsibility to gain control over their lives after their release. These points constitute the rationale upon which the European Union provides funding for the development of innovative educational and training activities and for the facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and experience across borders. Funding from European Union programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning Programme, the European Social Fund and the EQUAL Community Initiative has been supporting the creation and the development of prison education and training systems across Europe. It has also been facilitating the sharing and transfer of practices through the creation of sustainable partnerships and networks. More specifically, during the recent years more than 100 projects were funded by the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Lifelong Learning Programme, most of which fell under the Grundtvig sub-programme. These projects focused on different aspects of prison education, such as the acquisition of basic skills by inmates, the integration of prisoners to society, the development of innovative learning models for both prisoners and the

penitentiary personnel, all supporting the creation of a positive learning environment within prisons. The Pebble research project was also funded by the Grundtvig sub-programme. Moreover, the EQUAL Community initiative funded numerous projects and partnerships in order to promote the employability of inmates through education and training and to provide learning and working opportunities so that re-offending is reduced. Finally, projects on prison education were commissioned by Directorates-General of the European Commission, such as the Directorates-General for Education and Culture and Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, the Directorate-General for Justice and Home Affairs and the Directorate-General for Research. These projects focused on more peripheral issues influencing prison education, such as the cooperation of different sectors for the support of the education of inmates.

### *2.3 General Educational Provisions*

Based on the aforementioned Decisions and Rules and the provision of funding, it can be stated that education and training in correctional institutions constitute a legal requirement and are commonly provided to all prisoners, even though in some cases certain groups are given priority, such as juveniles and prisoners with basic skills deficiencies. The provision of education and training in European prisons can be divided into general education, vocational training and non formal education and training. Moreover, different approaches to education in prison evident across Europe exist and can be categorised in three broad typologies (Costelloe, Langelid, 2011). First, provision is embedded in a traditional and mainstream secondary school curriculum, but oriented towards the interests and needs of adult prisoners. Second, training programmes are focused more on employability than traditional education and are almost exclusively centered on basic skills and vocational training. Third, programmes are offence-focused and provide courses influenced directly by the prison context. Of course, combinations of these elements exist, with countries giving different focus to the different types of education. Such variance in provision and philosophy continues even while individual countries remain signed up to Council of Europe and European Union principles and policies. It can therefore be stated that a variety of educational interventions is provided to prisoners across Europe.

Recent findings however indicate that the participation in these educational pathways is low, reaching a mere 25% in the majority of European countries (Costelloe *et al.*, 2012), usually attributed to the lack of motivation and to prior negative experiences in mainstream education.

## 2.4 Curriculum

Regarding the curriculum available in prison education, much diversion exists between European countries. The basic tendency involves the provision of educational activities related to the acquisition and development of basic skills among prisoners, either by providing separate courses on basic skills or integrating the education in these skills in other training activities. Bearing in mind the low levels of basic skills among the prison population, this tendency seems to answer specific learning needs, supporting the declaration in the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe–Committee of Ministers, 2006) which states that «prisoners with literacy and numeracy needs, and those who lack basic or vocational education, should be given priority». This statement reveals the second tendency existing in prison education which is the provision of vocational training programmes. Such programmes are highly evaluated among prisoners since they facilitate access to the labour market after release and provide skills which can be transferred to other environments, others than employment, such as the home and family environment.

## 2.5 Employability

The issue of future employability of inmates has already been mentioned as a key issue towards the reintegration of inmates into society. Enhancing their employability is a complex issue though, since apart from the acquisition of basic and vocational skills, a holistic approach is followed in many cases, combining prison work, which provides the opportunity to gain experience on the demands and disciplines of the working environment, and other types of support programmes which tackle problems which influence employability, such as substance abuse, housing and relationships. This holistic approach also includes the issue of non formal learning. This type of learning presents a pathway into education for prisoners with previous negative experiences of the mainstream system. It also plays an important role for prisoners serving long sentences, or those for whom a focus on work is unrealistic (Costelloe *et al.*, 2012).

## 2.6 ICT Tools in Prison Education

Much literature exists on the use of new technologies as educational tools inside prisons. This use is considered as an important way to provide personalised learning support, to answer the varying learning needs of inmates, to facilitate the access to up-to-date materials and to overcome the problem of lack of continuity for those prisoners who



are moved to another institution. As research findings have shown (Costelloe *et al.*, 2012), prisoners in Europe tend to have limited access to ICT and the Internet, which is directly linked to concerns about the associated security risks. Different national and European projects have made efforts to overcome such barriers and to identify new and practical ways to exploit the use of ICT in prison education (such as the Learning Platform in Prison – LIS – project in Brandenburg, Germany, the ‘Virtual Campus’ initiative in the United Kingdom and the Pebble project). It is important to note that the use of ICT tools is not seen as a means of self-study. Rather, as pointed out in the Pebble research project, the support provided by educators and trainers is still required, since a relationship between educator and learner is often necessary for effective learning to occur, particularly in the case of learners with negative previous experiences or perceptions of education and training. The combination of e-learning and face-to-face contact appears to have a positive effect to prison population, as far as their effective education is concerned.

### *2.7 Education Staff*

The role of professionals who are involved directly or indirectly in the education and training of inmates (such as heads of schools, penitentiary personnel, social services personnel, volunteers from NGOs) has been pointed out. Many prison education initiatives aim at the development of knowledge, skills and competences of these professionals, since they can act as facilitators and mentors during the educational process of the target group. Their role to encourage and motivate inmates to participate in education has been identified as one way in which participation in education and training is increased. Moreover, their involvement in other supporting activities such as prison work brings wider benefits to the prison population, connecting them to the world outside prison, decreasing the feeling of exclusion often encountered in the group. Different initiatives have been implemented focusing on these professionals (such as the intensive programme to become a skilled worker in Austria), since their contribution is highly valued.

### *2.8 Focus on the Individual*

Many European countries have realised the importance of providing ‘tailor made’ educational pathways to the inmates serving their sentences in their correctional institutions, in an effort to answer their different learning needs and aspirations. To this end, projects have been focusing on different aspects supporting this ‘individual approach’ in prison education. For example, tools and tests to assess inmates’ skills and compe-

tences at an initial stage were produced, so that their gaps were revealed. Information campaigns on the availability of courses and seminars within the prison were supported, so that inmates are aware of the existing educational offers. Guidance, counseling and mentoring services were also provided to inmates so as to help them select the educational pathway which mostly suits their wishes and their future plans as active citizens in society after they are released. Finally, the provision of education and training based on modules or separate learning units also supports the individual character which prison education should have. These examples demonstrate the fact that prison education enhances its effectiveness through the individual approach, providing wider benefits to inmates, such as self awareness, time management skills and ability to set short and long term goals and targets.

### *3. Challenges*

Despite of the aforementioned characteristics which outline some important aspects of the provision of prison education in Europe, challenges exist bringing certain barriers to the smooth provision of education and training in correctional institutions. One of the most important challenges is the diversity of the prison population. Prisoners in European prisons form a heterogeneous group, as far as their age, their educational background, their sex, their nationality and their sentences are concerned. These differences need to be taken into account when designing and implementing educational activities, since they affect their learning needs in terms of both educational content and learning methodologies (for more on this issue, see Chapter 3). Linked to this challenge is also the fact that European prisons are overcrowded with an average occupancy rate of 105% across the EU-27. Prison populations across Europe are growing – there are currently around 640,000 prisoners in the EU Members – (Aebi, Delgrande, 2010) bringing additional limitations to the education provided.

Another challenge is the lack of a unified prison education policy not only across Europe, but across different prisons in the same country. This means that severe variations in the levels of access to education exist and inmates' rights to education and training are far from being addressed. In many cases, educational programmes are not offered on a permanent basis, they are more 'one-off' initiatives, funded for a specific purpose. This means that there are prisoners who cannot benefit from them on a regular basis, or who cannot continue their education after a specific programme has ended. This is not the case for the organised and traditional educational programmes provided in prisons; it is more the case of other national and transnational initiatives which aspire to overcome

specific barriers, and even though willingness for their transfer to other inmates and other counties exists, this is not always achieved.

Another important challenge relates to the continual disruption of planned educational activities either as a result of the transfers of inmates to other correctional institutions or due to the lack of security and/or educational staff in the prisons. This challenge is related to the fact that not all prisons of the same country provide the same offers in education, training and other learning activities, and as a result, inmates do not follow a linear pathway, repeating courses or finishing them before their actual end. On the other hand, security issues influence educational provisions as well, placing barriers and restrictions in the continuity of offers.

Finally, a number of other issues constitute challenges influencing prison education in Europe, such as the general economic recession, the large numbers of immigrants moving to Europe from the Eastern countries, the lack of a concrete evidence based information on 'what works' in adult education and prison education in particular and the difficulty in the cooperation between different sectors (e.g. public and private sector, Ministries, local authorities, employers' associations, etc). These challenges need to be fully and effectively addressed in order to guarantee that prison education plays the key role in the rehabilitation and efficient integration of prisoners in society.

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*Web sources*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Consultation at 12/15.



## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT IS THE PROFILE OF PRISONERS IN TERMS OF BASIC SKILLS: EVIDENCE FROM FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

*Marios Vryonides*

#### *1. Foreword*

The common feature of the educational profile of prisoners is that while they may share some basic characteristics they are also quite dissimilar. This creates some challenges when planning training opportunities for them. Obviously, the traditional educational approach which presupposes that all learners embark on their education from an equal basis does not apply here. There are distinct profiles with a variety of prior experiences in education and training, yet there are also some common features as well. The educational profile of inmates is very important because education is directly linked with crime and recidivism. When lacking even the most basic educational skills people are more prone to deviant behaviour. It is exactly for this reason that the focus should be on trying to involve inmates in basic skills educational programmes in an innovative and engaging manner. According to Messemer and Valentine (2004) correctional educators suggest that inmates who participate in a basic skills programme are less likely to return to prison upon release (see also, Porporino and Robinson, 1992).

#### *2. The Education Profile of Inmates. Evidence from Literature*

In a study published a decade ago Messemer and Valentine (2004) cited a number of various studies in the U.S. which suggested that the majority of inmates in the U.S. did not hold a high school certificate and were functionally illiterate. Moreover, they cited a report by Werner (1990) who suggested that 50% of the inmates in the state of California, between the ages of 16-25, could not read above the third-grade level. More recently, McCulley, Gillespie and Murr (2014) suggested that one in every 100 U.S. adults 16 and older is in prison or jail and about 43% of these individuals do not have a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate. Another recent study by Curtis *et al.* (2013) confirms a number of previous research findings (i.e. Ship-

pen *et al.*, 2009; Wade, 2007; Vacca, 2004) and raises concerns about the profile of prisoners which included lowered levels of educational attainment, lack of vocational skills, lack of educational opportunities and increased rates of unemployment. All the above were indicating factors influencing recidivism rates and were barriers to successful re-entry into mainstream life.

According to Patzelt *et al.* (2014) many prisons have introduced educational programmes that prepare inmates for reintegration into work and society after release. In their study they demonstrated that through a specialised programme on entrepreneurship education in prison was found to be particularly effective because in addition to providing an alternative career path, it transforms prisoners' attitudes toward themselves, their current situation, and others in their environment. A prerequisite for persistence with the entrepreneurship programme was that prisoners had a personal agency mind-set of internalising blame, maintaining low pessimism, and believing in their ability to control future outcomes. This mind-set helped activate opportunity recognition processes that served as vehicles for persistence in and successful completion of that particular educational programme.

### *3. The Education Profile of Inmates in the four Countries that participated in Pebble Research*

In the sample of the participating countries in the Pebble project detainees of all ages had attended a wide array of educational, vocational and/or non-formal education courses prior to their incarceration. The profile of many of the detainees is one which corresponds to the conditions that possibly led them to the prison system in the first place and it is not different from the profile one expects to find in other countries as well as demonstrated in the previous section. Among the detainees, there were a high proportion of drug users and patients with mental health problems which significantly affected every educational effort in prison. The Italian sample (referred to Pescara prison) in particular provides a good picture of this profile that roughly corresponds to the following characteristics

- have had little or no work experience,
- have had no vocational training,
- might have had severe literacy gaps,
- had low self-esteem,
- lacked participatory skills,
- failed at school,
- might think that education has nothing to offer them.

The most notable feature in all the prison populations was the fact that the majority appeared to have lower or insufficient qualifications regardless of the age range they belonged. Moreover, in three of the four countries (Italy-Pescara prison, Greece-Korydallos prison and Cyprus) there was high percentage of foreign nationals serving as inmates who presented an additional challenge to the respective systems because of their specialised needs in relation to the language of the country. In a survey trying to identify the educational level of the inmates chosen to participate in the Pebble programme some interesting observations may be made. As may be seen in the table below (Table 1) the majority of the inmates from Italy-Pescara, Greece-Korydallos and Romania-Buziaş that participated in the survey had mostly Lower Secondary School education and below. In Greece 22,5% had no formal education whereas in Cyprus nearly 60% of the inmates had some kind of secondary education whereas the other percentage had post-secondary level education as well. Upon further probing into what appears to be a high percentage it emerged that this group of inmates in Cyprus had convictions on economic related offences.

Table 1 – Country\* Level of formal Education.

	No formal education	Primary school or lower	Lower Secondary school	Higher Secondary school	Technical secondary education	University, College
Italy-Pescara	3,4%	3,4%	65,5%	20,7%	3,4%	3,4%
Romania-Buziaş	0,0%	10,0%	67,5%	22,5%	0,0%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	22,5%	15,0%	50,0%	12,5%	0,0%	0,0%
Cyprus	0,0%	18,4%	18,4%	10,5%	28,9%	23,7%
Total	6,8%	12,2%	49,7%	16,3%	8,2%	6,8%

In order to get a more in-depth understanding of the perceived level of competence in each skill inmates were asked to rate how they thought they could perform in reading, basic arithmetic, handling their finances and ICT skills. Below we present in frequency tables the way the inmates responded to the questions of the structured questionnaire by country. The results presented first in Tables 2, 3 and 4 refer to the skill of literacy.

To get a sense of the skills inmates had prior to their incarceration in three of the four countries they were asked to indicate their ability to read and comprehend something in (national) language before entering the prison. This connects to what was discussed earlier about the low levels of literacy as a contributing factor to deviance. Indeed their answers provide ample support for this connection. The fact that in two of the three countries more than half of them indicated an average level should



be interpreted as indeed a low ability score. The Cypriot case should not be seen as typical for the reasons explained earlier.

Table 2 – Country\* How easy do you find it to read a text in (language)?

	Very easy	Fairly easy	Average	Fairly difficult	Very difficult
Italy-Pescara	45,2%	51,6%	3,2%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	65,0%	25,0%	5,0%	2,5%	2,5%
Greece-Korydallos	37,5%	27,5%	32,5%	0,0%	2,5%
Cyprus	71,1%	13,2%	10,5%	5,3%	0,0%
Total	55,0%	28,2%	13,4%	2,0%	1,3%

Table 3 – Country\* How easy do you find it to comprehend something you read in (language) i.e a page?

	Very easy	Fairly easy	Average	Fairly difficult	Very difficult
Italy-Pescara	28,1%	65,6%	6,2%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	60,0%	22,5%	12,5%	5,0%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	40,0%	25,0%	22,5%	10,0%	2,5%
Cyprus	57,9%	15,8%	15,8%	7,9%	2,6%
Total	47,3%	30,7%	14,7%	6,0%	1,3%

Table 4 – Country \* How was your ability to read and comprehend something in (national) language before entering the prison?

	Poor	Average	Good
Italy-Pescara	na	na	na
Romania-Buziaş	12,5%	65,0%	22,5%
Greece-Korydallos	5,0%	60,0%	35,0%
Cyprus	5,3%	26,3%	68,4%
Total	7,6%	50,8%	41,5%

Moving on to the next skill in trying to probe into the perceived level of competence in each skill inmates were asked to rate how they thought they could perform in basic arithmetic. Below we present in frequency tables the way the inmates responded to the questions by country. Table 5 refers to the skill of arithmetic (adding and subtracting numbers up to 100).

Table 5 – Country \* How easy can you add/ subtract numbers up to 100?

How easy can you perform additions with numbers up to 100?					
	Very easy	Fairly easy	Average	Fairly difficult	Very difficult
Italy-Pescara	71,9%	21,9%	6,2%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	55,0%	25,0%	12,5%	0,0%	7,5%
Greece-Korydallos	35,0%	30,0%	30,0%	2,5%	2,5%
Cyprus	65,8%	21,1%	10,5%	2,6%	0,0%
Total	56,0%	24,7%	15,3%	1,3%	2,7%

How easy can you perform subtractions with numbers up to 100?					
	Very easy	Fairly easy	Average	Fairly difficult	Very difficult
Italy-Pescara	68,8%	25,0%	6,2%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	47,5%	30,0%	15,0%	0,0%	7,5%
Greece-Korydallos	22,5%	37,5%	35,0%	2,5%	2,5%
Cyprus	63,2%	21,1%	13,2%	2,6%	0,0%
Total	49,3%	28,7%	18,0%	1,3%	2,7%

Following the same logic as with literacy and in order to get a sense of the numeracy skill inmates had prior to their incarceration in three of the four countries they were asked to indicate their ability to deal with numbers up to 100 before entering the prison (Table 6). Similarly, in two of the three countries two out of three inmates indicated that they possessed that skill at a poor or an average level. Again this finding should be interpreted as indeed a low ability score.

Table 6 – Country\* How was your ability to deal with numbers (up to 100) before entering the prison?

	Poor	Average	Good
Italy-Pescara	na	na	na
Romania-Buziaş	15,0%	70,0%	15,0%
Greece-Korydallos	5,0%	60,0%	35,0%
Cyprus	10,5%	21,1%	68,4%
Total	10,2%	50,8%	39,0%

In the next barrage of questions inmates were asked to indicate their skills in relation to ICT and specifically their perceived competence in dealing with internet and managing e-mails (Table 7).

Table 7 – Country\* Have you even owned a PC.

	yes	no
Italy-Pescara	74,2%	25,8%
Romania-Buziaş	87,5%	12,5%
Greece-Korydallos	82,5%	17,5%
Cyprus	78,9%	21,1%
Total	81,2%	18,8%

The majority of inmates in all countries did own a computer. Asked about their perceived level of competence in dealing with a PC there was a fairly normal distribution of that competence. More specifically when they were asked about two fairly common uses of a PC (browsing the Internet and using e-mails) the majority appeared to be competent users. The Italian sample in Pescara prison appeared to somewhat deviate from that level of skill (Tables 8-9).

Table 8 – Country\* How well can you work with a PC.

	Very well	Fairly well	Average	Not very well	Not well at all
Italy-Pescara	20,0%	26,7%	30,0%	20,0%	3,3%
Romania-Buziaş	52,5%	27,5%	17,5%	2,5%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	15,0%	20,0%	25,0%	7,5%	32,5%
Cyprus	28,9%	23,7%	26,3%	10,5%	10,5%
Total	29,7%	24,3%	24,3%	9,5%	12,2%

Table 9 – Country \* Browsing the Internet & Using e-mails.

	Browsing the Internet		Using e-mails	
	yes	no	yes	No
Italy-Pescara	60,6%	39,4%	48,5%	51,5%
Romania-Buziaş	97,5%	2,5%	77,5%	22,5%
Greece-Korydallos	90,0%	10,0%	77,5%	22,5%
Cyprus	81,6%	18,4%	73,7%	26,3%
Total	83,4%	16,6%	70,2%	29,8%

Lastly inmates were asked to indicate how well they thought they could manage their personal budgeting. The majority in most countries indicated that they could do it fairly well (Table 10).

Table 10 – Country\* How well can you manage your personal budgeting.

	Very well	Fairly well	Average	Not very well	Not well at all
Italy-Pescara	39,4%	42,4%	12,1%	3,0%	3,0%
Romania-Buziaş	20,0%	57,5%	10,0%	12,5%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	27,5%	37,5%	15,0%	12,5%	7,5%
Cyprus	42,1%	28,9%	18,4%	5,3%	5,3%
Total	31,8%	41,7%	13,9%	8,6%	4,0%

In the presiding tables is that the majority of the inmates that were surveyed in this study indicated that they had a good or fairly good level in the four basic skills that the Pebble research dealt with. However, of the 4 skills ICT and budgeting appear to be less well possessed personal skills. Specifically there was an increased proportion of inmates that indicated that they thought their competence in these skills were average or below average. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of Cyprus the interviewer who was conducting the questionnaires and had a good picture of most of the interviewees indicated to the principle investigator that the picture presented by the inmates about themselves was often an over-estimation of their real capabilities and the reason that they gave such responses was the fact that they felt uncomfortable telling the truth about it. This is a very important observation to keep in mind when interpreting these findings. Moreover, the latter point is strengthened by the responses the inmates gave to the question about the necessity of such skills for their lives and their willingness to develop them further as the next set of tables present. Table 11 presents the findings about the necessity of teaching these skills in prison.

In an environment where a number of studies suggest that apart from systemic challenges to introducing educational programmes in prison one should not dismiss the fact that there are also individual challenges. For example McCulley, Gillespie and Murr (2014) argue that correctional educators are often trying to teach students who have failed within regular schools: they are apathetic learners; have learning, emotional, or drug problems (and sometimes co-occurring disabilities); and have a history of violence and low self-concept. The four Pebble skills are considered by the vast majority of the inmates that participated in the survey to be either very or fairly necessary (Table 12).

Table 11 – How necessary are the four basic skills?

Literacy necessary					
	Very necessary	Fairly necessary	Average	Not very necessary	Not necessary at all
Italy-Pescara	75,8%	18,2%	3,0%	3,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	32,5%	0,0%	65,0%	2,5%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	75,0%	20,0%	2,5%	2,5%	0,0%
Cyprus	73,7%	21,1%	5,3%	0,0%	0,0%
Numeracy necessary					
Italy-Pescara	78,8%	21,2%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	30,0%	2,5%	67,5%	0,0%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	72,5%	22,5%	0,0%	5,0%	0,0%
Cyprus	57,9%	23,7%	13,2%	0,0%	5,3%
ICT necessary					
Italy-Pescara	69,7%	27,3%	0,0%	3,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	42,5%	15,0%	42,5%	0,0%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	82,5%	12,5%	5,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Cyprus	68,4%	18,4%	7,9%	0,0%	5,3%
Budgeting necessary					
Italy-Pescara	60,6%	36,4%	3,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	27,5%	27,5%	45,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	72,5%	20,0%	7,5%	0,0%	0,0%
Cyprus	81,6%	10,5%	5,3%	2,6%	0,0%

Table 12 – How interested would you be to engage in a programme that uses new technologies to promote these skills?

	Very interested	Fairly interested	Average	Not very interested	Not interested at all
Italy-Pescara	97,0%	3,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	80,0%	15,0%	0,0%	5,0%	0,0%
Greece-Korydallos	70,0%	25,0%	2,5%	2,5%	0,0%
Cyprus	78,9%	13,2%	2,6%	2,6%	2,6%

Moreover and possibly more importantly when they were asked about how interested and motivated they would be to engage in a programme that uses new technologies to promote these skills more than 9 out of 10 provided positive responses. The level of motivation was equally high (Table 13).

Table 13 – Country\* How motivated are you to be actively engaged in a programme that uses new technologies to promote these skills?

	Very motivated	Fairly motivated	Average	Not very motivated	Not motivated at all
Italy-Pescara	93,9%	6,1%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Romania-Buziaş	70,0%	20,0%	2,5%	5,0%	2,5%
Greece-Korydallos	69,2%	25,6%	2,6%	2,6%	0,0%
Cyprus	76,3%	13,2%	5,3%	0,0%	5,3%
Total	76,7%	16,7%	2,7%	2,0%	2,0%

#### 4. Talking about Basic Skills

Many of the issues that were explored in the questionnaires were further elaborated with personal open ended interviews with a selection of 10 inmates from each participating prison. Below we present a summary of the common issues that emerged in the answers that were given to the questions that were posed to them.

##### 4.1 Literacy Skills

When asked about their literacy skills the inmates who took part in the personal interviews gave answers that focused on issue that connect-

ed with their everyday life and also to necessity of having such skills to a level that would allow them to function better in society when released. From reading the prison rules to helping them read better books that they borrowed from the school library. Furthermore such a skill would allow them to acquire a better communication with the public authorities, develop their personality and improve themselves. There were references that such a skill will allow those who had children to help them once they got out.

#### *4.2 Numeracy Skills*

Similarly, inmates gave analogous responses to the numeracy skills questions. Even though it appears that during the interviews there was an association of numeracy skills to mathematics it was widely acknowledged that people who possess that skill could perform their everyday tasks with more confidence and self-assurance.

#### *4.3 ICT Skills*

Regarding the ICT skill it was clear to the inmates that ICTs are to be found in all aspects of contemporary life and its ever changing nature which makes this skill a necessary skill to make it in modern world. Among the issues that appeared in all countries is the use of ICTs in order to find a job/employment after their release from prison, to communicate free and easy, to have free access to information and on a range of topics and importantly the fact the pc and internet is a pleasant form of entertainment. McCulley, Gillespie and Murr (2014) in their study found that the use of adaptive educational technology was also found to improve low literate incarcerated adults' reading competency scores.

#### *4.4 Personal Budgeting*

This appeared to be a newfound concept to many inmates and once they found out what it meant they were quick to indicate that it was certainly a very important one and that it would definitely make them deal with their financial issues more competently both within the prison but most importantly once they were released.

### *5. Motivation to Engage in a Programme which Promotes Basic Skills*

This was a key issue in all the countries that participated in the Pebble research project because positive motives to engage in such a programme would ensure its success. The responses in the interviews corroborated

the answers that were given in the structured questionnaire that such a programme on its own was a motivating factor in itself for someone to participate. In Cyprus, there were two very interesting responses as well. One which made reference to the existence of accreditation to the skills offered and another which raised the issue of a reduced sentence when somebody engaged in education in prison. In Romania, inmates expressed their willingness to participate in a programme that promoted basic skills, because of different reasons, namely to have life expectations like going back to school, having a job, saving money, having better everyday lifestyle, being able to help others around them. In Greece, there were answers that made reference to having a creative pursuit in prison thus creating an illusion of escape. Similarly, in Italy the detainees were positively motivated citing reasons such as improving themselves for the sake of their children by being a good example for them, being equipped with the right knowledge tools while other realised that since they were going to spend so many years in prison this participation would make time go faster with their learning process.

Studies, such as the one by Delaere, Caluwé and Clarebout (2013), point to interesting results about prisoners' motivational orientations to follow an educational programme. Specifically the study of Delaere *et al.* (2013) revealed that prisoners had a specific goal they wanted to reach (e.g., to heighten their status). Additionally, they found that prisoners with an avoidance posture sought more social contact through prison education pointing to what we will refer to later on as external motives. Regarding the issue of motivation and incentives of inmates to participate in a project for the acquisition of basic skills, in the Pebble research inmates initially tended to focus on intrinsic motives. Intrinsic motives, however, though very important were not always enough. There was a need to introduce motives connected to privileges within the prison but also with issues that connected to the reduction of the prison sentence and the accreditation of the skills that were being taught. These motives depended on the profile of the inmate. Inmates serving long sentences would be tempted by privileges within the prison but others serving medium to less sentences would be tempted by reduction of the sentence something that was not in place nor was there any immediate prospect for such a measure to be introduced in the short term.

## 6. Conclusions

This link between education and incarceration is critical to examine in light of the increasing rate of incarceration in many countries. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in the United States, more than 1 in every 100 adults is confined in jail or prison and over a span of



almost twenty years, the number of people confined in jail or prison grew considerably. The majority of this group includes individuals between the ages of 18–34 years old (Vacca, 2004). Further, the overall populations of individuals who are incarcerated represent primarily ethnic minorities, gender, and education. For example, men are ten times more likely to be incarcerated than women. It is also evident that the educational profile of individuals who are incarcerated is distinct. Overall, the incarcerated population is less educated than the general public (Erisman and Contardo, 2005). On average, the incarcerated population has lower levels of competence in specific dimensions of literacy and the ability to perform mathematical tasks based on the numeric values that are embedded within a text (Greenberg *et al.*, 2007). The same study also indicated that compared to 82% of people in the general population, only 33% of the prison population has earned at least a high school diploma. As a result of their limited educational backgrounds, many incarcerated individuals demonstrate deficits in basic skill areas including reading and writing.

Providing the incarcerated population with access to education would prepare them to return to the community with marketable skills. Moreover it is evident from the research reviewed so far that indicates that inmates who have access to education while incarcerated are less likely to recidivate. Further, the higher the level of education obtained, the lower the recidivism rate (Hrabowski and Robbi, 2002). It is within this framework that the usefulness of the scope and the target of the Pebble research project should be examined. The three groups of respondents in all the countries were uniform when asked about the usefulness of the scope and target of the Pebble research. Inmates focused on issues that connected with skills that would prepare them for their life. Special reference was made to the ICT skills, which as thought of as essential in every aspect of contemporary life.

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## CHAPTER 3

### INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PROCESSES AND TOOLS – THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH IN PESCARA PRISON

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#### 1. Foreword

In this chapter, first of all we sketch the general outline of the research on the topic of training needs analysis among the prison population (sphere and methodology, phases, purpose, research tools, section 2).

Then we set out to study the training demand, both of the single prisoners and of the prison administration, starting from an overview of the definitions offered by the scientific literature on Training Needs Analysis. As a result, we analyse individual training demand as the expression of a need linked to a particular context, to be combined at macro level (mission of the prison administration) and micro level (single prisoners expressing needs with regard to their re-education programme and the support and guidance this requires), in observance of the contextual restrictions (section 3). In particular, as far as processes are concerned (section 4), we will focus on pertinent approaches suited to the context in question (section 5), as well as some training need ('demand') analysis techniques and tools found in the scientific literature coming mainly from Anglo-American sources (sections 6, 7 and 8).

Lastly, in section 9 we set out the empirical findings on the training needs management process within Pescara prison in the period when the research was carried out (2013–2015).

The hope is that the indications gathered during the research can contribute to the open consultation on prison reform underway in Italy, which the *Stati Generali dell'esecuzione penale*<sup>1</sup>, promoted by the Ministry of Justice, are currently working on.

\* The chapter is the result of the joint work of the two authors, but paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 were edited by Francesca Torlone and paragraph 9 by Stefania Basilisco.

<sup>1</sup> In particular the reference is to Roundtable 9 on 'Education, Culture and Sport', <[https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg\\_2\\_19.wp](https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_2_19.wp)> (01/16).

## *2. Pebble Research*

### *2.1 Sphere and Methodology of the Research*

A transformative methodological approach was adopted. The aim of the research was not just to understand the situations and phenomena subject to the study, but also to introduce change, both with regard to the single inmates involved in learning pathways and the prison organisation generating, managing and monitoring these changes in order to implement re-education processes for the prisoners. The subject of our study refers to the analysis, survey and interpretation of the individual training needs emerging in four prison settings in Cyprus, Greece (Korydallos), Italy (Pescara) and Romania (Buzias) and the definition of educational programmes that can provide suitable and appropriate answers (also with the use of new technologies). In particular, this chapter deals with the survey context of Pescara prison.

Owing to the importance of the topics tackled and the complexity both of the subject matter and the context of the investigation, careful reflection was required right from the start as to which research strategies to use.

In all four countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Romania), the field-work was preceded by a survey of the context – consisting of study and analysis of the literature and previous field research carried out at national and international level. This was performed in the period from 2013 to 2015, following an integrated approach which combined quantitative (questionnaires compiled by the single inmates) and qualitative research tools (focus groups aimed at the prison staff or the prison director, school teachers, inmates, volunteers, prison education officers and prisoner representatives; semi-structured interviews carried out with the single inmates on several occasions during the research).

The various phases of the research programme involved the direct participation and involvement of different levels of prison staff (prison director, prison education officers, school teachers, volunteers, IT technicians and accounts officer), the pilot group of inmates involved in the experiment, and researchers. The specific research actions were drawn up, adapted and tested during the various meetings and joint participation opportunities. This ranged right from the first draft research proposal, to the formulation of individual spheres of interest, which went hand in hand with defining the inmates' personal and professional growth objectives, as well as selecting the survey tools, and reading, interpreting and returning the results. The ongoing shared engagement in the research programme and results, within such a complex context, led to moments of self-diagnosis and fostered and sparked processes of cultural and organisational change.

The research can be classed as 'action-research', since it is a systematic study that manages to combine action (that is, 'scientific study' of

the initial problem) and reflection (that is, analysis of the components in question), both of which with the aim of sparking processes of transformation and improvement in the persons and contexts involved. In this sense, the research fuels the educational action while it is being carried out and at the same time the educational action fuels the research. The transformations were evident in improvements and changes to prison administration practices, the introduction of innovations on one hand (e.g. activation of the Pebble Lab which led to changes in the inmates' and prison staff's day-to-day activities), and the more widespread understanding of them within the organisation on the other. In this sense, the research featured

- a high level of collaboration;
- on-site realisation;
- regular, cyclical use of feedback;
- participation;
- a 'learning' aspect, enabling alterations and changes to be made to tools and techniques as the research was being carried out, in order to stick more closely to the initial research goals;
- the study of particularly complex phenomena (e.g. individuals' representation and expression of their training needs in order to build a pathway aimed at re-education, rehabilitation and re-entry into employment);
- an eclectic methodology.

The style of the research was 'evidence-based'. This gave the possibility to use the empirical evidence and knowledge accumulated in the surveyed settings to orient the educational choices made by the researchers and prison administrators.

## 2.2 *The Research Phases*

The research was divided into several phases. They were:

- *Phase 1. Outline of the goals.* In this phase we pinpointed the general question and the correlated specific questions. The general question concerns the identification of regulations, procedures, methods, processes and techniques that foster people's growth and the services existing for that purpose. In particular, we looked into how the educational activities can better fit the demand for growth and re-education expressed by the inmates, along with that of the prison administration (in the persons of the prison director and the prison education officers). To this end we studied how the set of factors forming the learning potential contained in the prison setting (in particular in those activities and procedures defined centrally and by each single penal institute) could be used, as well as the sustainability of the training demand in the particular con-

text where it arises and is satisfied. With regard to this goal, we studied training needs analysis methods, techniques, tools and procedures, adapted to fit the context, as well as what educational response could be given to this demand, also through new technologies (e-learning).

- *Phase 2. Collection and study of the scientific literature.* The collection and study of the sector literature helped
  - define the ‘knowledge gaps’ linked to the analysis of individuals and organisations’ training needs and to the preparation of responses to these needs;
  - perfect the theoretical foundations for the on-site testing, also with relation to the specific prison context;
  - define the models to use for the research design, management, analysis, reporting and impact.
- *Phase 3. Review of the research design.* This phase consisted of putting together the overall research design, while making adjustments to processes, techniques and tools in order to achieve the specific goals. The educational action was built up on the evidence found during the research, and ‘transformed’ in line with it.
- *Phase 4. Definition of the tools.* Prior to defining the research tools, indicators and descriptors were singled out to keep under observation. They were used to form questionnaires, outlines for conducting focus groups, outlines for semi-structured interviews, etc.
- *Phase 5. Experimentation.* The experimentation involved processes and tools that needed to be adopted to achieve the research goals. The definition, implementation, experimentation and evaluation phases were carried out in sequence, in order to realise the transformations that the research set out to make.

The experimentation phase began by identifying the professional figures who perform educational functions for the inmates. Therefore, the target was broad and varied. They were given ‘training’ sessions to share methods, tools, approaches and procedures that could be used with the single inmates.

This was followed by the selection of the pilot group of inmates to involve in the learning pathway that was drawn up and monitored during the research. In every country, the pilot group consisted of 15-20 inmates, who were also selected on the basis of their penitentiary histories and sentencing (e.g. inmates with a long prison sentence were preferred over others in order, in theory, to guarantee continuity and regularity).

- *Phase 6. Collection of the empirical data.* The data collection phase was in preparation for the next phase.
- *Phase 7. Analysis of the empirical data.* The analysis performed was qualitative, supported by quantitative data from the sample.
- *Phase 8. Drafting of this research report.*

### 2.3 Subject of the Research

The research examined the training needs analysis and interpretation processes which take place in the prison context (excluding specific institutions, such as high security prisons, etc.). We found and analysed the training demand relating to the following main areas: language literacy, digital skills, mathematics, finance and budget management. Further, nevertheless recurrent demand was found pertaining to other areas (e.g. communication, English as a foreign language, Spanish and conflict management).

### 2.4 The Research Tools

Table 1 shows the tools drawn up and used during the research in order to explore the training needs analysis processes.

Table 1 – Pebble research tools.

Tool	Indicators used	Purpose of the tool
Needs Assessment Tool	- Entry level	To test the skills possessed by every single inmate before starting the learning pathway
Outline for conducting individual TNA ( <i>Training Needs Analysis</i> ) interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training subject/contents</li> <li>- Expected level of achievement</li> <li>- Reasons for requesting the training (personal interest, also for better job prospects in the mid- to long term; to improve performance levels in activities performed in the institute)</li> <li>- New behaviour and knowledge expected by the participant at the end of the training</li> <li>- Blended method (classroom, distance learning, incorporated with the context)</li> <li>- Organisational and logistical indications (compatibility with the correctional plan underway)</li> </ul>	To make a prior analysis of the training needs
Individual Learning Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initial entry level (beginner, intermediate, advanced)</li> <li>- Outcome of individual interviews</li> </ul>	To record the potential growth and improvement of the single inmates with regard to the re-educational goals drawn up by the prison administration as part of the correctional programme



Tool	Indicators used	Purpose of the tool
Customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Correspondence of the learning pathway with the correctional programme and own growth and improvement goals</li> <li>- Suitability of the various professional figures for the educational function performed</li> <li>- Suitability of the logistical aspects (e.g. Pebble lab access timetable compatible with other correctional activities, interviews, etc.)</li> <li>- Suitability of the teaching material</li> <li>- Correspondence of the level of achievement</li> <li>- ....</li> </ul>	Individual assessment of the learning pathway and materials provided (online platform, etc.)
e-learning contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training goals</li> <li>- Expected results</li> <li>- Training contents</li> <li>- Programme</li> </ul>	Assessment of pertinence, quality and benefit with regard to the training demand expressed

### 3. General Definitions of Training Needs Analysis

#### 3.1 Introduction on Terms

The scientific literature offers a wide variety of definitions of TNA (Training Needs Analysis). In some cases, it is interpreted as *Training Needs Analysis*, in others as *Training Needs Assessment*, or, acronyms aside, other labels used are *Pre-Training Assessment*, *Front End Analysis*, *Problem Analysis*, or simply *Analysis* (Rossett, 1987).

Other authors (Eraut, 2007; Craig, 1994) instead consider reference to LNA-*Learning Needs Analysis* to be more appropriate in consideration of the changes prompted as the consequence of the educational action and the central position of the *learner/employee* (rather than *employer*) in the activated learning processes (these authors refer in particular to the change processes prompted in the organisational contexts).

In any case, all the terms mentioned refer to a systematic data collection process, activated by the organisation, for the analysis of needs and/or problems in achieving the growth objectives set out by the prison administration for each inmate within the correctional programme. In this frame, placing inmates (singularly or in groups) on learning and growth pathways (Chiu *et al.*, 1999) appears a pertinent response to the ‘problem’

or demand expressed by each one. It is obvious that for us these processes are not just restricted to structured education and training, but the set of activity systems that generate learning in the contexts under examination.

Among the various terms proposed, in this work we adopt the one most commonly used in organisations: *Training Needs Analysis* (hereinafter TNA).

### 3.2 TNA in the Prison Setting

The definitions of TNA are either generic, or concern a specific sphere of interventions and the respective functions in question. In this latter case, the reference is to those who define TNA as a consultation (Dahiya *et al.*, 2011) and systematic exploration of the human resources management policies and their development potential (e.g. Sweeney, 1999), and a process to identify performance conditions and training needs, in order to improve individual productivity (Miller and Osinski, 1996). In the penitentiary field, we believe that productivity can still be an analysis indicator, if referred to the ways in which the inmate performs the activities (inside and outside the prison walls) and the results obtained.

In terms of the *Instructional System Design*<sup>2</sup> guiding the analysis process, the need is considered as the source of information required for all of the consequent training programme, which is ongoing and constantly under adaptation (Goldstein, 1993).

### 3.3 Training Needs Analysis

Some definitions found in the specialised literature associate the definition of training demand with the function of TNA: for example, Goldstein (1993) defines TNA as a process aimed at providing answers in the training sphere through the identification of

- the area or sector where the educational intervention is needed,
- the person whose competences and knowledge need to be boosted,
- the contents and subjects to be dealt with.

Following the Kaufman model, we identified further functions of TNA (Rossett, 1987: 15) with respect to the individual. They correspond to the collection and analysis of information on:

- optimum performances/knowledge for the single inmates,
- the single inmates' current performance/knowledge,

<sup>2</sup> *Instructional System Design* (Gagné, 1965) is the field of investigation that deals with defining the rules for choosing the most fitting education methods while taking the 'learning conditions' and different types of learning into account.

- observation by the (internal and external) staff on behaviour, activities, etc. which can demonstrate the inmates' training needs (for Italy the reference is to *scientific observation* as per art. 28 of presidential decree no. 230 dated 30.6.2000),
- existent problems and respective causes,
- solutions put forward by the penitentiary institute's group of observers.

The attention can also be placed on the organisational dimension, namely the correctional programme that the prison administration draws up with a team of experts to trace the single inmates' rehabilitation and re-education pathways. In this sense, TNA is identified as a process – constantly underway – that helps collect data and information on the training needs, and is instrumental to planning and developing the correctional programme.

While on one hand TNA has the function of identifying a training need or gap – depending on which definition you prefer – to put together one or more ad hoc intervention 'packages' (reactive approach to solve the problem or satisfy the need found, McArdle, 1998: 4), on the other the training cannot make up for all the 'performance deficiencies', whose solution is in no way correlated to the acquisition and increase in competences. Nevertheless, when it is, the strategic function of TNA is to propose necessary and pertinent investments in training, which can value the human capital and motivate the inmates to build their own growth pathways.

Hence, the functions of TNA can be summed up as follows:

- to align the training with the correctional programme,
- to provide the basis for the choice of pertinent training actions to fill the 'gap' found or to (help) satisfy the problems in the performance of services inside or outside the institute.

### 3.4 *The Inmates' Training Demand*

The micro dimension allows us to explore the specific and singular aspects of the potential participants, as regards their growth possibilities and prospects of filling their shortcomings and gaps so that they can meet the performance requests made by the penitentiary institute and the world of work.

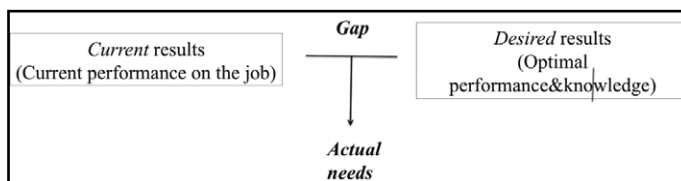
In the micro dimension, it becomes essential for the single people to take account of their prospects and training requirements and to express them in the manner that best reflects their needs. Sharing learning goals, results and expected behaviour with the single inmates encourages and motivates them not just to take part, but above all to learn and take the training to heart, so that they immediately transfer it to work practices

(inside and outside the prison) and the actions of their everyday lives. An aspect subject to a different mode of investigation concerns the inmates' participation in building their training course, which gives them the perception of having more control over their growth process (Ford and Kraiger, 1995), the goals to achieve and the educational actions to do so, which they themselves have planned. The greater the involvement in the planning phase (needs analysis included), the greater the motivation to assess the efficacy of the interventions that the single inmates have built together with the prison staff and external experts (e.g. who are part of the Correctional and Observation Group – *Gruppo di Osservazione e Trattamento*-G.O.T. – following art. 29, clause 2 of presidential decree no. 230 dated 30.6.2000) as part of their personal growth and re-education programmes. In this view, it becomes essential to (re)build the legal, penitentiary, social, professional and educational history of each inmate (e.g. activities carried out, interpersonal relationships, disciplinary sanctions, unlawful behaviour, critical events occurring during activities, perception by others, etc.) so as to set out an authentic pathway, with shared expectations and goals, and consistent phases, schedules and targets, to be pursued within the penitentiary institute supporting and sponsoring the pathway.

### 3.5 The Training Gap and TNA

In general terms, the definitions link TNA to the analysis of a need (or gap) arising from a 'gap in results' that needs to be overcome (Kaufman, 1982; Kaufman *et al.*, 1979). The data taken into consideration concerns the competences, knowledge, skills and aptitudes currently possessed and performances currently achieved by the single inmates, and those that they ideally need to possess in order to improve current performances or correct aspects of their character, attitudes, professionalism or personality (Figure 1). This must be accompanied by a priority assessment, also in consideration of the available resources.

Figure 1 – Data underlying the training gap.



In mathematical terms, we can interpret Kaufman's thinking with the following formula (Rossett, 1987: 16) which highlights the «gap» to be filled with educational interventions (Figure 2):

Figure 2 – Training Needs Equation (Wright and Geroy, 1992 in Jamil and Md Som, 2006:18).

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{Optimal/Expected performance / Knowledge / Behaviour} \\
 - \\
 \text{Current performance / Knowledge / Behaviour} \\
 = \\
 \text{Performance/Behaviour **need**}
 \end{array}$$

The training action is called upon to intervene in order to satisfy the *need*<sup>3</sup> (more than the *want*), as drawn up by the expert ‘observers’ inside the prison setting, and eliminate the gap between the inmates’ current and the optimal state of knowledge and behaviour and accompany them in the transition towards the growth and rehabilitation goals.

#### 4. Phases of the Training Needs Analysis Process

To understand the training need as a whole, it is necessary to perform analyses and observation involving the prison director, prison guards, volunteers, medical and nursing staff, surveillance magistrate and whoever else accompanies the inmates in their day-to-day actions and occupations in the prison environment. They help identify the right solution for the single inmates’ training needs during the implementation phase of the correctional programme. From the careful analysis of the inmates as they perform their day-to-day activities, inside and outside the walls, elements are acquired to assess the size of the demand connected to a *problem*, in terms of a ‘gap’ or performance problems (Figure 3) and the inmates’ more or less explicitly demonstrated and expressed aspirations to develop/acquire competences.

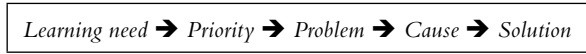
Figure 3 – Mathematical representation of the analysis of the problem generating the demand.

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{Analysis of the performance *desired/expected* by the prison} \\
 \text{administration with regard to the correctional programme drawn up} \\
 + \\
 \text{Analysis of the single inmates’ *current* performance} \\
 = \\
 \text{Size of the single inmates’ **problem**}
 \end{array}$$

<sup>3</sup> Here is the definition of *need* and *need assessment* provided by the founder of needs assessment (Kaufman, 1998: 87): «Needs assessment is the formal process of identifying needs as gaps between current and desired results, placing those needs in priority order based on the cost to meet each need versus the cost for ignoring it, and selecting the most important needs (problems or opportunities) for reduction or elimination».

Therefore, the process goes through phases of needs definition – framed within precise macro priorities – and problem generation, originating from one or more specific causes (lack of knowledge, motivation, maladjustment, etc.) (Figure 4). The instructional designer and developer are called upon to package the most suitable solution to these problems in a systematic and structured (and not haphazard) manner (Al-Khayyat and Elgamal, 1997).

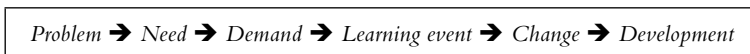
Figure 4 – The phases in the training needs analysis process.



### 5. From a Needs-Centred to Problem-Centred Approach

By framing training as a consumer good, some authors (Federighi, 2006) propose a education consumption process model prompted by the appearance of a problem (which generates a need perceived by the person in question), expressed in the demand to obtain a good (training). The process results in the consumption of one or more (formal, informal or ‘embedded’) educational events to satisfy the consciously and reasonably expressed demand to improve personal and professional living conditions. The transformation resulting from taking part in the educational event is depicted with respect to the problem that generated the need (e.g. the need to learn a language no longer exists at the end of a course, or it still exists but with a different intensity, dimension or characteristics). Further developments arise from the transformative process (new problems generating further needs or stabilisation of the balance prior to the appearance of the problem). In this model (Figure 5), the need is linked to a problem which follows from the inmates’ reflection and desire to make changes to their personal, social and working conditions (e.g. desire to understand the legal provisions issued during their prison lives so that they themselves can evaluate whether they are grounded or legitimate).

Figure 5 – Components of the education consumption process (Federighi, 2006: 55).



### 6. How to Conduct TNA – Some Models

The model by McGehee and Tayer (1961) suggests three necessary and mutually dependent levels so that the training needs analysis is not left to chance, but can be part of the same pathway followed by each inmate’s correctional programme:

- Organisation and implemented organisational changes (reference to the penitentiary institution's mission as such),
- Single inmate (reference to progress made by the single inmates with regard to their correctional plans),
- Activities, including professional activities, offered during the correctional activities (reference to the inmates' performances in terms of competences, aptitudes, behaviour and skills used during the correctional programme).

The identification and analysis of the inmates' training needs make up the most important phase in the whole cycle, as its pertinence and quality depend on this (Goldstein and Ford, 2002).

All the same, the empirical research shows that training needs analysis is often ignored, not considered or omitted, or done on a random or one-off basis (e.g. Mahler and Monroe, 1952 in Moore and Dutton, 1978). In some cases it is even performed in a harmful way, not so much with regard to formal interventions, but to the informal and unstructured ones.

### *7. Tools and Instruments for the TNA*

For the purpose of this research, some tools used in empirical research performed in various organisational contexts were selected as a guideline. From the more dated ones gathered by Moore and Dutton (1978), the scientific literature offers a range of available tools to find training needs (see Table 2), used over an extended length of time (Jamil and Md Som, 2006). These are:

- Direct observation,
- Questionnaires,
- Semi-structured interviews,
- Consultations, meetings, interviews (individual and group),
- Consultation of the specialised literature on techniques, methods of use and empirical evidence on effects and efficacy,
- Focus groups,
- Tests/forms,
- Job descriptions,
- Performance or, for some (Gilbert, 1978), performer assessments,
- Brainstorming,
- Analysis of selected samples.

The tools to find qualitative data (observation, interviews, focus groups, consultation of specialised literature) – usually requiring more time and financial resources – require an expert analyst with consolidated communication, listening, interpersonal and observation skills, who can analyse the objective and subjective aspects put across by the specific target group under examination.

Table 2 – Overview of some TNA tools.

Survey tools	Main Characteristics
Questionnaires (paper or electronic version using software)	<p>These are the most widely used TNA tool owing to their inexpensiveness, straightforwardness, simplicity and ease of use. The questions can be structured (McClelland, 1994) as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– closed-ended questions</li> <li>– open-ended questions</li> <li>– multiple choice questions</li> <li>– assessment questions with a set range of marks</li> <li>– classification questions</li> </ul> <p>With a combination of closed and open-ended questions, it is possible to collect quali-quantitative assessments.</p> <p>The use of questionnaires requires expertise in defining their layout, questions (how many, which and what type), descriptors, distribution, assessment and analysis of the answers provided. At times subsequent integrations are needed to fully understand the performance gap and organisational and individual elements and activities.</p>
Observation	<p>It can be used to find gaps in behaviour and hard and soft know-how. The observer's analysis skills influence the results of the observation. Use of observation is recommended in addition to other tools (e.g. questionnaires).</p>
Focus Groups	<p>These are group discussions on a specific topic, involving a variable number of people (8-12). They are pertinent (McClelland, 1994) insofar as the people involved in the discussion are in different ways linked to the need and/or individual who will receive the educational intervention (prison administration managers, prison education-correctional officers, school teachers, volunteers involved in educational functions, penitentiary officers, inmates, etc.). The range of people in the group can provide valid cues for reflection on the learning pathway to be implemented (or not) but it could require the group members to possess conflict management skills, empathetic listening and communication competences, and skills in 'investigating' the unsaid. In this case, the facilitator is called upon to perform an important role as mediator, to manage the discussion and the active involvement of everyone in the discussion. In this case too, use of a focus group can be accompanied by other training needs survey tools (e.g. questionnaires).</p>
Brainstorming	<p>This is another example of a group discussion, which can be used to collect a large number and types of input from different figures and departments.</p>
Interviews	<p>These provide a large amount of qualitative data (like focus groups and observation), which can integrate any quantitative data collected using other tools before (useful to prepare the questionnaire) or after the interview (useful to confirm, validate and clarify requirements). In order to focus on the inmates' training needs, it is essential for the interviewers to be able to make the necessary information emerge, also in connection with their experiences in prison and penitentiary history.</p>
Job descriptions	<p>These are the description of single components concerning performances and activities linked to a professional profile, if we are dealing with a work task-related training need (inside or outside the penitentiary institution).</p>



Survey tools	Main Characteristics
Tests/Forms	They can be used to measure levels of individual knowledge, competences and aptitudes. They highlight if the performance problem is linked to a lack of know-how, technical or behavioural skills and provide valid support in identifying the solution. A limit is whether reliable tests can be drawn up to measure the existent cognitive situation of the individual doing the test (Steadham, 1980 in Goldstein and Ford, 2002).
Documents available within the institution	These documents provide evidence on problematic aspects of the single inmates. They are useful for an in-depth analysis of individual needs: drop-out rate from previous school, training or professional activities, productivity in work experience (inside and outside the prison), individual interests, expert and penitentiary officer reports (correctional team), prison biography, significant elements in their past sentencing, management of moments of daily life in the penitentiary facility (interviews, sports and recreational activities, etc.), etc.

### 8. *The Choice of TNA Tool*

The choice of which tool(s) to use to perform TNA depends on criteria concerning the organisation, such as:

- Available resources (human, financial, time),
- Competences (internal or external) in preparing and using the tools,
- Sensitivity of the prison organisation and staff to the topics of re-education and the inmates' growth,
- Willingness of the decision-makers in the organisation (e.g. management),
- Ability of the organisation to plan and put together TNA with regard to educational actions aimed at inmates' re-education and rehabilitation,
- Initial skills levels of the inmates,
- Clarity in outlining the overall goals of each inmate's correctional plan.

### 9. *Tools and Processes for Individual Learning. The Process of Training Need Management in Pescara Prison*<sup>4</sup>

In this paper we report on the empirical results of the Pebble – *Prison Education Basic Skills Blended Learning* – research performed by the Italian team in Pescara Prison.

<sup>4</sup> Particular reference is made to the results of the Pebble (2013–2015) international research project, on the implementation of innovative basic-level skills learning for the prison population in selected facilities in Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Romania.

The aim of the research was to implement the inmates' basic competences through a training process 'integrated' into the penitentiary context, starting from four topic areas: Italian literacy, mathematics, digital (ICT) and financial skills, while emphasising the learning possibilities offered by prison life.

Analysis was made of the training needs of the single participants in the project and of the context. As a result, it was possible to pinpoint how to put together the learning pathway, by making the most of all the learning opportunities and resources present in the prison; furthermore, it also permitted a wider range of training in areas and topics that were initially not envisaged, using an innovative method based on the use of new technologies and the exploitation of educational elements present in the penitentiary context.

A first level of analysis of the 'context' concentrated on surveying the human resources and tools available in Pescara prison and on the ones that needed to be activated to achieve the learning goal.

Analysis of the resources present in Pescara prison context highlighted the following points:

- The workgroup created for the research enabled on-site collaboration and support from the University of Florence<sup>5</sup>,
- The presence of the school and expert teaching staff working in the context also enabled the inclusion of the 'school component' and the formal initiatives linked to this component in the tested innovative model,
- The presence of and work with existing training activities (theatre courses, the writing workshop, prison journal, various work activities with production labs, religious courses, etc.) provided support in the experimentation of the model,
- The resources *typical* of the context – prison guards and legal officers with past experience of working together – were actively involved right from the early stages of planning the training activities to the final moment of assessment and re-planning,
- The presence of volunteers who work in the prison, leading correctional and/or cultural activities, was a key springboard in implementing the model,
- The prison's consolidated relationships with external partners enabled promotion of the educational component in all work performance-linked activities.

From the start of the project, *meetings between the different professional figures* were staged to provide integrated information and training on the progress of the project. This way of working proved to be fundamental,

<sup>5</sup> University of Florence Department of Education and Psychology represented by Prof. Paolo Federighi and the research coordinator Dr. Francesca Torlone.

not just so that all the people involved received the same information, but also to boost the personnel's motivation so that they would perform their job in the best possible way, adding to the project's success.

### 9.1 *The Self-assessment Questionnaire*

The characteristics of the inmate population of Pescara prison were compared with those required of the set of inmates who would begin the training process<sup>6</sup>. As a result, a first group of people were singled out to receive a *self-assessment questionnaire*. The aim of this questionnaire was to measure the initial motivation levels to begin the Pebble learning pathway.

The questionnaire was given to 30 inmates of Pescara prison. The answers to the questionnaire highlighted the following points:

- All the respondents said they were interested in undertaking a training course to improve their basic competences,
- The declared level of education showed that most of the respondents possessed a low level of schooling (most had completed primary and secondary school), only 4 out of 30 had finished secondary school and only 1 out of 30 had begun a university course,
- In the respondents' self-assessment of the competences in their possession in the various areas of the project, the results were as follows:
  - most replied that their reading and writing skills in Italian were «sufficient», but all the respondents asked to improve some areas of their Italian language skills (grammar, writing, reading, difficulty in hypothetical sentences, etc.),
  - in mathematics most of the respondents replied that they had low and unsatisfactory skill levels,
  - in computer skills, most classed their skills as seriously lacking (most of the respondents declared that they did not know how to use an email or word processing programme, while wider skills were possessed in surfing the Internet),
  - in the financial and budgeting areas, most of the respondents assessed their competences as unsatisfactory (but not as bad as mathematics) and said that they wanted to improve them, especially the capacity to manage their own economic resources.
- To the question on the usefulness of improving their basic skills the respondents replied that they considered basic skills very useful, also in order to find a job at the end of their sentence,
- Most of the respondents selected the area of information technology as the one in which they felt most need to improve their competences.

<sup>6</sup> The following criteria were identified in order to select the pilot group: age not above 40, end of prison sentence not less than four years away, prior positive experience of a school training course.

The inmates were selected on the basis not only of the willingness expressed, their declared motivations and the personal and legal characteristics found in the observation data, but also on the basis of the questions asked to the prison director, the legal and pedagogical officers and the prison guards.

The following factors were taken into consideration when making the selection:

- Ability to follow the prison rules deduced from the lack or infrequency of disciplinary offences<sup>7</sup> and nevertheless maintaining respectful behaviour towards the staff in the various spheres of prison life, collaborating with the institution and participating in other correctional opportunities,
- Following/having followed a school education course,
- Definitive legal position with a medium to long-term sentence,
- No motions underway for alternative measures,
- No current requests for transfers to other penitentiary institutions.

### 9.2 *The Focus Group and Interviews in Pescara Prison*

Fourteen inmates were selected from the first 30 respondents, based on the requirements set out above and on the data collected through the other two analysis tools: the *focus group* and *interviews*.

Taking part in the *focus group* were:

- the Pescara prison director,
- the Pescara prison research project supervisor,
- the legal-pedagogical officer (representing the prison's education area),
- the head teacher of the school (Istituto Tecnico Statale Atherno – Manthonè),
- the teacher responsible for the school activities in prison,
- the prison's IT staff,
- 1 inmate selected from those who had replied to the questionnaire on the basis of the motivation shown.

The *mixed* participation of staff and presence of an inmate were the 'organisational' premise for sharing the project goals. What is more, it facilitated the identification of modes of school personnel – prison staff collaboration during the various steps of the training process.

In consideration of the fact that the school emerged as a fundamental resource in the context analysis, teaching proposals were collected during the *focus group* to implement as part of the Pebble project. Possibilities

<sup>7</sup> In this connection see art. 39 of the penitentiary law and art. 77 of Italian presidential decree no. 230/2000.

were explored to improve the inmates' education and training, starting from the experience acquired by the school personnel, which was then enriched by data and elements of observation coming from the prison staff<sup>8</sup>.

The reflection also focussed on the prison and school staff's assessment of the teaching tools and material available for the inmates' training programmes. The school personnel showed a great deal of open-mindedness towards IT training support, as a result of its previous organisation of IT courses, also to acquire the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Below are some essential points of the focus group, in question form:

- How do the inmates assess the competence level and collaboration of the teachers/trainers/legal-pedagogical officer involved in providing the training activities?
- How and how much can a training programme/course using new technologies to develop basic literacy, numeracy, IT and economic-financial skills change the current condition of the prison population? Are there suggestions to improve the programme planning?
- How can this pathway contribute to helping the prison population in future?
- What motivates the inmates to take part in this kind of programme?
- How do the teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff assess the equipment available in the institute to plan and provide training courses/programmes for the inmates?
- How do the teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff consider/assess the organisational aspects linked to planning and providing training courses/educational programmes in prison?
- How do the teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff consider/assess the educational and training programmes currently on offer in Pescara prison?
- What type of teaching materials are currently used to teach the various disciplines?
- How do the inmates, teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff consider the Pebble research goals (linked to the development of classroom and distance learning in the four topic areas mentioned)?

<sup>9</sup> Here is the ECDL project as defined by the school: The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). The European computer driving licence – also known in Italy under the English acronym ECDL, is a certificate that attests to the possession of basic computer skills. This consists of the ability to work on a personal computer using the common applications and basic knowledge of information technology (IT) at the level of general user. ECDL is a programme offered by CEPIS (Council of European Professional Informatics Societies), the institution that unites the European informatics associations. Italy is one of the member states and it is represented by AICA, the Italian Association for Informatics and Automatic Calculation. It is recognised in 148 countries around the world (the tests are available in 41 different languages), with 24,000 accredited test centres. Outside Europe, the ECDL is known as the International Computer Driving Licence or ICDL. The 'New ECDL' proposes new modules and allows greater flexibility as candidates can choose the combination of modules they consider most interesting and useful and ask for a certificate attesting to the exams passed at any time. To be more precise, three types of certifications can be obtained: ECDL Base, ECDL Full Standard and ECDL Profile, based on 17 modules grouped into three categories: Base, Standard and Advanced. ECDL Base includes four modules that supply the basic digital literacy skills and knowledge:

- basic computer concepts,
- fundamental Internet concepts,
- word processing,
- spreadsheets.

The *focus group* and the *meetings between professionals* enabled the sharing of important information as well as the joint planning of the research training sessions. This meant that optimal use could be made of the resources present and in particular of the school teachers and prison guards. By combining the interest expressed by the *trainees* on the use of technological and innovative tools with the *trainers'* willingness to use technological tools to support the learning, the prison managed to build a *WLG-Web Learning Group*, with the support of the TRIO Regione Toscana (Tuscany regional government) computer platform (see further).

The experience gained by the school personnel in the context, not only in the sphere of providing teaching modules but also in other specialised training programmes, as well as the solid involvement of the prison staff, facilitated the construction of a *blended* and *embedded* training process. Right from the start, the school permitted basic classroom teaching to be *provided* on the areas in question, also to the inmates in the Pebble project who were not enrolled on school courses. The school was willing to welcome the Pebble participants on the ECDL training lessons (even without taking the end exam) and supported the inmates in the online training.

The prison guards, IT technicians, volunteers and educators built, managed and monitored the inmates' testing of educational sessions inside the prison (e.g. by giving them support in using online materials, trying them out together above all in the initial phase of the experiment, observing the inmates' skills and aptitudes as they grew and changed during the experimentation, observing the impact that these transformations also had on the communication, relational etc. skills inside the prison).

As a result, this highlighted the possibility of creating a circularity between the various correctional activities present in the prison, starting from the training courses dedicated to forming basic skills.

The second phase of surveying the training needs, through the *semi-structured interviews*, enabled a closer look at the single inmates' motivations for taking part in the training course. Above all, the interviews provided the opportunity to verify the learning goals and every single participants' expectations for improvement.

The single inmates' training needs were interpreted together with the information from the school personnel, the prison staff and the internal 'observation documents', deriving from both the personal, legal and personality data and the previous training or work experience in the context.

In particular, in the interview it was possible to find information concerning every participating inmate's progress in the institute's 'correction-

al' programme<sup>10</sup>, as regards any existent activities and their consequent willingness to take part in the learning pathway. In the interviews the inmates were able to answer questions on how the prison activities are organised, to talk about their experience in terms of learning, satisfaction and efficacy compared to experiences in other activities, and to express the subjects dealt with in the project they thought they were more interested in and why. In addition, it was asked why they thought it useful to boost their skills in particular areas during their time in prison, in terms of the benefit they deemed could be derived for their activities or work tasks in everyday prison life.

As a result, it was possible to take account of the information provided directly by the people concerned. This information was added to the information from the prison staff and/or found in the observation documents. All this gave quite a clear picture for making the learning plan. However, at pedagogical level, this procedure sparked the participants' attention, prompting them to reflect on their reasons for learning (starting from the four subject areas) in terms of the improvement in their lives in the prison as well as the effect the improved skills could immediately have on the quality of their lives.

The interviews acted as a tool supporting the inmates' motivation to participate. The request to provide indications on which experts and professionals would work to build *individual learning plans raised the level of attention towards the project*. In addition, it provided *a positive stimulus in terms of strengthening self-esteem*, as the inmates felt they had been 'called upon' to contribute to a process usually decided on by the professionals and not explained to the inmates in constructive terms.

On the other hand, for the prison staff, collecting the above information and material was *a further tool to get to know the inmates themselves* (Ministero della Giustizia-Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria, 2013; Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria-Ufficio del Capo Dipartimento, 2011). This is of fundamental importance for the prison's organisational and correctional processes and its institutional goal, namely the educational purposes of the sentence.

To sum up, the administration of these tools proved useful for various reasons:

- to motivate the inmates to take part in the project,
- to boost their self-esteem and feeling of self-efficacy (also seen in the subsequent quantitative tools administered, which show the positive sensations stemming precisely from this type of intervention),

<sup>10</sup> For example, question no. 4 of the interview went as follows: «So that we can prepare the training programme that best fits your expectations, we need further information on your life in Pescara prison».

- to provide elements of knowledge on the inmates (Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria-Ufficio del Capo Dipartimento, 2015; Ministero della Giustizia-Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria, 2005<sup>11</sup>). This is not only useful for the prison education officers who draw up the Summary Report as per the internal regulations and circulars – including all the elements of observation of the inmates' capacity to make use of the correctional opportunities – but also, in general, for drawing up the Information Reports for the Surveillance Magistrate which have to highlight the inmates' behavioural characteristics. It was also useful for all the prison and security staff. Indeed, the prison as a whole *has to* provide suitable correctional activities and work together to prevent critical events, including those linked to the phenomenon of self-harming.

### 9.3 Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

The material collected in these preliminary steps – self-assessment questionnaires, focus groups, interviews – was used in the *information and training meetings*, which once again saw the participation of 'mixed' personnel (school personnel, University of Florence personnel and prison staff from the educational, IT and accounts areas, prison guards). Then it provided the basis to define the *Individual Learning Plans*.

Indeed, learning plans were created on the basis of the analysis of every inmate's needs. The plans accounted for the following elements:

- topic areas of interest,
- subjects in each topic area,
- training demand on the basis of the inmates' self-assessments,
- educational correctional activities already begun and tasks and roles in prison life,
- links expressed between the requested training and improvement of a day-to-day activity inside the prison,
- links expressed between the requested training and the improvement of life prospects once out of prison,
- time available for the training,
- preferences.

The learning plans built for each participating inmate were *shared* with the school personnel, prison guards and education officers. In addition, they were returned to the single inmates to check if they responded to their expectations.

<sup>11</sup> See articles 28 and 29 of Italian presidential decree no. 230/200 on the team and scientific observation of the personality.



The learning plan put together accounted for the training requirements expressed by the inmates and the observation data emerging from the prison staff.

For example, some inmates were described by the prison staff as people who spent a lot of time in the 'common rooms' partaking in 'pastimes' such as cards, table football and chess. This element was taken into account in their learning plans, and emphasis was placed on intervention by the prison workers to help make the game-play a 'learning' experience<sup>12</sup>.

This type of experience gave the *trainers* an opportunity to reflect on the fact that the possibility of improving any aspect of people's lives during imprisonment can help stimulate them to make the most of their personal resources, which can then also be used in other fields.

Furthermore, considering that the inmates' requests converged with the availability of human resources and tools, the goal to implement basic skills through the use of innovative devices was totally fulfilled. Thanks to the activation of the Web Learning Group, the inmates were able to continue their learning, which had begun face-to-face and at an *experiential* level, through on-line training.

#### *9.4 The Learning Programme planned in Response to the Training Demand emerging during the Research*

The learning pathway planned and activated in response to analysis of the training needs demonstrated by the Pescara prison inmates was structured in three phases. The steps were carried out contemporaneously and managed in consideration of the individual learning goals:

- *face-to-face training*, during which the learning in the indicated topic areas was supported by the school, with teacher-led lessons in the classroom;
- *training in the penitentiary context* thanks to the engagement of the internal staff, prison guards, educational staff and volunteers who stimulated the inmates during the various moments in their prison lives;
- *on-line training*, through the use of the TRIO computer platform<sup>13</sup>. Thanks to the support of the Regione Toscana (Tuscan Regional Government), the prison was able to access the platform for free. With the scientific support of the University of Florence, a selection was made of the resources to provide to the users on the basis of the evidence

<sup>12</sup> In these cases, the prison guards who were normally in greater contact with the inmates in these areas were asked to interact with them during the leisure 'time'. This time was to provide an extra opportunity for more interpersonal experiences and for them to express their needs, including the need for recreation.

<sup>13</sup> Regione Toscana on-line distance learning platform, <<http://www.progettotrio.it>> (12/15).

from the individual training demand survey and interpretation phase. The technical staff (from the prison and the platform, who were in constant communication) played an essential role, as did a volunteer who acted as classroom tutor, the school teachers who included the teaching resources in the teacher-led lessons, and the education officers who constantly monitored and gave support to the inmates. In this phase, a fundamental contribution was given by the prison guard personnel, as well as by the education officers: the former gave the inmates support in accessing the platform, while the latter monitored the users' motivation with some ad hoc interviews to collect the inmates' experiences of their learning pathways. In addition, on the basis of the needs expressed by the inmates, also relating to the time available to attend the Pebble Web Learning Group (WLG), the prison director gave *special service orders* which authorised access to the Pebble experimentation lab seven hours a day, from Monday to Friday, so that the inmates could also attend other activities and nevertheless have the possibility of frequenting the WLG.

Subsequently, after the on-line platform had been used effectively, further training needs emerged for the inmates which had not been accounted for initially. As a result, the on-line resources were integrated. Owing to some changes that had happened in their lives, such as being able to have face-to-face meetings or being awarded special permits to see their children, some inmates asked to embark on modules on pedagogy and parenting.

In any case, the possibility of having a wide range of training opportunities boosted the inmates' increasing learning demand. And thanks to the constantly evolving process of self-analysis, the inmates were always in search of fields in which they could grow and improve.

The inmates' skills were monitored and observed during the phases of the tested learning model. In addition, there were also moments to share (above all during the individual interviews) the progress that had or had not been made since the beginning of the process.

The last moment of training in this process was the conference *La formazione in carcere. Strategie condivise per la crescita e lo sviluppo delle competenze individuali* (Education and Training in Prison. Shared strategies for the growth and development of individual competences. Pescara, 17 December 2015), organised by the Pescara prison director and held outside the prison with the participation, among others, of three inmates who illustrated their experiences and made a reflective analysis on the conclusion of their learning pathway.

The results of the research motivated the prison director to extend the WLG on-line training after the end of the Pebble research project, while continuing to use the institute's resources. This was possible be-

cause the project highlighted that, thanks to the resources present, on-line training is sustainable inside Pescara prison and that it responds to the inmates' learning demand.

In conclusion, the experience gained and the empirical results found from the inmates and trainers' participation in the project had a significant influence on the organisation's decision to carry on the WLG experience and involve the prison staff in the use and extension of the lab service. Therefore, in this case the management decision was prompted by a bottom-up process starting from the inmates, and concluded by a positive feasibility assessment from the director.

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<[https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg\\_2\\_19.wp](https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_2_19.wp)>  
<<http://www.progettotrio.it>>

<sup>14</sup> Consultation at 12/15.

## CHAPTER 4

### INDIVIDUALISED APPROACHES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES LEARNING PATHWAY. A GENERAL THEORETICAL FRAME

*Bushra Saadoon M.Al-Noori*

#### 1. Foreword

In this Chapter we provide a short theoretical frame on learning a foreign language in consideration of the high number of immigrants prisons do have in the research countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania) and the need for them to learn both the language of the hosting country and other foreign languages in the view of their release (i.e. English, Spanish as emerged during the empirical phase of the research).

For along time, in most English as a foreign language (henceforth, EFL) contexts students consider classroom the only place where they can learn English. They are too teacher-dependent without the initiative to learn on their own. But the fact is that: no school, or even university, can provide its students with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their active adult lives (Jiao, 2005: 27). Writing is a tool for learning and self-discovery, not just a means to demonstrate learning (Emig, 1977: 122; Meyers, 2005: 3). It is the basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a foreign language (Chastain, 1988: 244).

Wenden (1991: 15) states that learning the process of writing is a difficult skill for students to develop and learn, especially in EFL context, where exposure to English is limited to a few hours per week. Students, learning English composition, struggle with many structural issues including selecting proper words, using correct grammar, generating, and developing ideas about specific topics.

These factors tend to hamper students from improving their classroom interaction and keep them from developing more active learning in writing. Due to this gap between student's needs and teacher's instructional methodology, the issue becomes how teachers can help students express themselves freely, independently and fluently to be more autonomous writers, and how teachers can help students become more successful readers and writers of academic and work place texts (Kim and Kim, 2005: 2).

Üstunluoglu (2009: 149) states that new approaches are always emerging in English teaching, but no matter which methodology and what techniques are used, there is a tendency to see learners as passive receivers of new information, as individuals who are unable to develop the nec-

essary skills to learn to assess and control their own progress themselves. He adds that the students seem to be unable to identify what to master and how to master efficient language learning since they do not seem to have the capacity for reflection about how to monitor their learning.

Holec (1980: 145) claims that «learner autonomy is an inevitable approach to take if we want our learners to be the man “product of his society”, to the man “producer of his society”».

Over the last two decades, there has been considerable interest in learner autonomy as a necessary condition of effective learning. It is seen as an issue principally of students taking greater control over the content and methods of learning (Chan, 2001: 505). It grows out of the individual's acceptance of his/ her own responsibility for learning. The learner is perceived as a decision-maker who has, or will develop, the capacity for choosing among available tools and resources to create what is needed for the task at hand.

EFL college students find difficulties in working by themselves since they are not highly motivated towards doing the various language tasks related to their own choices. The autonomous learner displays some ability of evaluating and choosing materials, reflecting on learning, and providing self assessment. If one of the main aims of the course is to help students become more effective learners and to take on responsibility for their own learning, some learners training will be required (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989: 2).

Furthermore, an autonomous learning programme is significant in mounting communicative competence in a foreign language and enables the students to be in touch with their instructors through writing in an effective way and reflect their capacity in learning. Also, autonomous learning is significant to students for two more reasons. First, it involves how best to improve the performance of writing composition, their lexical, structural, and overall accuracy. Hence, giving the students responsibility for their learning in groups enables them to develop effective independent learning strategies in all areas.

Second, autonomous learning is significant to students when they have the chance to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfils the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world (Lee, 2002: 5).

We will try to find out the development of autonomy in the experimental sample's autonomy.

## *2. Definition of Basic Terms*

### *Autonomous Learning*

Dickinson (1993: 334) states that «Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his/ her learning and the implementation of those decisions».

Benson (2001: 11) states that «autonomy is the recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems».

Holec (1980: 14); Cotterall (1995: 195); and Sheerin (1997: 54) state that

autonomy refers to the learning that involves six important learning activities. That is 1) analyzing one's own strengths, weaknesses, or language needs, 2) determining learning objectives, 3) defining the contents and learning progression, 4) selecting methods and techniques to achieve the established learning objectives, 5) monitoring the procedures of language acquisition, and 6) evaluating what has been acquired.

The researcher adopts Little's definition (1990: 4) which states that «autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action».

#### *Programme*

It is defined by Good (1973: 442) as «a sequence carefully constructed learning experiences, designed to achieve within a specified period of time certain instructional objectives, leading the students to mastery of a subject with minimal errors; an empirical evidence of the effectiveness of each teaching sequence is obtainable from the performance records of students».

It is defined by Hornby, *et al.* (2010: 1207), as «a plan of things that will be done or included in the development of something».

The operational definition is an organised course of study prepared by the researcher to develop the undergraduate students writing skill over a period of 13 weeks. It is a sequence of carefully constructed chapters and strategies that involves the objectives, practices, and activities, in addition to review tests.

### *3. Autonomy in Learning-Theoretical Background and Related Previous Studies*

#### *3.1 Concept of Autonomy*

Autonomy is a Greek word which is pronounced αυτονομία (*autonomia*) and which means α υο-auto- ('self') + νόμος ('nomos' that is law) «one who gives oneself their own law. It is a concept found in moral, political, and bioethical philosophy. Within these contexts, it refers to the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed, un-coerced decision»<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomy>> (12/15).



In moral and political philosophy, autonomy is often used as the basis for determining moral responsibility for one's actions. One of the best known philosophical theories of autonomy is developed by Kant (1804: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

Gardner & Miller (1999: 112) claim that it is the process of taking personal responsibility for one's own progress. The new definitions and dimensions of a 'learned person' have also contributed to interest in autonomy. A learned person is no longer the 'know-all' or 'fountain of knowledge', but someone who has learned how to learn, and carry on learning even after leaving school and throughout his or her life (Dickinson, 1995: 165).

The concept of autonomy has become part of mainstream research and practice in Western cultures and appears to have become universally accepted as an important educational goal, as pointed out in the works of (Benson and Voller, 1997: 20; Paiva, 2006: 17) who first attempted to understand autonomy in language learning as a complex phenomenon.

Many revolutionary education philosophers have contributed to interest in autonomous learning (e.g. Rousseau, Dewey, Rogers, Illich, Vygotsky, etc.). All of these have underscored the active role the learner should play when learning.

Interest in learner autonomy in the field of language education has been the result of the rapid shifts in psychology, linguistics and applied linguistics over the last thirty years or so. Many publications have underlined the position of the language learner as an active partner in the learning operation. From a constructive view, the role of the learner has even been considered a determinant in restructuring and reshaping his or her knowledge and experience. Learner autonomy conjures up 'independence', 'self-direction' 'awareness', 'development', 'involvement', etc. (Mariani, 1994: 38).

Autonomy first began to be addressed in the foreign language teaching field with the emergence of the communicative approach. Before that, autonomy is allowed no space within the classroom, considering that the teacher commonly control all learning activities, and the students' rights are limited to the choices made by the school.

In the 1970s, with the emergence of a new concept of language – language as communication – and the emphasis on the cognitive processes, autonomy appeared as a central feature in foreign language teaching.

Despite such explanations many practitioners view the construct of learner autonomy as being synonymous with self-access and especially with technology-based learning. Even nowadays autonomy is often associated with learning in isolation, outside the classroom and without a

<sup>2</sup> He states that autonomy is the foundation of human dignity and the source of all morality; and hence should be an essential aim of education. Mariani (1994: 36) states that the concept of autonomy is not a new one. It is indeed deeply rooted in the various philosophies of the world heritage.

teacher. This is a very partial view. Since the capacity of taking charge of one's own learning is not innate but must be learned and developed, there is much need for guidance. It is the complex task of teachers to help their students become more autonomous in their language learning.

In addition, learner autonomy is a problematic term because it is widely confused with self-instruction. It is also a slippery concept because it is notoriously difficult to define precisely. The rapidly expanding literature has debated, for example, whether learner autonomy should be thought of as capacity or behaviour; whether it is characterised by learner responsibility or learner control; whether it is a psychological phenomenon with political implications or a political right with psychological implications; and whether the development of learner autonomy depends on a complementary teacher autonomy (Yuan, 2007: 38).

### *3.2 Definitions of Autonomy*

One of the most well-known definitions of autonomy is reported by Holec. He defines autonomy as «the ability to take charge of one's own learning» (1980: 3). This definition involves making decisions about different aspects of language learning process (determining objectives, monitoring progress, or evaluating performance). He adds that the main idea behind learner autonomy is that students should take responsibility for their own learning, rather than be dependent on the teacher.

According to Benson (2001: 1), autonomy is a precondition for effective learning. He believes that when learners succeed in developing autonomy, they not only become better language learners but they also develop into more responsible and critical members of the communities in which they live. He adds that the autonomous learner is one that constructs knowledge from direct experience, rather than one who responds to someone's instruction.

Freire (1970: 2) defines autonomy as «the learner's capacity and freedom to construct and reconstruct the knowledge taught». According to Young (1986: 19) the idea of autonomy as a form of learner identity, i.e. autonomy as a right, implying the ability to take control of one's own learning process. Scharle and Szabó (2000: 3) define autonomy as «the freedom and ability to manage one's own affairs, which entails the right to make decisions as well».

Shafaei (2010: 6) considers learner autonomy a skill and illustrates learners who are autonomous to have acquired the learning strategies, the knowledge about learning, and the attitudes that enable them to use these skills and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately, and independently of a teacher. Providing the students with opportunities for autonomy in learning is one thing while helping them to develop and intensify a certain amount of skill acquired is another. When learners

are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, they are more likely to be able to set achievable and realistic targets, develop ways to cope with new and unexpected events, and assess their own potential and limitations (Wenden, 1991: 3).

Benson and Voller (1997: 1) state that autonomy falls into five categories:

1. situations in which learners study entirely on their own
2. a set of skills which can be learned and applied through self-directed in learning
3. an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education
4. the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning; and
5. the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Holec views that autonomy is «[...] an ability, a power or capacity to do something» (1980: 4). According to Hunt *et al.*, autonomy is «[...] the decision-making process involved in identifying problems and making relevant decisions for their solution through access to sufficient sources of information» (1989: 209).

Cotterall points out that autonomy is «[...] the extent to which learners demonstrate the ability to use a set of tactics for taking control of their learning» (1995: 195).

Benson states that «autonomization is necessarily a transformation of the learner as a social individual. ... autonomy not only transforms individuals, but it also transforms the social situations and structures in which they are participants» (1996: 34).

A number of terms can be found to be used interchangeably with the term autonomy. These terms are: self-instruction, distance learning, out of class learning and individualised instruction. These terms basically describe various ways and degrees of learning by one's self, whereas autonomy refers to the abilities and attitudes (Little, 1990: 7).

### *Self-Instruction*

Little (1990: 7) makes a useful statement on what autonomy is not limited to learning without a teacher. In a narrow sense, self-instruction refers to the use of printed or broadcast self-study materials. In a broader sense, it refers to situations in which learners undertake language study largely or entirely without the aid of teachers.

### *Distance Learning*

The recent growth of distance language learning has led to a corresponding growth in the literature, in which issues of autonomy are prominent.

Distance learning has also begun to merge with Computer Assisted

Language Learning (henceforth CALL) through concepts such as ‘online learning’, cyberschools’, ‘asynchronous learning networks’ and ‘telematics’ (Little, 1990: 7).

### *Out-of-Class Learning*

In the recent literature on autonomy, the term ‘out-of-class learning’ has been used, somewhat narrowly, to refer to the efforts of learners taking classroom-based language courses to find opportunities for language learning and use them outside class learning (Pearson, 2004: 126).

### *Individualised Instruction*

After the 1980, it is assumed that the development of autonomy necessarily implies individualisation. However, the definition of individualisation is regarded as a synonym of attention to diversity, that is, personalisation of the learning process.

Brookes and Grandy suggest that autonomy and individualisation are associated by a mutual link to the concept of learner-centeredness «one corollary of learner centeredness is that autonomy of the learner as the ultimate goal» (1998: 1). Individualised instruction is designed to meet the needs of individual learners, but the teacher prepares materials, sets objectives and evaluates the learner’s ability to perform.

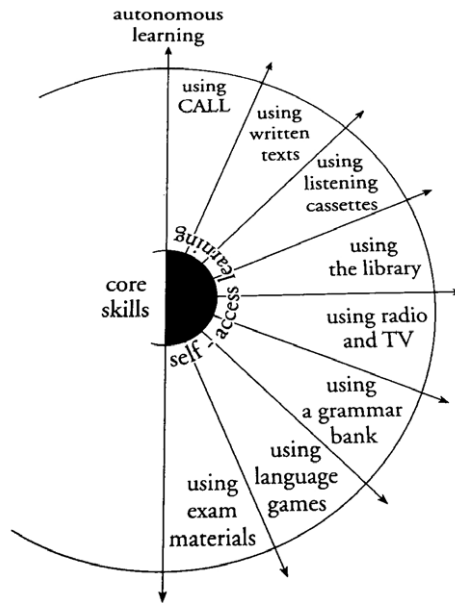
### *Self-Access*

Self-Access is often used synonymously with other terms for autonomy. It is a «method of learning in which students choose their own books, materials... etc, and study on their own. It can reach into many types of autonomous learning. In fact, full-autonomy would involve complete self-access. Learners would choose all of their own materials» (Benjamin, 2005: 9).

Self-Access is a way of describing materials that are designed and organised in such a way that students can select and work on tasks on their own materials appropriate to and available for self instruction (Dickinson, 1987: 11).

Self-Access is also the integration of resources, people, management, individualisation, needs analysis, learner reflection, counselling, and learner training to provide a learning environment (Gardner and Miller, 1999: 25). It is portrayed as a resource to various types of independent learners. It can be used in a various types of autonomy. Learners choice as a more fundamental aspect of a language course can be provided through the establishment of self-access centers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Self-Access Centre (Hedge, 2008: 97).



### 3.3 Key Concepts of Autonomy

Autonomy is a complex socio-cognitive system, manifested in different concepts of independence and control of one's own learning process, involving capacities, abilities, attitudes, willingness, decision making, choices, planning, actions, and assessment either as a language learner or as a communicator inside or outside the classroom. As a complex system, it is dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable, non-linear, adaptive, open, self-organizing and sensitive to initial conditions and feedback (Chitashvili, 2007: 17).

However, all the above share certain key concepts like: learner responsibility; learner choice; decision making, and detachment learner independence. Accordingly, it can be said that the key concepts of autonomy are:

#### 1. *Autonomy as a Responsibility*

Benson defines and describes learner autonomy as «the capacity to take control of one's own learning, largely because the construct of “control” appears to be more open to investigation than the constructs of “charge” or “responsibility”»; and he argues that «an adequate description of autonomy in language learning should at least recognise the importance of three levels at which learner control may be exercised: control over learning management, control over cognitive process and control over

learning content. Autonomy means the ability to take control of one's own learning, independently or in collaboration with others» (2001: 47).

Scharle and Szabó state that «autonomy and responsibility both require active involvement, and they are apparently very much interrelated» (2000: 4).

Benson and Voller believe that «learner autonomy is the ability to take personal or “self regulated” responsibility for learning; and it is widely theorized to predict academic performance» (1997: 18).

According to Little (1995: 178), the learners' acceptance of responsibility is the basis of learner autonomy, which has both socio-affective and cognitive implication. Socio-affective concerns for learner autonomy suggest that affective factors mediated via interactive social processes ought to be considered, whereas cognitive concerns suggest that autonomy may be an inborn capacity for learning (Usuki, 2007: 47).

Wenden states that

learners' responsibility does not mean learning alone but rather they are internalizing and developing an awareness of responsibility for their own learning. Learner's acceptance of responsibility means the desire to develop a capacity to reflect critically on the learning process, evaluate the progress, and if necessary make adjustments to learning strategies. Such capacity may be developed through independence rather than dependence by recognising the need to take account of the learners and their personal constructs on the one hand and the teacher's special expertise on the other (1998: 515).

Wenden (2002: 32) claims that autonomous learners will take more responsibility for learning and are likely to be more effective than learners who are reliant on the teacher. They will set their own goals, reflect on their progress, and seek opportunities to practise outside the classroom. They see themselves as having the crucial role in their language learning. They are self-confident learners, believing in their ability to learn, to self-direct and to manage their learning. Autonomous learners have been accepting responsibility for their learning and sharing in the decisions and initiatives that give shape and direction to the learning process (Little, 2000: 69).

## 2. *Autonomy as Willingness*

Littlewood claims that autonomy denotes to

learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently ability depends on possessing both knowledge about the alternatives from which choice have to be made and necessary skills for carrying out whatever choices seem most appropriate. Willingness depends on having both the motivation and confidence to take responsibility for the choices required (1996: 97).

Littlewood argues that «students' willingness to act independently depends on the level of their motivation and confidence; and students' ability to act independently depends on the level of their knowledge and skills» (1996: 98).

### *3. Autonomy as a Capacity*

Benson points out that «autonomy is a multidimensional capacity, which can take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times» (2001: 47).

In the applied linguistics literature, autonomy is seen as a capacity for active, independent learning. Autonomous learners possess the skills necessary to carry out a self-directed learning programme, i.e., the ability to define objectives, define contents and so on (Little, 1991: 14).

### *4. Autonomy as an Attitude Towards Learning*

Autonomy in foreign language learning is «of an “attitude” or even a philosophy than a methodology. It is not concerned with one specific method, but allows for any method, which the individual learner finds it beneficial to his learning purposes» (Ze-Sheng, 2008: 3).

According to Dickinson, autonomy can also be seen as «an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take responsibility for his own learning» (1992: 330).

Holec states that «a particular attitude to the learning task, where the learner accepts responsibility for all the decisions concerned with his learning but does not necessarily undertake the implementation of those decisions» (1980: 30).

Attitudes to learning and the perceptions and beliefs which determine them, have 'a profound influence on learning behaviour' and on learning outcomes, since successful learners develop insightful beliefs about language learning processes, their own abilities and the use of effective learning strategies, which in total have a facilitative effect on learning. These students tend to develop a more active and autonomous attitude that allows them to take charge of their learning (Cotteral, 1995: 195).

### *5. Learner Choice and Decision Making*

Kaltenbock (2001: 5) believes that autonomous learners are those who are given considerable freedom to decide on the path they want to take through any particular sections. Learners' choice brings about learners' decision-making, flexibility, adaptability and modifiability. Learners learn how to make informed choices if they are entitled to reflect on their language learning experiences (Lee, 1998: 288).

Benson (2001: 49) states that learner autonomy is defined as a construct of capacity for making informed decisions about one's own learning. Autonomous learners are seen as those who are able to reflect on

their own learning through knowledge about learning and who are willing to learn in collaboration with others.

In order for learners to make informed decisions about their learning, they need to develop an awareness of at least four important areas of metacognition such as «learner awareness; subject matter awareness of the target language, learning process awareness and social awareness» (Ellis, 1999: 14).

#### *6. Autonomy as a Detachment*

Dam (2003: 85) states that the important variables towards learner autonomy is detachment and language awareness which are crucial to planning, monitoring and evaluating language learning processes and outcomes.

Learner autonomy is «a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action» (Little, 1991: 4). Even in this simple definition it is clear that ‘autonomy’ is not any one specific thing, it is a capacity, and like any other capacity, it will grow with practice, or be lost through inactivity.

McGarry notes the essential arguments for autonomy:

Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programmes of work, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situations, evaluate and assess their own work and, generally, to learn how to learn from their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future (1995: 1).

### *3.4 Independent Learning and Autonomy*

Learner independence is also known by a number of other terms: learner autonomy, independent learning, lifelong learning, learning to learn, thinking skills. All these terms refer to a concept where learners are involved in their own learning process. By being involved in this process, they start to make meaningful connections with the world outside the classroom. Instead of relying on the teacher to do the thinking for them, they take responsibility for thinking and learning themselves. Learning then becomes more than the rote memorization of a series of facts and continues even after the learner has completed full time education (Sinclair *et al.*, 2000: 12).

Independent language learning is an essential complement to classroom-based learning if learners are to acquire target competence in a realistic period of time. It follows that language teachers can help promote learning efficiency by making links between teacher-guided learning and learner-initiated activities outside class.



Independent learning is defined by Jeffries as

learning in which an individual or group of learners study on their own, possibly for a part of parts of a course, without direct intervention from a student. This can involve learners in taking greater responsibility for what they learn, how they learn, and when they learn. It can also lead to learners being more involved in their own assessment. Independent learning is likely to be most effective when at least some support is available (1990: 79).

#### 4. *Factors Affecting Learner Autonomy*

There are many factors affecting the promotion of EFL learner autonomy, these factors include: motivation, learning style and learning strategies.

##### 1. *Motivation*

Motivation is of great importance to the autonomous learning. Only if students are highly motivated, they are willing to take responsibility for their own learning and adopting a cooperative way of learning in the classroom (Reid, 2007: 15).

Brown (2001: 20–28) states that motivation is the extent to which learners make choices about goals to pursue and the effort they will devote to that pursuit. It is a key factor in successful learning. Ideally motivation should be intrinsic – that is, a learner is self-motivating. To achieve this, however, a learner needs to have a desired goal and some determination to succeed.

Besides, Dickinson finds a strong link between motivation and autonomy, in that the two constructs share certain key concepts: these are learner independence, learner responsibility and learner choice. Incorporated within these, or entailed by them are other concepts such as decision-making, critical reflection and detachment, all of which are important in cognitive motivation. He adds that «autonomous learners become more highly motivated and work more effectively» (1995: 168).

The relationship between motivation and autonomy in language learning has been a very controversial issue, the controversy being on whether it is autonomy that enhances motivation or it is motivation that produces autonomy.

Spratt *et al.* (2002: 250) argue that «motivation may lead to autonomy or be a precondition for it, which is significant for the task of language learners' training, as it indicates where teachers should choose to place their teaching priorities». In situations where learners resist autonomous

practices or reject or avoid learning opportunities, teachers may encourage autonomy by developing students' motivation to learn (Deci, Ryan, 1985: 245).

Furthermore, in helping learners develop motivation to learn and thus promoting learner autonomy, teachers can allocate more class time for students' engagement in activities, materials and syllabuses that interest them and that they wish to engage in for their own sake. Teachers should serve as models of motivating themselves, which can be one of the most effective ways for the development of motivation (Spratt *et al.*, 2002: 252).

### 2. *Learning Styles*

Cohen and Dörnyei (2002: 176) underscore the well-known fact that different learners approach learning in a significantly different manner, and that the concept of learning styles has been used to refer to these differences. Learning styles seem to be relatively stable, and, thus, teachers may not have such a direct influence on this learner variable as with motivation.

Many learners do not favour one learning style to the exclusion of all others. Nevertheless, the identification of learning style dimensions, generally in the form of dichotomies, is useful to describe learners' style preferences.

Kinsella states that a learning style refers to «an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills which persist regardless of teaching methods or content area» (1995: 170). Some learners like doing grammar and memorizing; some want to speak and role-play; others prefer reading and writing, while avoiding speaking. But language learning means to be able to use language, that is to say, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all necessary.

In addition, a learner style is a biologically and developmentally in-born set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others. It might be the product of the learner's personality, experience, socio-economic and/or cultural background.

### 3. *Learning Strategies*

Chamot and Kupper define learning strategies as «techniques which students use to comprehend, store, and remember new information and skills» (1989: 13). Richards and Schmidt define learning strategies as «the ways in which learners attempt to work out the meanings and use of words, grammatical rules, and other aspects of the language that they are learning» (2002: 301). Learning strategies refer to mental and behavioural steps, techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that are taken by learners in order to facilitate and enhance their own learning (Oxford, 2003: 80).

Oxford views learning strategies as «specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations» (1990: 8).

According to Brown, strategies are «specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information» (2000: 113). Cohen argues that learning strategies are consciously selected by learners (1998: 10).

Oxford proposes the roles of learning strategies in autonomous learning «through four perspective models: a technical perspective, a psychological perspective, a sociocultural perspective, and a political-critical perspective. Through the technical perspective, learning strategies are tools that empower learners to learn on their own» (2003: 9).

The technical perspective, as clarified by Oxford, emphasizes the situation as what underlines the development of learner autonomy. The situational conditions are in general made up of literal surroundings that serve as learning resources such as a self-access center, a classroom, a home setting, or a travel environment. Under such learning resources, the learners who are capable of using learning strategies can better use the sources to learn on their own (Benson, 1997: 23).

Through the psychological perspective, learning strategies function as a gateway to autonomous language learning. Through this view, learners are regarded as having highly motivated, self-efficacy. They, in addition, have positive attitude about learning and want to seek meaning and achievement in their learning.

In terms of the learning contexts, this perspective views learners' environment as a learning resources. In such a learning environment, the learners need learning strategies to learn on their own (Cotterall, 1999: 45). The sociocultural perspective emphasizes social interaction as a main part for the development of learners' cognition and language. This perspective, in fact, centers on Vygotsky's idea. It views the context, which consists of a particular kind of relationship as a situation for learning (Little, 2003: 37).

In addition, through the political-critical perspective, learning strategies are regarded as factors that help learners to access within power structure and cultural alternatives. Learners, according to this perspective, hold power to control over their own learning situation.

Considered their roles through these four perspectives, learning strategies are one of the important factors that can help accelerate the development of learner autonomy. Technically, learning strategies serve as tools empowering learners to engage in series of autonomous learning activities. Psychologically, they function as a gateway to autonomous language learning practice. Socioculturally, they serve as a means for learners to enter the community of practice and gain greater proficiency (Rukthong, 2008: 24).

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*Web sources*<sup>3</sup>

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomy>>

<sup>3</sup> Consultation at 12/15.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH: RATIONALE AND SUITABILITY FOR PRISON SETTINGS

*Marios Vryonides*

#### *1. Foreword*

This chapter discusses the pedagogical methodology chosen to deliver a basic skills curriculum content for inmates. The ultimate aim of the Pebble research project presented in this book was to improve prison education in Europe by making basic skills learning more easily accessible to learners in correctional education. Because of the distinct educational profile of the inmates and the conditions within which they were expected to receive their education a blended learning approach was thought to be the best mode. In this chapter we will present the basic characteristics of a blended learning and the rationale which makes it a suitable method of delivery of a basic skills curriculum. As will be discussed below and as was discussed in Chapter 2 because of the profile of inmates and their individualistic needs a pedagogical model was needed suitable for more intense instructor-learner interaction in the learning process.

Blended learning, thus, becomes ideal for prison education. Prison education should have aims and purposes no less important than those of mainstream adult education, primarily, the facilitation of the right to learn, a fundamental human right that everybody, regardless of their personal characteristics, should have and which is key to any individual's development. Education in prison is of value in itself, whatever the purposes of the prison system. It limits the negative effects, which the deprivation of freedom causes, such as depersonalisation, institutionalisation and de-socialisation. In many ways it may appear as providing some sort of normality within the abnormal situation of imprisonment, by focusing on the potentials of inmates and by encouraging their participation in meaningful and lasting activities.

Moreover, education in prison maybe seen as an effective rehabilitative programme linking inmates with the society outside at large, enabling them to reassess their values, goals and priorities in life in a positive way, while acquiring the personal, social and technical skills necessary for a successful and permanent re-entry into society as productive citizens, family members and co-workers. The blended learning approach,



as proposed by the Pebble research project, does not just address the basic skills deficits of prisoners by developing them to a satisfactory level, it provides training to what is often named as soft skills relating to new forms of education and training through the use of ICTs. Both goals are paramount in facilitating successful (re)integration in society.

The specific objective of the Pebble research project, that is the creation of an e-learning environment, takes into serious account and respects the prison security regulation in the European prison environments. This new e-learning methodology in prison education allows prisoners to acquire the key skills of literacy, mathematical competence and digital competence, ICT-skills and financial skills in order to be more fully prepared in dealing with their post-imprisonment life. This objective involves the development of a blended learning environment as the main approach to provide innovative ICT-based content, pedagogy and service as a lifelong learning opportunity. The target group is intended to access the content of the basic skills curriculum in an open and flexible learning environment, which overcomes the limitations found in conventional educational settings while at the same time making their learning more individualised and autonomous. The full potential of blended e-learning is utilised since it is a more flexible way to acquire the knowledge. As will be discussed below, this approach takes the best from self-paced, instructor-led, distance and classroom delivery to improve instruction. Blended e-learning enlarge the scope of the skills developed by prisoners, skills that go beyond traditional prison technical education and training and give opportunities for formal qualifications (such as computer skill certifications, language skill certificates etc.). This method, offers inmates a sense of control on their learning and on their lives, bringing wider benefits to their self- image and confidence. So, let us examine some of the basic features of blended learning next.

## 2. *Why Blended Learning?*

Blended learning is a formal education approach in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace. Face-to-face classroom methods are combined with computer-mediated activities. In other words, *blended learning*, also referred to as 'hybrid learning', combines traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning. Blended learning courses serves to «facilitate a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience», (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004: 96) and this incorporation is a major contributor to student satisfaction and success in such courses. The use of information and communication technologies has been found to

improve access to as well as student attitudes towards learning. By incorporating information technology into the class, communication between lecturers and trainees is improved, and students are able to better evaluate their understanding of course material via the use of «computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules» (Alexander and McKenzie, 1998: 59).

According to Chappell and Shippen (2013) using technology in correctional education can address two relevant issues:

- (1) the numbers and variety of inmates needing education, and
- (2) understaffing conditions in prison schools (Borden and Richardson, 2008).

According to Pearson (2012) in computer-based training (CBT) learners have the convenience of scheduling training sessions when it is convenient for them and sessions can be taken from various sites and the learners have the ability to work at their own pace. The three major types of CBT are compact disc read only memory (CD-ROM), local-area network (LAN) and Web-based training (WBT). According to Wade *et al.* (2013) it is recognised that implementing a technology-based programme within correctional environments is accompanied with a lot of difficulties not least security issues connected with internet access from within a prison.

Up to the present, most northern European countries, such as the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries have reared the benefits distance learning has to offer to the prison population as a means to transcend the physical barrier of imprisonment. Distance learning has offered inmates many opportunities in a form, which helps them, make use of a commodity they have in abundance: time. Moreover, there have been certain pilot programmes which attempted to study the effectiveness and efficiency of e-learning vocational education courses in the prison context, which successfully resulted in asserting that «e-learning is [indeed] an engaging and attractive way to deliver education to offenders in [...] custody» (Schuller, 2009: 22).

However, these and other distance learning initiatives, do not answer to one of the main concerns in a custodial setting, to the issue of security. Since prisons, in most Southern European countries – including the countries that participated in the Pebble research project – have very strict prohibitions relating to internet access, it has been important to employ ICT pedagogical technologies that would take into consideration the limited internet access. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of the project is the employment of asynchronous e-learning technologies, which are not based on internet technologies. In Pescara prison they succeeded in testing synchronous e-learning technologies for the first time.

The central aim of the research project is the development of an e-learning methodology, within the boundaries required by the penal poli-

cies. Thus, CD-ROM-based training, CD-ROM-/web-based training, is mostly used by only one learner at a time and is the least expensive of the three mentioned in the previous paragraph. CD-ROMs may be used to deliver training to the learner where access to the Internet is limited due to prison regulation and restrictions.

Given the fact that many prisoners have negative experiences of formal education, simply shutting them in a classroom is unlikely to have any positive effect. Prisoners' negative past experience of education has often been highlighted as a barrier on basic skills learning. It is expected that through the use of e-learning methodologies students will be encouraged and facilitated to attend these courses and that they will incur positive and meaningful outcomes as a result.

The implementation of e-learning technologies contributes to overcoming of barriers and operational difficulties that accrue through traditional classroom prison education methodologies, such as poor attendance rates, prisoners being transferred between prisons, classes clashing with other activities in the prison regime, prisoners being removed from class for other reasons (such as having their cells searched, drug tests or visits etc.). These factors can contribute to a disrupted learning environment. Therefore, through the deployment of e-learning technologies, it is expected that all kinds of 'disruptions' that limit prison education effectiveness will be overcome and that the e-learning teaching methodologies will provide the effective, intensive, easily assessed and undisrupted training environment that is necessary for the basic skills acquisition. So, why blended learning? The answer lies in the simple fact that it makes good use of two words (face-to-face teaching and on line instruction) and at the same time does the following:

- Reduces the number of in-class meetings but does not eliminate all in-class meetings.
- Replaces (rather than supplements) some in-class time with online, interactive learning activities.
- Gives careful consideration to why (and how often) classes need to meet face-to-face.
- Assumes that certain activities can be better accomplished online--individually or in small groups--than in a face-to-face class.
- May keep remaining in-class activities more or less the same.
- May make significant changes in remaining in-class meetings.
- May schedule out-of-class activities in 24\*7 computer labs or totally online so that students can participate anytime, anywhere.

### *2.1 Advantages of Blended Learning*

There are several advantages of blended instruction which combines all the positive elements of face-to-face instruction and fully online classes

thus making it more effective. By using blended learning methods which is a combination of digital instruction and one-on-one face time, students can work on their own at their own pace and receive more individualised and attention from teachers. In a class such as the one you expect to get in a prison setting where the composition is not at all homogenous such as the one you expect to find in a traditional classroom blended learning facilitates simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experiences. The use of information and communication technologies is a major motivator for students and can produce immense satisfaction and a sense of success to learners. Moreover, especially for students who had prior negative predispositions to schooling it can actually improve their attitudes towards learning. One other advantage of blended learning is that it often allows for student data to be collected providing instructors and students themselves with immediate feedback. The most important advantage, however, is that it allows for personalised education, allowing students to progress at their own pace and replacing the traditional model where a teacher presupposes that all students have tailor made needs and characteristics.

Technology enhanced instruction is indeed a major advantage because it can bring to correctional education an increase in individualised instruction. Research shows that individual students in incarcerated situations achieve significantly greater gains in academic achievement than in the group instruction format.

## *2.2 Disadvantages of Blended Learning*

Blended learning has a few disadvantages as well that one should consider seriously before embarking in its implementation. These disadvantages could be seen as challenges to be addressed both at the level of technical requirements but also to the level of institutional arrangements that need to be in place to safeguard its smooth implementation. First of all, there is a strong dependence on the technical resources or tools with which the blended learning experience is delivered. These tools need to be reliable, easy to use, and up to date, for them to have a meaningful impact on the learning experience. In other words they need to fulfil the learning outcomes in the best possible manner. In this case ICT literacy and competency on the part of both instructors and learners is often a prerequisite. The absence of a minimum level of competency can serve as a significant obstacle for learners attempting to get access to the course materials, engage in individual-based learning activities. High-quality and constantly available technical support becomes then paramount in order to retain high levels of motivation and avoid disengagement. If this happens the result might be students falling behind on their learning materials and it would be highly ineffective if they were

faced with a tallied material to catch up. Moreover, when instructors are faced with a number of learners to supervise and guide through by providing effective feedback it might become a highly time-consuming process in comparison to traditional instruction. Another issue that is pointed out by Chappell and Shippen (2013) and has been the product of relevant research on the issue is the following: implementing technology in educational settings lags behind technological developments. Innovations often become obsolete in a period of time with the next version or model of a technology and that of course requires constant updates and modernisations.

All the above of course are issues that could be addressed if proper training is given to instructors and learners prior to their induction in a blended learning course and all the necessary institutional, technical and support mechanisms are in place from the start.

### *3. Blended Learning in the Pebble Research Project*

Education and training can and should be provided in numerous settings and circumstances, prisons being one of them. Even though international and European conventions (UN, 1977; EU, 2000) and recommendations have been approved and recognised so as to protect and promote prisoners' right to education and training, prison education is still one of the most pressing issues globally and more specifically in Europe since, on the one hand, the importance of quality education in prisons is not always fully recognised, while on the other hand, the education provided very often fails to meet the demands for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability.

In an effort to address these very important issues partners from the four European countries, namely, Italy, Romania, Greece and Cyprus implementing the project titled 'Prison Education Basic skills Blended Learning (Pebble)' attempted to identify commonalities and differences in the regimes and structures of the education systems across four diverse prison education systems. From the start it was decided that by making use of blended learning in order to teach basic skills to inmates, namely numeracy, literacy, budgeting and ICT skills the learning outcomes would have been much better rather than using traditional methods. The parameters that would ensure the successful fulfilment of the goals of this project such as inmates perceived competences of the four basic skills and willingness to engage in an innovative programme that made use of blended learning and the existing infrastructure of the educational provisions in the prison systems of the four countries (i.e. existing curricula, content, modes of attendance and organisation of Prison schools) was paramount.

Prisons create a very distinct educational environment with multiple challenges in comparison to the mainstream education and training. Imprisonment in overcrowded institutions and the diversity of prison populations are mainly the reasons which constitute prison education a challenging issue across Europe. Today, the need for educational and learning provisions in prisons is more urgent than ever. Around 640,000 people form the European prison population and a significant proportion of it is low-skilled individuals. It is estimated that only 3-5% of them would be qualified to undertake higher education (Hawley *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, research has shown that over half of prisoners have no qualifications of any kind, while 43% do not have the reading skills expected of an 11-year-old and 82% do not have the corresponding writing skills (Clark and Dugale, 2008). Low levels of skills and qualifications have negative effects on prisoners' employment opportunities upon release, which has been found to be one of the most important factors influencing whether or not ex-prisoners would re-offend. Even though prison education plays an important part of the rehabilitation process and can help inmates gain valuable skills which can be useful for future employment and further education and training opportunities, participation in education programmes among prisoners remains below 25% in most European countries. Institutional barriers, such as the shortage of resources and staff and the restricted educational opportunities in terms of content and level, as well as dispositional barriers such as prisoners' previous failure in education limit the extent to which prisoners can access learning within prisons. These are facts which apply to almost all European prisons and are no different in the prisons of Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Romania, which are the four countries participating in the Pebble research project with one penitentiary institution each.

Based on these facts, finding ways to improve the attractiveness, quality and efficiency of prison education is imperative. Even though there can be no single approach to the arrangements for prison education which can be applied in all countries, it has been pointed out in numerous studies that the provision of education and training in prisons should be contextualised at the local and national levels and tailored to the individual. Innovative teaching and learning methods, which focus on the individual learner and build on existing knowledge and experience, attract more prisoners into learning. This includes the use of ICT and of alternative methods of teaching and learning, such as blended learning, so that prison learners may be more engaged and their learning opportunities enhanced.

This chapter presented the innovative methodology of the Pebble project based on blended learning. With its aims at improving the provisions in prison education in all countries across Europe where it may be implemented it will serve in developing an integrated learning model,

which combats deficiencies in skills and competences of prisoners and contributes and facilitates inmates' personal development and their re-entry to the wider society.

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## CHAPTER 6

### AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE PEBBLE LEARNING APPROACH AND CONTENTS

*Maria Toia*

#### *1. Foreword*

Low levels of basic skills among the adult population consists a problem faced by all countries at global level. In Europe, this represents an increasing and uncontrolled phenomenon involving at least 80 million citizens.

Research shows that a skilled workforce is a productive workforce, better able to respond to the challenges and opportunities: conversely research shows that low basic skills correlates to lower employment opportunities, health and welfare. (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009 in Howard and Kings, 2010).

Low levels of basic skills can be associated with a whole range of difficulties and challenges that adults might face in respect to the most important spheres of their lives, such as employability, work, health, well-being, family or financial capabilities.

Remains though a huge challenge to reach those adults with low level of basic skills and enable them to learn so that they can increase their chances in life and work. Providing the appropriate learning opportunities is again another great challenge. Basic skills provision can be organised in various learning contexts, such as working places, prisons and probation services, colleges or schools, community centres etc. Howard and Kings (2010) say that enhanced basic skills provision can be achieved only by «putting literacy and numeracy at the centre of adult learning and vocational education». (Howard and Kings, 2010: 7).

Adult basic skills provision has to be flexible to accommodate the wide range of learners, wherever possible, offering learning opportunities that are easily accessible and welcoming (Hughes and Schwab, 2010). In this sense, the underlying principle in the development of the Pebble curriculum is based on an innovative blended learning approach that enables the individuals to devote the appropriate time and effort for each basic skill in order to reach the desired standard.

The development and delivery of the Pebble training programme has the purpose to help inmates to acquire the key skills of literacy, numeracy, digital competence and financial skills in order to be more equipped



in dealing with their post-imprisonment life. The Pebble training programme involved the development of a blended learning environment as the main approach to provide innovative ICT based content, pedagogy and service as a lifelong learning opportunity. The target group had access to an open and flexible learning environment that allowed them to overcome the limitations found in conventional educational settings while at the same time it enabled to make their learning more individualised and autonomous. Concretely, the full potential of blended e-learning has been used as a more flexible way to acquire the knowledge provided, taking the best from self-paced, instructor-led, distance and classroom delivery to improve instruction. The blended e-learning approach (see Chapter 5) developed within the Pebble research project, has enlarged the scope of the skills developed by inmates, skills that go beyond traditional prison technical education and training and give opportunities for formal qualifications (such as computer skill certifications, language skill certificates etc.). And most important, it gave inmates the sense of control on their learning and on their lives, bringing wider benefits to their self- image and confidence.

## *2. The E-learning Basic Skills Curriculum*

Over times the uses of literacy and numeracy have changed from place to place. By this, it does not mean the ability to read and write and manipulate numbers changes, but the way in which people use written and numerical language (Ivanic, 1998). A particular focus on literacy has given this the heading «literacy as a social practice» (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 21). The philosophy in the development of the Pebble training curriculum, involving more than literacy and numeracy, may be seen as a social practice approach. Basic skills as situated social practice draws on situated theories of learning which see learning as taking place in day-to-day relationships between people in their environment, whether this is a formal classroom, a workplace or any other social context or interaction (Hughes and Schwab, 2010).

At the moment there are different meanings for 'basic skills', depending on the linguistic and cultural context in which the term is used. While the concept of basic skills has evolved over time, no global consensus on the definition has emerged. A majority of the official definitions for basic skills focus on the reading, writing and numeracy skills necessary to perform simple tasks in everyday life. However, in most of the cases, these basic skills are referred to as «literacy, language and numeracy», «skills for life» (literacy, numeracy and ICT skills) or «essential skills» (Unesco, 2013: 24). The four thematic areas of the Pebble basic skills blended curriculum encompass the the following 'traditional' knowledge-contexts

as have been defined by the European Framework for Key Competences (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006):

- Communication in mother language/ Literacy
- Numeracy
- Digital competence – ICT skills

And in a resurgent area of the ‘new’ basic skills:

- Financial skills.

While the debates around the definitions of basic skills is an ongoing process, the Pebble research project has looked into the work of different international initiatives and organisations in order to summarise the definitions that best suit the aims and contents of the training curriculum (Boxes 1, 2, 3, 4):

#### BOX 1 – LITERACY.

*UNESCO (1958, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004)*

Literacy is the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one’s daily life. It involves a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes basic arithmetic skills – numeracy.

*European Commission (2006)*

Communication in the mother tongue is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts.

#### BOX 2 – NUMERACY.

*Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning – VOX*

According to VOX numeracy means applying mathematics in different situations.

Being numerate means to be able to reason and use mathematical concepts, procedures, facts and tools to solve problems and to describe, explain and predict what will happen. It involves recognising numeracy in different contexts, asking questions related to mathematics, choosing relevant methods to solve problems and interpreting validity and effect of the results. Furthermore, it involves being able to backtrack to make new choices. Numeracy includes communicating and arguing for choices by interpreting context and working on a problem until it is solved.

Numeracy is necessary to arrive at an informed opinion about civic and social issues. Furthermore, it is equally important for personal development and the ability to make appropriate decisions in work and everyday life.

### BOX 3 – BASIC ICT SKILLS.

#### *European Commission*

Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT) [...]. Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.

Digital competence requires a sound understanding and knowledge of the nature, role and opportunities of IST in everyday contexts: in personal and social life as well as at work.

This includes main computer applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, information storage and management, and an understanding of the opportunities and potential risks of the Internet and communication via electronic media (e-mail, network tools) for work, leisure, information sharing and collaborative networking, learning and research. Individuals should also understand how IST can support creativity and innovation, and be aware of issues around the validity and reliability of information available and of the legal and ethical principles involved in the interactive use of IST.

#### *VOX – Framework for Basic Skills, Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training*

Digital skills involve being able to use digital tools, media and resources efficiently and responsibly, to solve practical tasks, find and process information, design digital products and communicate content. Digital skills also include developing digital judgement by acquiring knowledge and good strategies for the use of the internet.

Digital skills are a prerequisite for further learning and for active participation in working life and a society in constant change. The development in digital technology has changed many of the conditions for reading, writing and oral forms of expression. Consequently, using digital skills is a natural part of learning both in and across subjects, and their use provides possibilities for acquiring and applying new learning strategies.

**BOX 4 – FINANCIAL SKILLS.***OECD – PISA 2012*

Financial literacy is knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and risks, and the skills, motivation and confidence to apply such knowledge and understanding in order to make effective decisions across a range of financial contexts, to improve the financial well-being of individuals and society, and to enable participation in economic life.

In addition to the selection of the appropriate definitions, the contextualisation of the e-learning content is of particular importance and the curriculum developed in the Pebble project was tailored and adapted to the prison learning settings. It was considered that is absolutely necessary to tailor the provision of learning opportunities to each learner, in order to make it more attractive, motivating, efficient and effective as a process.

The curricula for each of the four thematic areas corresponds to the three first levels of expertise of the European Qualification Framework (EQF):

- Level 1: basic general knowledge
- Level 2: basic factual knowledge
- Level 3: knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts.

Each module, for each of the corresponding levels of proficiency, for each thematic area, has a total duration of 20 hours.

Also, one of the most important features in the Pebble e-learning content are the accompanying interactive, screen-based practice material. The e-learning material has been developed in a CD-ROM format in order to overcome any barriers relating to restricted internet access that is mostly common in prison settings.

In addition to the training contents that are developed in e-learning format, a Learner's Guide and Educator's Guide are two additional support materials that complement the implementation of the educational process.

### *3. Implementing the Course Contents*

A comprehensive learning and educational methodology has been developed in order to answer to the recorded needs of the prisoners. Based on analytical individual learning plans, educational material and content was created to support the learning process of each prisoner participating in the training. The content covers the four thematic areas of basic skills and is divided in three different levels:

- Level 1: Introductory Level
- Level 2: Intermediary Level
- Level 3: Advanced Level.

The four prison partners in the project delivered the course contents based on an individualised learning approach (see Chapter 3) in order to specifically tailor his/her learning to his/her needs according to the results of the diagnostic assessment tools that were developed within the project.

The total duration of each individual training plan lasted from:

- a minimum of eighty (80) hours to
- a maximum of two hundred forty (240) hours according to level of proficiency of each individual on each of the four (4) basic skills under consideration.

Before the delivery of the pilot training courses, a six (6) hour training session took place during which all participants have been taught the use of the e-learning system in order to be able to start the learning process. This session provided them with the necessary information on the application of the CD-ROM in their learning process, familiarised them with the methodology to be implemented and constituted a practicable way to reach even the inmates with a relatively low level of computer literacy.

The methodology employed for the delivery of the seminars was that of blended training which takes the best from self-paced learning, instructor-led learning, distance learning and classroom delivery (see Chapter 5). This was considered to be a good approach in minimising or avoiding any possible misunderstandings occurring when training is solely based on distant learning.

In each participant country twelve basic skills learning seminars were delivered, on the four knowledge areas addressed by the training curriculum. Each knowledge is divided in three different level so as to meet the needs and cover potential skills deficits for as many inmates as possible and also to promote the individualised character of the methodology applied. Therefore, inmates had the possibility to attend the level they wished, which was also revealed through the assessment conducted in the beginning of the process. They were able to attend any level of the four thematic areas at their own pace dedicating the time and effort according to their needs.

The educators have supervised the process organising face-to-face training sessions in order:

- to attend the needs of their trainees,
- to answer to potential questions and
- to solve problems when necessary.

The face-to-face sessions took place around every five hours of e-learning training taking into consideration the context' constraints and in this way the education and knowledge gaps were avoided and inmates were supported efficiently throughout the process. This combination of educational provisions helped them build their own learning plan, create their own learning objectives and outcomes, and eventually develop their sense of initiative and responsibility.

#### *ICT Assessment Tests*

Very often, prison education rests on the false assumption that inmates consist of a uniform group with no differentiation relating to age, sex, educational background, personal interests and basic skills proficiency levels. Therefore it was considered extremely important to develop and conduct assessments of learners' needs and existing skills, prior to the delivery of the learning sessions, in this way meeting better the needs of the individual and the prisoner is enabled to enhance his/her chances of gaining employment on release.

Within the context of the prison setting, robust diagnostic procedures, which are vital for the identification of the learners' full range of needs and a range of learning provisions (subject matter, levels), have been developed as part of the Pebble methodology. An assessment tool is available for each of the four thematic areas. This tool has been developed with the help of ICT technologies. All four ICT assessment tools have been delivered to inmates in a digitalised prior to the actual start of the training course.

The ICT based assessment tests had the role to accompany the need analysis, which provided a clear picture of the skills level of the inmates, and eventually helped to the creation of the individual learning pathway with tangible goals, motives and outcomes for each of the inmates.

For each of the four thematic areas, the ICT assessment tool comprised a designated number of questions and tasks, allocated to several units on each of the three levels. The questions and tasks in the assessment tools have one or more closed answers, and the answers provided by the inmates have been used to analyse the skills of inmates for each of the levels. Depending on the skills levels demonstrated by inmates on each of the three levels, the delivery of the learning content has been individualised so that it met the real learning needs in best way possible.

#### *The Role of the Educator*

The educators delivering the Pebble training course have a crucial role to play in the success and achievement of inmates who are attending the course. There is a tendency to assume that teaching basic skills is a simple task. Actually, it is one of the most challenging and skilled areas of adult teaching. The educators who undertook the delivery of

the Pebble training seminars were confronted with learners for whom traditional or simple methods of learning to read or write or use numbers have not worked. This negative prior experience of education, or, equally, a lack of familiarity with formal education (for those who missed out on much of their schooling for a variety of reasons), plus the experience of coping with adult life without such important skills, means that a deep level of teacher knowledge and expertise were required from the educator delivering the Pebble training course.

The educators who were facilitating the basic skills course to adult inmates needed to possess a set of skills and attitudes at a more advanced level than other teachers who are facilitating general adult education. Basic skills learners need highly skilled professionals to help them succeed and not re-experience earlier negative experiences. So in this case, the educators had to understand the context of the adult learner, recognise learners' prior knowledge and experience and build on learners' strengths in order to create an effective learning process.

The educators needed to have the skills to engage, motivate and empower learners to enable them to reach their goals set for each of their life context and dimension. Also, the learners may have specific learning difficulties or be difficult to engage, due to their previous negative life/schools experiences and may face multiple educational barriers. Again, this requires specific competences for educators not only to deliver the course, but to motivate and stimulate the adult inmates to learn, to increase their self-esteem, and eventually encourage them to progress towards other forms of learning.

#### *Training Seminar for Prison Educators*

One way to engage the prison educators and prepare them for the delivery of the course was to organise a series of traininign for educators, designed to support educators in prisons in the use and application of the developed e-learning contents. During the seminar, educators were familiarised with the methodology of blended learning for the four basic skills and they were informed on the methodology applied for the creation of Individual Learning Plans-ILPs for the participating inmates.

In the delivery of the Pebble training seminars, the educators had available a comprehensive e-learning content designed to match the inmates' needs and interests on the four thematic areas and the three levels, accompanied by a diverse range of additional information that are available in the *Educator's Guide*. Together with the *Educator's Guide*, which was the main instrument to assist educators in the delivery of the Pebble training course, a *Learner's Guide* was available to assist the inmates in their learning process. The aim of the *Learner's Guide* is to provide clear and straightforward instructions to participants of the e-learning courses on the use of the e-learning management systems.

#### 4. Conclusions

The success in the implementation of the Pebble basic skills course depends on a lot of factors that can be anticipated or not. Each of the participating prisons in the pilot had to overcome several challenges and identify the best strategies to deal with those challenges.

According to Schwab *et al.* (2015), inclusion and differentiation are two main aspects to be considered when planning and delivering a training programme. Even though the programme is delivered to the whole group, the group is made up of individual who need to be included in the learning opportunities. In order to have an inclusive curriculum, the contents need to be presented in a staged and balanced manner. In this way the learners can move from one activity to another, steadily building their knowledge and skills. On the other side, differentiation is important in order to cope with the differences between learners that will affect how they learn, this including factors such as: attention, interest, motivation, cognitive issues, learning styles, psychological needs or previous learning experiences.

Another important aspect to consider when delivering the Pebble course is the learning and teaching cycle, that can be more or less complex depending on the context of the implementation. Usually a learning and teaching cycle follows the basic form of: initial assessment, lesson planning, lesson teaching, formative assessment and summative assessment (Griffiths *et al.*, 2015). There may be different stages in a learning and teaching cycle, but all should illustrate the same interplay: assessment, planning and teaching/delivering. Irrespective of the context and setting, the implementation of the Pebble training should at no cost avoid the fulfilment of these three steps, in order to ensure that inmate learners will get the best out of the educational process.

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## CHAPTER 7

### EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK BY INMATES IN THE PEBBLE RESEARCH

*Xenofon Chalatsis*

#### *1. Foreword*

Evaluation of training and educational programmes targeted at adult learners has been considered one of the most crucial parts of the implementation of the educational intervention, since it is the ultimate procedure to analyse the different factors involved in the process and to demonstrate whether this training has reached its objectives in an effective and efficient manner. Evaluation is important for all actors directly involved in the training process, such as the trainers and the trainees, but there are also some other groups who can benefit from its findings, such as the education and administrative staff, researchers, policy makers and the general public. Evaluation acts as a compass towards those training initiatives which have achieved their scopes so that they are repeated and multiplied, while it also demonstrates strong and weak points to be taken into account for future training activities. More specifically, evaluation of training in the framework of prison education is additionally important, since it can provide useful conclusions on other aspects, such as the correctional policy, the rehabilitation process and the final integration in society of the group of prisoners and the benefits which can be brought to this vulnerable target group.

Based on the aforementioned ideas, the Pebble project has given priority to the evaluation of the training process targeted at inmates in four European prisons so as to examine whether the pilot training in four different skills (ICT skills, Financial skills, Literacy and Numeracy) using the blended learning methodology had effects on the knowledge and the competences of inmates and on the correctional environment in general. The general objective of the project was to improve the provisions in prison education in European countries by providing an integrated learning model, which will combat any deficiencies in skills and competences of prisoners and will contribute and facilitate their personal development and their re-entry to the wider society. The specific objective of the Pebble project was the creation of e-learning environment and methodology which would respect the prison security regulation in

the European prison environments and would help inmates acquire key skills in order to be more fully equipped in dealing with their post-imprisonment life. This objective of the project involved the development of a blended learning environment as the main approach to provide innovative ICT-based content, pedagogy and service as a lifelong learning opportunity. The target group had access to an open and flexible learning online and off-line environment, which made their learning more individualised and autonomous. More specifically, the full potential of blended e-learning was used since it is flexible and takes the best from self-paced, instructor-led, distance and classroom delivery to improve instruction and ensures that learners undertake a more tailored learning pathway and gain access to personalised learning support (Englebright and Pettit, 2009).

To design and state these objectives is the first step of the evaluation process which was followed throughout the two years when the project lasted (2013–2015). This chapter will present the different aspects of the evaluation process followed for the Pebble project and will conclude with findings and recommendations for future development, optimisation and improvement.

## *2. Evaluation and Feedback*

### *2.1 Who and What*

The Pebble research project was based on specific findings related to the skills level of inmates, their competences in basic thematic areas, the existing educational provisions to the particular population and the recommendations provided by past initiatives and policy measures on the education and reintegration of inmates. Researchers from four major educational institutions in Europe gathered the relevant data, so as to create an educational pathway for each of the inmates who would later participate in the seminars. This data was presented in four National Reports<sup>1</sup>, enriched by findings obtained after the consolidation of the key actors in the field, i.e. the inmates, the educators and the penitentiary personnel involved in the education of inmates, such as the heads of prisons, the heads of prison schools, professional from the services supporting prisoners, such as social workers working in correctional institutions. The contribution of these people was sought at the evaluation of the educational intervention as well. Bearing in mind that only through

<sup>1</sup> <<http://elearninginprisons.com/index.php/en/tools-and-documents/national-reports-on-prison-education>> (12/15).

the cooperation of different agencies can prison education be effective, the Pebble project tried to involve different groups of people whose experience could help the project develop on the right way.

More particularly, the most crucial target group whose evaluation would judge the efficiency of the project was the inmates. All participating inmates in the four prisons were asked to evaluate their own skills and competences prior to the commencement of the pilot training. This self-evaluation was considered important so as to ensure that the proposed training was an answer to stated deficiencies and to form the basis upon which another self-evaluation would be conducted, after the end of the training so as to check changes in knowledge and attitudes. This evaluation, along with an assessment tool in electronic form formed the basis of the educational process of each inmate, since it provided the necessary information on who is going to attend which seminar of the four skills on which level out of the three (Basic, Intermediate and Advanced). When the educational process reached the middle, i.e. when training for the two out of four skills had been delivered, inmates were asked to evaluate its different aspects. Apart from the self-evaluation, where they were asked to assess themselves as far as the knowledge gained was concerned, they provided their views on the thematic fields, the educational material, the supporting media, the infrastructure, the human resources, and their trainers. This interim evaluation provided important feedback to be used as guidelines for the remaining two courses and actions were taken when an aspect received a low rate. They were also asked to provide estimation on the contribution of the pilot seminars to their future reintegration to society, an important point which is among the most crucial ones in the case of correctional education and support. The final evaluation of the pilot seminars were handed to them once they finish the training on the fourth skill, and similar questions were asked, so as to acquire a full and detailed picture of the inmates' point of view on the process.

Another group which participated in the evaluation was the trainers who undertook part of the training. These professionals were involved from the very beginning of the project since they also participated in a focus group on the educational provisions in the prison environment and were therefore fully aware of the scope and the activities of the project. Before the commencement of the pilot seminar, trainers participated in the *Train the Trainers seminar*, where they were familiarized with the different aspects of the project and, more importantly, with the Pebble Learning Management System and the content of the pilot courses for each of the four skills. Their training was supported by the *Educators' Guide*, a book containing all necessary information regarding their involvement and role in the project and the inmates' learning pathway. Trainers were asked to evaluate the seminars they attended, in an effort to estimate its effectiveness and efficiency, so that similar courses are organised by other

institutions in the future, when implementing similar projects. Trainers were asked to evaluate both the content and the methodology of the course, as well as their trainers. They highly appreciated their training, pointing out the importance of the support they need to have when teaching new materials with a new methodology. The remarks which were made were positive, while the Guide was highly evaluated. Furthermore, trainers were asked to provide feedback on the practical implementation of the pilot training of inmates as well, when training on the allocated thematic field (or skill) ended. Their evaluation comprised of questions regarding the perceived purpose of the Pebble project from their perspective, the assessment of the extent to which the Pebble project met trainees expectations, the outcomes of the project, the identification of the key success factors relating with the implementation of blended methodology in prison settings, and finally the identification of barriers and other factors that might have negative effects in likewise initiatives in the future. Their answers were very important in order to have a thorough feedback on what went well and what not during their involvement in the pilot training seminars, so that any necessary amendments are made in case other prisons and other educators wish to deliver similar projects. Their evaluations were quite high, they felt that they benefited from the particular experience, gaining more knowledge and competences as professionals, renewing their skills by implementing a new educational model and methodology. Their feedback was significantly important when it came to the evaluation of the educational materials and the content which was used, pointing some gaps in the materials used and some technical problems with the Learning Management System. Their views were taken into account and further corrections were made to avoid similar difficulties in the future.

Finally, another group whose evaluation was sought was the group of prison professionals who are directly involved in educational and training activities inside the correctional institutions where the pilot training took place. These professionals were the head of the prison, the head of the prison school and people from the social services who provide guidance and support to inmates. They were asked questions very similar to the ones trainers answered with a focus on the prospect of turning a prison to a positive learning environment. Their contribution was of major importance since they are the key actors in the field and are very well aware of the limitations existing inside prisons. The blended learning methodology was thought to be the answer to some barriers in prison education, for example when prison schools are not working, or when there are not enough educators to teach the population. Moreover, the focus given to the basic skills was highly evaluated, since skills gaps among inmates is a common phenomenon and finding and is necessary to be resolved prior to any other type of thematic area. The restrictions in the use of Inter-

net are barriers which cannot be overcome by them, since it is a matter of national policies; still, using CD-ROMs in computers was regarded as a positive learning method for prisoners to be acquainted with new media and new technologies.

## 2.2 *How*

The evaluation process of the Pebble was conducted at two levels. The first level was the internal evaluation which involved the direct engagement of all different actors who participated in the training and was conducted by the professionals organising and delivering the training. In order to enhance the validity of findings, a second level of evaluation was added involving the appointment of an external evaluator to assess the different elements of the training, as well as other aspects of the project, such as management and partnership cooperation issues. Both levels will be presented since they acted complementarily and brought added value to the evaluation results.

The groups which participated in the evaluation of the training seminars and the blended methodology provided their feedback through different means. A combination of means was thought to be essential so as to gather as much information as possible, so that the final results of the whole process are valid and real. The following evaluation means were used:

- *Questionnaires*: Questionnaires were used in the case of inmates, containing closed and open questions so that they had the opportunity to express their opinions on the different aspects under question. Numerical data is necessary to measure items such as skills before and after training and effectiveness of the educational materials. This is the reason why they were asked to provide a grade on different aspects of the pilot training and in the majority of questions they were given a range of 1- 10 to evaluate them. Another reason for this type of evaluation is that, in transnational projects, such as the Pebble project, there is a need for provision of comparable results. Therefore, inmates' opinions from four different prisons, in four different countries can form a valuable feedback, able to be generalised for other inmates in other correctional institutions. On the other hand, open questions gave them the opportunity to reveal views on issues such as motivation, future plans, possibility of successful reintegration and wishes for more or other educational programmes they would like to attend. These questionnaires gave the partnership useful information on what went well and what needs to be changed, in case the project is replicated in different prisons, where the population there is similar to the population participating in the Pebble pilot training seminars. For the same reasons, trainers answered to questionnaires

regarding their participation in the «Train the Trainers» courses, assessing numerically the different aspects of the course.

- *Interviews*: Evaluation through interviews was chosen for the cases of trainers when they finished the pilot training seminars, and the prison officials. The opinions of these professionals were thought to enrich the findings of the project, since they are very well aware of what works in the prison environment and what can be done for the creation of a fruitful learning environment for prisoners. The type of questions asked could not be answered in a quantitative manner, since only through discussions can other elements emerge as being essential or relevant to prison education. It is quite common the phenomenon when professionals from the field of education and training have a pre-fixed notion on what is and works for prison education. These people can validate ideas and can clarify situations, since they are constantly in contact with members of the target group and, more importantly with policy makers in the field.
- *External evaluation*: The project evaluation was one of the most crucial parts of the Pebble project since it related to the quality assurance variables that measure various aspects of the project in order to ensure that the predefined quality standards have been met. Therefore, an external evaluator was appointed so as to assess the project in terms of its originally planned objectives, in terms of the key Lifelong Learning Programme priorities, in terms of the sustainability of project products and the potential for pan-European impact of the project outputs. The evaluator had access to all project documents and training materials, monitoring the training procedure closely. The data collection methods employed included, as appropriate to the range of stakeholders, formal and informal interviews, assessment tests, evaluation questionnaires and observation. For the specific part of the project which involved the training of inmates, the evaluator had access to the training materials and contacted the relevant stakeholders so as to record their views on the matter in question. The feedback provided was used in order to revise products and outcomes so that they can be used extensively by other members of the target group. The recommendations, stated in two different reports, formed the basis upon which partners built the training process, making timely amendments for the maximization of the expected impact.
- *Follow up*: The purpose of the follow-up methodology is to measure the long term outcomes of the training intervention. It has to be pointed out that the follow up process is among the most important elements of the training process since firstly it helps to ensure that prisoners can capitalise on the education they have undertaken within the prison environment and secondly it can prevent the time and fund investments made in such learning initiatives from being wasted or useless

for the specific target group. The aim of the Pebble follow up questionnaires was to unveil whether the training intervention has led to any changes as far as the following aspects are concerned: educational gain, placement in primary/ secondary/ postsecondary education and receipt of the relevant credential, post-release entered employment. The follow up process has been designed to take place biannually, i.e. six months after the end of the training seminars and twelve months after the end of the training seminars, while the post release employment status was decided to be measured within the first semester after trainees exit from the programme and retained employment in the first year after the end of the project. This follow up is expected to provide valuable feedback since it will assess the potential changes in the behaviour of inmates in a more tangible and systematic way. Moreover, the connection between training in prisons and employment outside prison was included in this follow up process, since it has been found that if training is provided with no real prospect of securing employment after release, this can be damaging for prisoners (McEvoy, 2008). Generally, it needs to be pointed out that the follow up process has been designed in such way so as to provide an answer regarding the connection between recidivism and prison education, a connection which has been found in numerous studies and reports dealing with the issue (for example, Hrabowski and Robbi, 2002). This will be checked in due time, when the appropriate time period has passed and the behaviour have (or have not) changed.

### *3. Conclusions and Recommendations*

After the presentation of the evaluation process implemented by the Pebble project, the following conclusions can be drawn, while recommendations for further research can be made:

- Evaluation in prison education, as in all other types of education needs to bear specific characteristics. It has to start from the very beginning of an educational intervention and to continue beyond the lifetime of the training to check changes in different elements such as skills, knowledge, learning and behaviours. It has to actively involve all different actors who have taken part in the intervention, since each one can provide different type of feedback on the same issues investigated. It has to be based on different tools and media, so as to provide the opportunity of clear and thorough expression of thoughts and views. It needs to be designed in a way to correspond to the stated objectives, so as to measure them independently and draw conclusions. Finally, the conclusions of all different sorts of evaluations need to be widely disseminated, especially to those professionals involved in prison ed-



ucation and decision making so a robust evidence base is created to inform those people and the general public as well.

- As pointed out in the *Report Prison Education and Training in Europe. Current State-of-Play and Challenges* (Hawley *et al.*, 2013), among the issues which require further research and evaluation is the investigation on how new technologies can be best used for prison education and training, in a way that is compatible with the security required of a prison regime. The Pebble project has demonstrated that on the one hand the blended learning methodology worked very well for the participating inmates, while on the other hand, flexibility is the key point for overcoming Internet security barriers within prisons. In the framework of the project, the educational process was supported by both online materials for those participating prisons with less strict policy on the availability of internet access for their inmates (such as in the case of Italy–Pescara) and off-line materials for those prisons where the access to Internet is prohibited (such as the case of Greece–Korydallos). The availability of both types of materials has enhanced the prospect of their future use in other prisons.
- The overall results of the evaluation regarding different aspects of the training were positive, implying that project’s products and outcomes can be replicated in different prison settings in other countries. However, it has to be pointed out that the fact that this methodology worked for the participating inmates does not necessarily mean that it will work for others. «It is also important to go beyond “what works” to identifying “what works in different environments and for different offender groups” (e.g. female offenders, foreign offenders, those with learning difficulties, etc.)» (Hawley *et al.*, 2013: 52).
- In most of the participating prisons, the role of the educators was highly valued. In other penitentiary environments, like Pescara (Italy), the issue was who is to be considered as ‘educator’ in the prison context<sup>2</sup> (we assume such a role to be associated to various professionals working in prison, penitentiary officers included). The Pebble experience has shown that the presence of an educator is important, as for example, in the case of Greece where the evaluation received by inmates regarding different aspects of the training seminars was high, but when it came to the evaluation of their educators, it was significantly high, pointing out that their contribution to the acquisition of skills and competences was valuable. One of the challenges faced by the project was to find this certain balance between the electronic

<sup>2</sup> Educational functions are plaid by the so called ‘legal-pedagogical officers’ (*funzionario giuridico-pedagogico*) as well as school teachers, external trainers, volunteers, penitentiary officers, etc. Following this approach the research in Pescara (Italy) aimed at the active involvement of a wide typology of ‘educators’.

learning and the face-to-face learning. On the one hand the objective was for inmates to get acquainted with the use of the computer as an educational tool, learning at their own pace and rhythm, while on the other project partners did not want to deprive them from the human contact which is of high importance for the specific target group. So the challenge was neither too little nor too much contact with educators. Their role was highly valued, especially when it came to the provision of encouragement and motivation to continue or start something new, a new unit, for example. Inmates, having a negative experience from formal education, usually feel discouraged to participate in educational programmes, feeling that a repetition of previous experiences is most likely to occur. So, the evaluation showed that educators, apart from helping participants in the there-and-then barriers, had the role of a coach as well, providing support.

- A broad cooperation between different agencies is essential for the successful combination of learning needs and educational provisions using new technologies and ICT tools. Some of the most important actors who need to cooperate in order to provide viable and meaningful educational solutions to inmates are: Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice, Higher education Institutions and vocational training centers, prison personnel such as penitentiary personnel, social workers, counselors and psychologists, heads of prisons, directors of schools, volunteers providing services in the prison, organizations related to arts and culture activities, NGOs etc. Their cooperation should focus on issues such as the administrative responsibilities for prison education, the funding and educational resources, the research, evaluation and dissemination of 'good' or 'best' practices so as to enable evidence-based planning and development. In the Pebble research the cooperation between educational and correctional institutions proved to be a success factor for the project outcomes.

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*Web sources*<sup>3</sup>

<<http://elearninginprisons.com/index.php/en/tools-and-documents/national-reports-on-prison-education>>

<sup>3</sup> Consultation at 12/15.

## CHAPTER 8

### INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS SUPPORTING EDUCATION IN PRISON

*Annet Bakker*

#### *1. European*

As a starter I would like to focus on the first word in our name: ‘European’. What does European mean to us? My experience tells me that apart from being a dedicated Italian professional you may have gone abroad and met colleagues in different countries doing the same work. Have they approached the same difficulties you experience in your everyday work in a different way? ‘European’ includes a personal, a local and a national view, but it is also a joint perspective: a European perspective, the wish to share and support one vision. This is, simply stated, the reason for our existence.

#### *The Council of Europe*

On the 13th of October 1989, the Council of Europe adopted the set of Recommendations No. R 89(12), that outline the needs and responsibilities concerning the education of imprisoned persons in Europe.

These recommendations stipulate that all imprisoned persons should be offered the opportunity to engage in educational activities and that these activities should serve to develop the whole person, be conducive to effective reintegration, and encourage a reduction in recidivism.

As from 1991 these recommendations have formed the basis of the objectives of the EPEA and have been ratified in the educational policies of a number of European countries, but still we have to go a long way to ensure that the recommendations are sufficiently well implemented across Europe and internationally.

#### *Non Governmental Organisation*

The EPEA is recognised by the Council of Europe as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Twice a year it has an advisory role in the commissions meetings on education and humanitarian rights related issues. In this capacity we contribute and share all our professional expertise in this very important collective.

To support organisations through Europe a lot is done at a European level to facilitate this collaboration. Regulations, legal frameworks

and funding programmes have been developed and are still under constant revision.

### *Education and Training 2020*

(ET2020) is the European legal basis framing cooperation between EU member states in the sector. It allows them to exchange practices, work together and get support for their policy reforms. In 2009, ET 2020 set four common EU objectives to address challenges in education and training systems by 2020:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

ET2020 has also defined EU benchmarks to reach for 2020, including the one that determines that 15% of adults should participate in life-long learning.

Nevertheless times have changed and ET2020 must adapt to new economic and social realities. The Commission has just released a draft report<sup>1</sup> to see how priorities can evolve. The main proposals for adult learning featured by the report include political continuity in implementing the renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning through four main axes:

- Governance;
- Supply and take up;
- Flexibility and access;
- Quality.

### *European Funding Programmes*

Programmes such as Grundtvig and now the Erasmus+ for adult education enable many parties to work together and pass the threshold of their national boundaries. Most educational institutes and penitentiary institutes are mostly focused on the groundwork and in delivering outcomes that are directly visible in their own environment. Commercial enterprises will more naturally look for experience abroad and will try to copy methodology that even if it is new has already worked elsewhere, and they will be more inclined to invest in this kind of learning and developing methods. Non-profit organisations more often than not do not experience this urge to invest in knowledge culture. Therefore, the in-

<sup>1</sup> <[http://ec.europa.eu/education/documents/et-2020-draft-joint-report-408-2015\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/documents/et-2020-draft-joint-report-408-2015_en.pdf)> (12/15).

dividuals that have ideas and that want to explore and share them with others are very much depending on funding, thus having to convince their employers of the necessity and added value that exploring these ideas internationally can bring to professional development. We see a growing interest in these international partnerships and ways of collaboration, one of the reasons being that years of funding programmes have established an awareness of the potential in similar or supplementary organisations abroad. Of course many countries have still a more internal approach of their work, but this is bound to change.

#### *Communication Assistance*

Language barriers are sometimes very simple but nonetheless critically important obstacles. International collaboration involves understanding and to achieve that we have to be able to actively use a common working language. In Europe most of the time this language is English, so this may be a reason to be reluctant to start an international approach, because it takes you out of your comfort zone, and at the same time it could also be seen as a challenge. Motivating staff to share their experience and their professional knowledge in a different language also brings immense recognition of their value. An employer who recognises the importance of what has been done on a national level being as good enough to be presented in an international playfield, will in this way praise the employees and stimulate them to continue exploring their work from even more different angles. To find differences and similarities in other national systems may encourage staff to revise their approach, one that may have been taken for granted for too long. It can also help fine-tuning the methodologies that have been already discovered or used.

The European funding programmes include language assistance funds, to prepare employees for higher levels of language skills enabling them to be able to participate in international projects.

#### *European Scope*

In Europe there is no other organisation that has as much understanding of and experience in Prison Education (PE) as EPEA. The combination of its wide variety of professionals as members, with active connections with most of the partners that have been involved in PE-related projects over the last 25 years or so, makes the EPEA a unique organisation. Another important aspect is the fact that EPEA is a non-profit organisation: we are and have been relying on enthusiastic members who have agreed to dedicate their time, knowledge, experience and expertise in support of the work of EPEA. Most of the time this was done by running the projects and sharing their outcomes with us.

It is also important to note that our members have extended their scope from a national one to an international one as soon as they became members of the EPEA.

#### *National versus European Awareness*

Through the way we are organised we aim to secure a personal touch as much as possible. Our regional representatives keep in touch with the partners in their region, reporting back to the Steering Committee, and as such we have built up a regional knowledge of most of the PE activity and its developments. These developments are best to be understood by a person of the region itself, who is aware of the cultural, national and historical nuances that can differ a lot between the European countries. This makes the European awareness grow within our organisation itself and, of course, within the members that take part in European activities.

## *2. Prison*

Why should there be a special interest organisation as ours? Is working in prisons different from teaching in a school? Well, yes and no. Sometimes, when I am approached and asked about the many dangerous moments I must certainly have faced during my 25 years of teaching in prison, I can only think of the regular teachers in our ordinary schools that face so many dangerous moments in their ordinary classes. In the minds of people that do not have the everyday experience of being in a prison, there is a concept fed by films, books and lately TV shows that distorts reality. Moreover, there is also a regulatory element: we face in prison a stricter rule environment than the one in our school system, and it crosses our learning plans on a daily basis. Prisons have a role in detaining persons that have crossed lines in society and their punishment is detention. With detention comes a strict set of rules and regulations. Education, as many other services rendered in prison, is not usually part of the professional capacity of the prison management, so basic rules and regulations are not always in favour of the education services offered. We have to work with and around these necessities, because they are there to serve us as well. But in a regular school you do not face the same problems our prisoner learners face, in for example, the possibility of having to be transferred elsewhere in any day of their stay in prison, even if this is in the middle of their education programme: we can start teaching, but we cannot always finish. In a school everybody speaks 'education-language', in a prison only the happy few fully understand what you are doing. I don't feel that I have to elaborate much more about the differences and similarities,

working in prison is different, but I can note one thing that is good: we don't have to deal with all the parents!

### *3. Education*

The third word in our name refers to our core business: education. We defined 'Education in prison' in our constitution as: formal, informal and non-formal education provided for all persons who are under the supervision of the judiciary, whether sentenced or awaiting trial, and whether serving a sentence in prison or in the community. It comprises the curriculum of normal, formal education and the arts, access to the library and sports.

#### *21st Century Skills*

Technological developments have rapidly changed education, and the way we communicate today has challenged the older and the younger generations. For the juveniles that became imprisoned it means a double isolation when, from one day to the next, they lost both their individual freedom and their web based communication possibilities, changing the imprisonment itself to a different sort of sentence. The older generation generally does not use the possibilities of these new communication paths in the same way and thus a new generation of illiterates is being created: the digital illiterates. Since society demands gradually more of an integrated participation of its citizens, lots of people experience a social exclusion if they do not evolve together with the world around them and learn how to use digital devices. Many of the prisoner learners use the time opportunities in prison and finally try to make that step to see if they can catch up with the world, taking computer and IT learning courses.

Education needs to adapt to these developments, there is need for suitable programmes, online facilities and a proper education policy with training of staff and secured internet facilities. Of course there needs to be a basic educational provision, with classrooms, teachers and a curriculum, but that is not the end of it. We see that most prison education systems only rarely manage to keep up this speed of developments. Moreover developments change enormously between countries, but also between prisons within one country. Technology should of course complement existing teaching provision and not be a replacement, as we know the relationships between students, teachers and their peers are key. There are some very interesting developments in the area of technology and so international collaboration between professionals, is essential if changes are to be made and we all want to be brought up to speed, but this is not enough. We also need engagement of policy-makers as a vital con-



dition for success. Understanding of the possibilities and the challenges is necessary to create a broad platform in any policy discussion regarding prison education.

#### 4. Association

Let me tell you more about our organisation itself, the final part of our name.

##### *Who are we?*

The European Prison Education Association is a member organisation made up of prison educators, administrators, governors, researchers and other professionals whose interests lie in promoting and developing education and related activities in prisons throughout Europe.

The Steering Committee of the EPEA is elected by the members of the EPEA. It meets monthly online and every 6 months in some part of Europe, and convenes with the General Council every two years. It works on behalf of the membership, providing leadership, promoting and administering the association. When it meets its goal is to achieve progress within a strategic plan of development and to carry through the policy decisions identified by the Officers (Chair, Secretary & Treasurer) and Regional Representatives (North, South, East, West & Central), the General Council and the membership of the association.

Our members can be individual members or organisational members. Both organisational as individual members have become members for a reason, a curiosity or specific wish for collaboration on a certain topic of their interest. That personal involvement is one of the main energies that drive our organisation and make it so powerful and effective. We started off as a small group of people, and feel that this element of personal approach is still an important key to our success in all our involvements.

##### *What do we do?*

The EPEA organises bi-annual training conferences in order to offer a unique and strong international platform to exchange best practices and research through presentations and panels. Building bridges between practitioners, policymakers and researchers is another one of the many purposes that these conferences are used for. By meeting other professionals and taking part in a large variety of interactive training sessions, our participants build their own network in which many new ideas are developed into new projects and collaborations. We do not need to invent what has been tried in a neighbouring country, we can learn from the experience, whether the experience was successful or not. Knowing

where things went wrong helps building up the next project without making the same mistakes.

The unique centralised position of the EPEA on prison education makes it the obvious organisation to turn to, for partner search and dissemination of information.

We can connect, mediate, advise and inform, we are a powerful tool and we love to be used in projects that agree with the recommendations and our strategy plan.

### *Partnerships*

EPEA is committed to working with prison administrations in Europe to further its aims, but is totally free-standing and independent. Apart from serving the aims of the organisation by, amongst other things, encouraging the formation of national branches, the EPEA organises a major international conference on prison education every two years. This is why EPEA cherishes its role in the Commission of Europe and the partnerships with organisations such as JEPR, EuroPris, EPALE and EAFA. I want to introduce these key actors to you.

*JEPR*<sup>2</sup> is the Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry; an international, peer-reviewed journal for researchers and practitioners. Topics covered include, but are not limited to: sociology, criminology, adult education and literacy, instructional design, mental and behavioural health, and administration and policy as it relates to the context of prisoner education and subsequent reentry into the community beyond prison walls. They invite us warmly to motivate practitioners and researchers alike, to contribute to their journal, in this way building a bridge between the academic world and educational practise. We recently discussed how we can build a bridge for practitioners that do not possess foreign language-skills to write an article, and ideas of a translation-pool of experts were exchanged. Hopefully this will stimulate people to speak more openly about their work so that others can learn from it.

### *EuroPris*<sup>3</sup>

The European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services is a non-political, non-governmental organisation that was initiated in late 2010, founded in 2011 and officially registered in The Netherlands in December 2011. EuroPris brings together practitioners in the prisons' arena with the specific intention of promoting ethical and rights-based imprisonment, exchanging information and providing expert assistance

<sup>2</sup> <<https://jper.uib.no/jper/index>> (12/15).

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.europris.org/>> (12/15).

to support this agenda. The organisation exists to improve co-operation among European Prison and Correctional Services, with the aim of improving the lives of prisoners and their families, enhancing public safety and security; reducing re-offending; and advancing professionalism in the corrections' field.

*EPALE*<sup>4</sup> is a relatively young initiative of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission, and are committed to making this online initiative a permanent feature of the European adult learning landscape. They recently initiated an theme week on prison education, which will hopefully be a good way to start a dialogue between the regular teachers and prison teachers or other professionals across Europe.

*EAEA*<sup>5</sup> is a European NGO whose purpose is to link and represent European organisations directly involved in adult learning. Originally known as the European Bureau of Adult Education. EAEA promotes adult learning and access to and participation in non-formal adult education for all, particularly for groups currently under-represented.

#### *Added value*

The EPEA has grown from a small member organisation to a fully recognised authority in the playing field of the European partners I just mentioned. All these partners have to work together in order to reach a humanitarian and constructive detention policy with successful reintegration in mind. We all have a different entry and connections with prison education, and this tells us that prison education alone is not very valuable: we need to see it in a wider perspective, and tied with an offer of activities related to the detention and re-integration of the prisoners.

Projects and policy need to be in balance, both need to be implemented and supported to have a certain added value. Without visionaries there would not be a good policy implementation or a meaningful education.

These different international bodies need to be connected to understand their collective wider perspective and be aware of their power of change. As an example of a different perspective I recently came into contact with representatives of the CPT (Commission for the Prevention of Torture), that of course enters so many of our prisons to monitor detention conditions and monitors prison education against the

<sup>4</sup> <<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/nl>> (12/15).

<sup>5</sup> <<http://www.eaea.org/>> (12/15).

recommendations of the Council of Europe. Good coherent policy and the reality that supersedes the initial vision is visible during their visits. These meetings are very valuable in extending our sometimes one-sided vision; we can look at the conditions that we take for granted, but sometimes we may be very well organised in comparison to other prisons and countries. Priorities can also differ: we often refer to Maslow-pyramid uses in our classes, but speaking to people of the CPT makes you realise that you need to start with the basic provisions. Once a safe learning environment is secured, then you can start the teaching. If that is not done you have to take into consideration that conditions might interfere with the learning process. This, however, should never be a reason not to teach.

In answer to one of the questions I got for this article, about concrete outcomes of projects we have participated in, it seems a bit unfair to me to direct you to only a few of the many projects that have crossed our paths.

Maybe the best way to introduce you to some of the most recent interesting projects, is to have a look at the projects that were presented at our latest bi-annual conference<sup>6</sup> in Antwerp during last September (please scroll down on the page to find resumes of all presentations). I strongly believe that success depends very much on what is the starting point of the project partners. If we work in a country where PE is not very well developed and through a project, different organisations and teachers of prisons end up working together and a network of peer learning starts up, this can develop into a major breakthrough in the future development of that country's policy or strategy. If a project is made up of partners that have long history of PE, and who are looking for a specific outcome for, i.e. their web-based learning, this may be highly appreciated by those participants, but worthless for prisons that have no computers available for education purposes. Success is relative, and we should be aware of that. As long as we appreciate each other's starting points and try to improve what we have got, everybody can benefit. In some projects you will teach, in others you will learn. In all of them you will grow, and the EPEA grows with you.

We have of course seen great projects that have resulted in great successes like for example 'The prison translator'. A programme with Penitentiary terminology translated in many European languages. Since then other projects have done similar work using newer technology. We saw the development of distance learning from Sweden growing into different models used elsewhere, and now it has become a huge added value for the Danish prison education model.

<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.epea.org/epea/conference/>> (12/15).

Many projects have involved external prison education providers or other organisations that were not necessarily working inside the prison, this helped working towards what we now see as perfectly normal: re-integration with chain partners in society.

#### *Recent Developments within EPEA*

Over the last years the EPEA has worked very hard to create a longer term vision and strategy. We have very ambitious targets to better facilitate our members in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Prison Education world. We have updated our communication facilities to be even more visible and interactive with the members. This involved a modernisation of our website, and a professional webinar facility to introduce themed discussions with the members or other interested parties. We hope to be more actively present in projects in the near future. For this we created a non-profit social enterprise plan, that is ready to be put into practice as soon as the final decision is made on the Steering Committee.

With the composition of the new Steering Committee we now have a more active focus on the learner's point of view because of the integration of our western representative, Nina Champion. She also happens also to be part of the Prisoner's Learner Alliance (PLA) and then joined the EPEA Steering Committee because she wanted a more international scope than the British playing field that she knows so well.

This brings us to the very own Italian context, with the revision of penitentiary policy in which I hope to have contributed to the educational aspects of the national and international policy. Of course I say this without any knowledge of the current Italian educational policy and only with my humble experience, so once more, this is very relative...

On behalf of the EPEA SC I wish you good luck and hope that the Council of Europe Recommendations for Prison Education and the resources on the EPEA website are useful in your discussions. We will always be here to help.

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<sup>7</sup> Consultation at 12/15.



## CONCLUSIONS

*Francesca Torlone, Marios Vryonides*

Penitentiary institutions can be seen as «cognitive systems» (Vicari and Troilo, 1999; Federighi and Torlone, 2015). It implies that they can be seen as source of learning for prisoners for two different reasons. On the one hand such systems manage learning actions that take place inside the prison for the transfer of knowledge (classrooms, laboratories etc.) aimed at solving gaps of knowledge and often leading to formal certifications. On the other hand penitentiary institutions can give value to the knowledge they possess themselves through educational actions that are managed – intentionally or not – by any individuals living therein. Knowledge they possess is in terms of relations, routine assignments, personal culture and beliefs, values, procedures. Learning for prisoners is affected also by all of these components. These latter ones do also affect blended learning, the way it is structured, formalised and made available for prisoners (authorisation needed to enter the classroom, use the internet connection, define the duration of PC use etc.).

From a pedagogical point of view the design, activation and management of rehabilitation processes on an individual level refers to the creation of wide opportunities for personal growth and learning for inmates, in and outside prison. Prisoners can grow, reflect on their personal life and expectations for the future by being part of different learning opportunities, like the formal and blended, non-formal, informal, ‘embedded’ ones.

The penitentiary cognitive system should try to make *any* learning opportunities available for prisoners as to address the re-educational goals assigned to punishment and penitentiary institutions as such. The perspective evidenced by our research is new: in addition to education, vocational training, school activities, laboratories, etc. that are widely organised and very much appreciated the focus may be also on how to make the whole penal system a learning system for prisoners (surveillance judiciary, penitentiary officers, heads of prisons, volunteers, teachers and trainers, chaplains, health care personnel, lawyers etc.: all of them play an educational role towards prisoners in their daily actions and tasks). Blended learning is part of the system and is surely an important part of



the penitentiary learning mosaic: it promotes learner's autonomy, independence, responsibility, freedom as learner – following penitentiary rules and restrictions and his/her own treatment plan – can decide whether to practice e-learning, when and how long, control his/her learning pathway via the use of distant tools like assessment entry and exit tests etc.

Another crucial related issue is to investigate on learning needs individuals-learners-prisoners do have. Prisoners – like most of the individuals – do not always have clear in mind and cannot articulate and communicate what they would like to learn and why. Penitentiary 'educators' in all countries do have in common the responsibility to deeply investigate on individual learning needs and demand in the frame of prisoners' biography and 'penitentiary history' and design a tailored learning pathway that will activate transformative learning processes in the individual-learner-prisoner. Blended learning can support such transformative process.

The challenge for policy makers, researchers, professionals is to go on building penitentiary institutes as «learning cities» (Federighi, 2016) where educational actions are taken at all levels in the view of prisoners' re-education and rehabilitation. Managers of prisons play an important role in that.

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