

The “Prisoners Are People” Perspective—And the Problems of Promoting Learning Where this Outlook Is Rejected

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“This is a true account of a prison without walls, without guns, without guards, where the dignity of the individual is recognized and each is treated as a person.”

— Kenyon J. Scudder, Chino, California, August 1951, in Foreword to *Prisoners are People*.

“...prisoners should be listened to and their agreement or willingness should be sought in connection with decisions. This means...that the prisoner should no longer be seen as an object of treatment but as a responsible subject.”

— Hans Tulkens, June 1988, in “The Concept of Treatment in the European Prison Rules.”

Introduction

In the U.S., Britain, and to a lesser extent in some other parts of Europe, penal policy has of late been characterized by massive increases in the use of incarceration, by negative stereotyping of prisoners and by extremely vengeful attitudes.

The essential point of this paper is that many of these linked and currently dominant penal approaches (which I title ‘Anglo-American’), as well as being destructive in themselves, severely narrow and distort the education of inmates. The solution to this problem can begin by connecting with penal perspectives that center on human dignity, and also by linking correctional/prison education with the insights and practice of progressive adult education. (In this paper I will usually use the European term ‘prison education’ to cover what in North America and elsewhere is called ‘correctional education,’ and the term ‘penal’ to refer to wider matters that in North America are also described as ‘correctional’—as in correctional institution, system or policies).

The paper begins by exploring in section II one perspective that is, in my view, coherent and credible in its description of the role of imprisonment, i.e., the philosophy inherent in the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 1987). The outlook in that European ‘policy document’ complements very well the thinking in a further Council

of Europe report, *Education in Prison* (1990), which is analyzed in section III and which advocates an adult education orientation for the education of those held in custody. There are many earlier U.S. works that can be drawn on to support these alternative views: e.g., John Dewey’s general approach to education (Westbrook, 1991), Austin MacCormick’s (1931) prescription for correctional education, and Kenyon Scudder’s (1952) account of a clearheaded and bold penal initiative at the California Institute for Men, among many others. Such American works will be touched upon rather than examined in detail in this paper, but they do offer powerful challenges to the state of things in American corrections today. The title of Scudder’s story, *Prisoners are People*, neatly encapsulates the philosophy that underpinned his efforts and could just as well be used to summarize the European Prison Rules approach.

The underlying assumptions of these perspectives are greatly at variance with those of the currently dominant ‘Anglo-American’ approach to penal policy. The ‘Anglo-American’ approach is analyzed and criticized in section IV and an argument made in section V that it is close to incompatible with genuine education. Correctional/prison education needs to detach and distance itself from such destructive penal attitudes and practices. Those of us who work for the education of offenders have to also be advocates of humane

and workable penal policies (bearing in mind that much of what happens at present in prisons is neither). Relating the thinking of adult educators such as Jack Mezirow (1990) to educational work in penal institutions offers guidance and encouragement, not just in the classroom but in how we might deal with larger system as well; this is the theme of section VI. A concluding section VII sketches suggestions for "a way forward."

Principles for Penal Policy

The European Prison Rules (EPR) are far more than a set of rules or standards.

They offer clear principles, and a policy framework, for the use of imprisonment. They represent an adaptation, to specific European conditions and aspirations, of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) for the treatment of prisoners. The first such European revision of SMR was made in 1973 and a second revision in 1987. The EPR's of 1973 introduced 'human dignity' as a basic principle, while in the more recent 1987 version, the rules "endeavor to operationalize the idealistic goals of treatment, to make them more realistic and further to define the structural, organizational and personnel instruments and the treatment or regime activities needed" (Tulkens, 1988).

I wish to dwell on some of the underlying core principles in the EPR. There is a clear assumption in them that, in general, prison damages people and should be used as a last resort, and, where used, the "suffering inherent" in imprisonment should be minimized. (EPR 64,65) Tulkens says of the EPR that, following the revisions, they now "explain, as it were: if you go on using imprisonment you have at least to try hard to make it as harmless and as positive as possible for the prisoners. Therefore: listen to them, take account of their opinions, make them cooperate and assume responsibilities; on the other hand, do not be over-ambitious as to what can be achieved or what can be promised, but offer prisoners consequently realistic and attainable opportunities, chances, activities and help which meet their needs and stimulate their interests."

Two other crucial characteristics of the EPR philosophy emerge in the above quotation. One is the idea that there may be some scope in prisons

to offer prisoners opportunities to develop themselves (although this is not to deny "the detrimental effects of imprisonment," nor should the scope for such positive action be exaggerated—the overriding fact is that prison is usually a destructive process). The other feature of the EPR to be noted is the advocacy of serious participation by the prisoner based on respect for his or her human dignity. Tulkens says, "What comes to the fore in particular is that prisoners should be listened to and their agreement or willingness should be sought in connection with decisions. This means that the review stressed that the prisoner should no longer be seen as an object of treatment but as a responsible subject."

These core features of the EPR may be found in three of the more important rules. The EPR begin with a statement of six principles, the third of which seems to me to go to the heart of the matter:

"The purposes of the treatment of persons in custody shall be such as to sustain their health and self-respect and, so far as the length of sentence permits, to develop their sense of responsibility and encourage those attitudes and skills that will assist them to return to society with the best chance of leading law-abiding and self-supporting lives after their release."

The idea of 'treatment' here is clearly quite different from the narrower medical usage of this term. It has both defensive and more positive qualities; it recognizes that the negative psychological, social and physical effects of imprisonment must be held in check as much as possible, while whatever openings there may be for personal development must be taken. This dual approach is seen in the elaboration of 'treatment objectives' given in rules 64 and 65:

64. "Imprisonment is by the deprivation of liberty a punishment in itself. The conditions of imprisonment and the prison regimes shall not, therefore, except as incidental to justifiable segregation or the maintenance of discipline, aggravate the suffering inherent in this.

65. Every effort shall be made to ensure that the regimes of the institutions are designed and managed so as: (a) to ensure that the conditions of life are compatible with human dignity and acceptable standards in the community; (b) to minimize the detrimental effects of imprisonment and the differences between prison life and life at liberty which tend to diminish the self-respect or sense of personal responsibility of prisoners; (c) to sustain and strengthen those links with relatives and the outside community that will promote the best interests of prisoners and their families; (d) to provide opportunities for prisoners to develop skills and aptitudes that will improve their prospects of successful resettlement after release."

The key principles inherent in the EPR have been summarized somewhat differently by William Rentzmann (1996), who also vividly illustrates their implications by reference to experience in Scandinavian prison systems. Rentzmann speaks of three fundamental and interrelated principles of a modern penal philosophy: Normalization, Openness and Responsibility (also called, perhaps more pertinently, Self-Administration). The connection between these concepts and the EPR as already outlined should be clear enough. Openness refers to all efforts to counteract the 'total institution'; the negative effects of incarceration are reduced by opening prisons to the outside world. Normalization "means that comparison should always be made with conditions outside the prison when deciding what is appropriate," echoing the EPR 65 reference to adherence to "acceptable standards in the community" and to the sustaining and strengthening of "links with relatives and the outside community." The idea of Self-Administration breaks with the paternalistic traditions of most prisons, places responsibility and the need for initiative on the shoulders of the prisoner and promotes serious participation as envisaged by the EPR. Rentzmann illustrates in very concrete terms what is involved here in his description of the Danish Prison Service's move away from the provision of 'hotel' services. The

inmate there must choose, buy and cook his or her own food, must wash his or her own clothes, and must to a large extent be responsible for his or her own treatment program.

Education in Prison

The European Prison Rules, then, developed around the idea that the prisoner should be regarded as, in the words of Tulkens, "a responsible subject." The prisoner's dignity is seen to be respected; the prisoner is seen as a citizen, a member of the community; and is allowed, as far as possible, scope to make choices and to seriously participate in shaping his or her life and activity within the prison. One logical outcome of this approach was to give a very strong role for education within regimes (EPR, 77-82): there should be a "comprehensive education programme" in every institution; all prisoners should have access to education; and education "should be regarded as a regime activity that attracts the same status and basic remuneration within the regime as work."

It is interesting to note that while senior prison administrators were working out this policy in Strasbourg in the mid-80s, another Council of Europe 'expert group' was, to a large extent independently, coming to conclusions in relation to prison education that are remarkably complementary to the ideas in the EPR. But that Select Committee, which produced the report, *Education in Prison* (1990), took its initial bearings largely from the world of adult education. This section notes how an adult education orientation to the education of prisoners supports and is supported by the 'European' penal policy outlined above.

Perhaps it is no surprise that these two Council of Europe reports should mesh in so well with each other, but it is somewhat remarkable how, in another continent at another time, Austin MacCormick wrote, in *The Education of Adult Prisoners* (New York, 1931), along such similar lines. (The European prison educators were totally unaware of this much earlier American book as they completed their work). What these and other texts point to, is the presence of a strong tradition of progressive penal and education thought that can be drawn on to challenge some of the darker attitudes and practices that pervade prisons or corrections in these times. Some of MacCormick's

views are given in the concluding section of this paper.

Education in Prison follows the EPR in asserting in its formal recommendation the rights of prisoners to education: "All prisoners shall have access to education...Education should have no less a status than work within the prison regime...." The introductory chapter to the fuller 'explanatory memorandum' summarizes the report: "...two overall complementary themes predominate: firstly, the education of prisoners must, in its philosophy, methods and content, be brought as close as possible to the best adult education in the society outside; secondly, education should be constantly seeking ways to link prisoners with the outside community and to enable both groups to interact with each other as fully and as constructively as possible." (1.5) Thus, the report is not just a statement about education but makes a major assumption as regards penal policy—that the person in prison is still a member of the wider community. In relation to Svenolov Svensson's (1996) crucial question, "Do we have citizens in prison or do we have prisoners?", it asserts, in line with general Council of Europe thinking, that the person incarcerated is still a citizen, still a member of society, and advocating education to lessen the sense of separation from the wider community as much as possible.

Seeing the fuller person rather than just the inmate is very much a part of the adult education approach. The Recommendation states, "Education in prison shall aim to develop the whole person, bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context." Such a view contrasts with the one-dimensional perspectives that often hold sway in prison or correctional education—where the student may be seen predominantly as an 'offender' and the task then is to address the 'offending behaviour'; or the focus may be restricted too much to facilitating economic achievement through job-training. Aiming "to develop the whole person," on the other hand, greatly opens up the agenda. For a start, it implies a much wider curriculum so that artistic activity, social education, academic study less directed towards vocational outcomes, health and physical education, consciousness raising, can all have a more substantial and central role in the education program available in prison.

But it is in the way learning is provided, in the adult education methods, that the Council of Europe approach may be most different from more restrictive 'correctional' education. The key idea is that of participation, whereby the adult who chooses to study has a significant say as to what to learn, how to learn and in evaluating the experience of learning (Warner, 1993). The significant say which an adult education student is entitled to in regard to his or her own learning connects clearly with the 'self-administration' in one's own treatment advocated by Rentzmann and Tulken. Clearly, mandatory programs are anathema to good adult education practice. But, education programs dominated by formal external assessment may be called into question also: sometimes they may not allow the student enough scope for serious change and development, or, as Mezirow would put it, for "critical reflection" that leads to "transformative learning."

An adult education approach to the education of prisoners, then, fits very well with the 'European' penal policy as outlined above. The two perspectives reinforce each other. This complementary may be illustrated by looking at aims of the Prison Education Service in Ireland (Department of Justice, 1994), which are to help those under sentence "(i) to cope with their sentences, (ii) to achieve personal development, (iii) to prepare for life after release (iv) to establish the appetite and capacity for further education after release."

The first aim, enabling prisoners to cope with the destructive effects of being incarcerated, is fundamental, for the person overwhelmed by prison will be unable to progress in any other way. That aim corresponds very clearly with the EPR stipulation that regimes must seek to "minimize the detrimental effects of imprisonment" (EPR, 65). The emphasis on personal development in the second aim is a wider and deeper aspiration than is often the case in other education (let alone penal) settings, but this reflects the adult education emphasis on working with 'the whole person' that is also implicit in the EPR. The third and fourth aims, both of which look to the time beyond the sentence, are in tune with the EPR emphasis on developing "skills and aptitudes that will improve their prospects of successful resettlement after release" (EPR, 65).

The 'Anglo-American' Model

But this 'European' model of imprisonment is not the one most widely followed these days and would not even be recognized in large swathes of Europe. Many prison educators have to grapple with a far less hospitable setting. I depict the alternative model as 'Anglo American,' and hope it will be understood that this is solely because the most vehement advocations and illustrations of this approach can be found in the United States and England in recent years. Strains of this model can be found virtually everywhere of course; and, on the other hand, there is much progressive practice, that runs counter to the dominant mood, to be found in Britain and the U.S., even at present.

The Anglo-American model can be characterized as having three key features:

- (1) Negative stereotyping of those held in prison;
- (2) Vengeful attitudes;
- (3) Massive increases in the use of incarceration.

The model is a set of such linked perspectives, and meshes with superficially simple policy slogans such as 'zero tolerance'; 'get tough on crime' and 'prison works'. Fear and the desire for vengeance drive the enormously costly expansion of the prison system. But this policy and the attitudes behind it are based on misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the facts about crime, about those sent to prison and about the effects of imprisonment. Inmates are demonized, dehumanized, seen as 'other' than 'us'. Grossly untenable presumptions are promoted about those we send to prison; perceptions about prisoners in general are often inaccurately formed on the basis of a small number of untypical events or people. A critique of the 'Anglo-American' model must, therefore, begin with a deconstruction of the hugely distorted perceptions of who are sent to prison.

One of the most obviously incorrect assumptions made about those sent to prison is that they are very violent people; at times the impression is given of unpredictable, irrational and even manic violence. Media and politicians contribute greatly to the promotion of this image. A very prominent Irish politician referred once to the general body of prisoners, saying "These fellows would cut your

throat in church and walk off smiling"—a depiction probably true of none of the near 2,000 prisoners incarcerated in Ireland at the time. Whether in Ireland, England or the U.S., the facts show that only a minority of prisoners held in custody at any one time are sentenced for violent offenses. For the U.S., Irwin and Austin (1994) give a figure of 29.9% of prison admissions (in 1988, based on 35 States) being found guilty of violent crimes. 70% were sentenced for non-violent crimes such as burglary, drugs (possession and trafficking mainly), robbery and public order crimes. Comparable figures for England/Wales and Ireland are 12% and 9% respectively (O'Mahony, 1997). Even where the 'stock' rather than the 'flow' of the prison population is looked at, those convicted of violence (which tends to be broadly defined) are still in the minority: 23% for England, 21% for Ireland and 47% for U.S. state prisons (which, presumably, would be lower when jails are taken into account) (O'Mahony, 1997).

A further aspect to the stereotypical public perceptions of those who go to prison has to do with images of their personalities and life-styles that are often promoted by some politicians and by parts of the media. Those sent to prison may not just be presented as predominantly violent, but as 'hardened criminals' (the adjective implying severe insensitivity and dehumanization), or as 'career criminals'. This latter phrase is interesting in that, like 'zero tolerance,' it achieved huge usage in the United States before being exported across the Atlantic and featuring prominently in recent elections in Britain and Ireland. Perhaps the slavish copying, by Michael Howard and others, from the American context of even key phrases in their policy statements, well illustrates the paucity of critical thought that often lies behind such presentations. Indeed, like the presumption of violent tendency, Irwin and Austin have shown that the perception of most of those sent to prison as 'career criminals' does not hold up to analysis either.

In a study of 154 males randomly selected from the intake population of three U.S. states, Irwin and Austin specifically tested the "career criminal" presumption. They found that 19% had engaged in a "crime episode or spree," but had "for an extended period...lived a relatively conventional life." 14% were incarcerated for

"one-shot crime," never having been "involved in serious crime before the current arrest." 6% were classified as "derelicts," men who "had completely lost the capacity to live in organized society." 18% were people who, "though they avoid regular involvement as criminals, are at risk of being arrested because they are on the streets for many hours and police regularly patrol [their] neighborhoods looking for street criminals." Thus, only a minority (43%) can be classified as "into crime," i.e., committing crime regularly. However, most (59%) of this group "were convicted of petty crimes...rather than being vicious predators, most were disorganized, unskilled, undisciplined petty criminals who very seldom engaged in violence or made any significant amount of money from their criminal acts."

What emerges here is a picture much more familiar to educators and others involved in prison systems in many countries—that a great proportion of those held in prison are victims of severe social and psychological neglect in the past. To acknowledge this is not to deny the appropriateness of criticizing and addressing offending behaviour, but it does lead to a more complex picture than political and media slogans often allow: such acknowledgment is, in fact, a necessary part of the process (to borrow another slogan) of 'being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime'. K. J. Lung (1993), the long-serving director of the Finnish prison service, depicts the mass of prisoners in most countries as people "deprived of all chances to develop and use what we can call their stronger parts...[they] started with very low expectations of success...experienced domestic and street violence in their childhood...they are poorly educated and unskilled and have been unemployed for long periods or all of their lives. They live in substandard housing and have a wretchedly poor or deprived socioeconomic and family background."

The reality then, even in U.S. state prisons, points to no more than a quarter of those incarcerated being classifiable as 'career criminals'. That reality, as much as offending behaviour, is what educators and others concerned with crime need to focus on, so that real personal and social development can be facilitated. There is a challenge enough in that task, but the gross stereotyping of our clients, in relation to their propensity to vio-

lence and their life-style, as indicated above, confuses and complicates the picture. It is necessary for prison educators, and colleagues in related fields, to assert our awareness of this different reality.

We also need to be able to locate the negative labeling as part of wider social patterns. The stigmatizing of prisoners often goes hand-in-hand with an exaggerated view of the extent of crime and, in particular, an exaggerated sense of things being out of control: a prominent political party in Ireland hyped the situation in its election literature—"crime is out of control in our cities, towns and countryside" (in contradiction to any rational analysis of the evidence). It may not be just the offenders, but their families also who are labeled: Vivien Stern, Secretary-General of Penal Reform International, noted, in the run-up to the British election, "the competition to scapegoat the families of the poor who cannot control their offspring."

In writings in the British paper, *The Observer*, Peter Beaumont provides analysis of a tendency in many commentaries to identify a new 'Dickensian underclass,' often indeed, resurrecting nineteenth century phrases such as 'vagabond' and 'layabout' and depicting the 'undeserving poor' and 'dangerous classes'. This tendency is evident in the treatment of groups other than offenders also, such as the homeless, single parents and asylum seekers. He quotes the criminologist, Rob Reiner, as seeing "a return to a pre-democratic view that regarded whole classes of society as effectively outlaws." This reverses "150 years of movement...towards a more inclusive society in which everyone belongs, has equal citizenship and is guaranteed a minimum of rights." David Downes, a colleague of Reiner, speaks of the reintroduction of the "vocabulary of exclusion." He says, "The image that is being created is the lurking menace of the career criminal who lives by preying on society. These are old folk devils that have been resurrected to set alongside our own folk devils, like the mugger and the ram-raider. The label becomes all. Everything else—the causes crime, etc.—is wiped out."

I identified such negative, and unfair, stereotyping of the prison population as the first of three key features of the 'Anglo-American' model of imprisonment. The second feature—vengeful atti-

tudes by politicians and the public towards those held in custody—follows directly from the first. Dehumanized images of the criminal or prisoner mesh with prejudice against the poor and other racial groups. They engender disdain and fear and allow, even foster, desires for revenge. Vindictive practices then become general within prisons, undermining the EPR principle of “minimizing the detrimental effects of imprisonment.” Stark illustrations of such attitudes were provided in Britain by the chaining of women prisoners in maternity wards and by the case of Geoffrey Thomas, who remained chained within three hours of his death from stomach cancer.

Such approaches, and the prison overcrowding that accompanies them, have been criticized in Britain not just by penal reformers, but by the very people charged with overseeing the justice system. Derek Lewis, the former Director General of the Prison Service in England and Wales, accused the former Home Secretary, Michael Howard, of pandering to a populist ‘lynch mob mentality’. (*The Observer*, 29 Oct. 1995). On the point of his retirement as Prisons Inspector, Judge Stephen Tumin warned, “that the Government’s obsession with security in place of humanity was transforming the British prison system into something resembling Nazi concentration camps.” (*The Observer*, 29 Oct. 1995). Criticizing Howard’s policies of promoting longer sentences, mandatory sentences and generally greater use of incarceration, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, pointed up the sheer ineffectiveness of Howard’s approach: “I do not believe,” he said, “that the threat of longer and longer periods of imprisonment across the board will deter habitual criminals. What deters them is the likelihood of being caught, which at the moment is small” (*The Independent*, 13 October, 1995).

Built on misleading stereotypes, fueled by attitudes of vengeance and fear, the most dramatic outcome of the ‘Anglo-American’ model is what I have called its third key feature—the massive increase in the use of incarceration. Prison populations are escalating throughout the U.S. and, from a much lower base, throughout most of Europe. I wish to conclude the analysis of this model by dwelling on the sheer ineffectiveness of this approach. Lord Taylor pointed this out in the above quotation in relation to its lack of deterrent effect.

And yet the costs—in human, social and financial terms—of this policy are enormous.

In the discussion of the EPR, we noted that prison is inherently damaging to the individual and noted the wisdom of keeping such damage to a minimum. But current ‘Anglo-American’ policies, both in their greater use of imprisonment and their promotion of more destructive forms of imprisonment, are creating far more bitter, alienated and damaged people. This contributes to a more divisive society, where crime and other social problems are likely to worsen. And the financial resources of society are swallowed up in such developments, as both the capital and running costs of even the worst of prisons tend to be great. Thus, the State of California now spends more on its prisons than on its universities. Irwin and Austin highlight, in particular, the destructive nature of the element of vindictiveness in this whole scenario: “Ultimately, vindictiveness erects barriers between people, isolates them, and prevents them from constructing the cooperative, communal social organizations that are so necessary for meaningful, satisfying human existence. Ironically, it is just these social structures that contain the true solution to our crime problem.”

Issues for Prison Education

Section II above presented what I believe is a coherent and credible penal philosophy, expressed in particular through the European Prison Rules. Section III described an adult education approach to the development of those held in prison and I argued that this is very complementary to the outlook on prisons expressed in the EPR. Section IV described an altogether different situation whereby penal policies are built on negative stereotyping of inmates, expressions of vengeance and excessive use of incarceration. Attempting to provide genuine education in such a setting gives rise to enormous difficulties and dilemmas, and these are explored in this section. Distortions of, and limitations to, the education of men and women held in prison may arise in several ways under the ‘Anglo American’ model:

(i) a reduced concept of the incarcerated person, arising from the stereotyping, means that there is less recognition of his or her positive potential;

(ii) a reduced concept of the community or society, which excludes rather than includes prisoners and others associated with them, hampers education that aims to integrate the learners with others;

(iii) the content of education programs tends to become narrowed, due to a concentration on 'criminogenic factors' and for other reasons;

(iv) some of the very creative methodologies of adult education tend to become incompatible with these attitudes—especially methodologies which respect the student, and his or her experience, allow 'open spaces' and foster significant participation by students in shaping their own education;

(v) expanded prison populations restrict the education available to each prisoner as both space and resources become tighter.

These issues will be considered in turn.

The first two issues—a more narrow perception of the person held in prison, and seeing that person as 'other' than us and not part of our society, arise directly from the stigmatizing of the prisoner discussed earlier. We are invited to see the 'offender' but not the 'whole person'; to see one dimension, in terms of criminality, but not the more complex product of multiple social forces; to see the inadequate person but not the positive qualities and potential. Thus reduced in terms of his or her humanity, that person is all the more easily excluded from social membership. Yet, any concept of education worth its salt has at its heart some vision of full development of the person, and of that person in relation to the wider society. Such ambitions, so fundamental to genuine education, are clearly hampered in a climate of these penal policies.

A third way in which the Anglo-American outlook inhibits education is in the restriction of the content of education. Not only has education a less important role given such a philosophy (and severe curtailing of prison education in England and the U.S. in the 90s has been well documented), but the kind of education allowed is affected. A very dramatic illustration of this process is provided from Canada by Stephen Duguid: renowned and clearly successful university courses

in British Colombian federal prisons were terminated in 1993 by the Correctional Service of Canada in favor of "programming...which more directly targets the criminogenic factors facing offenders," as the Deputy Commissioner put it. The criminogenic factors that were seen to lead to crime are summarized by Duguid as "substance abuse, antisocial and violent behaviour, illiteracy, mental illness, sexual deviancy and strong pro-criminal orientation." He quotes the Deputy Commissioner as saying, "Programming must be linked to meeting offenders needs, and particularly those needs which if addressed will result in pro-social behaviour.... All programs should have a correctional orientation and correctional goals."

The most fundamental problem with this approach is that it fails to see education as a human right. A widely accepted expression of such a right is contained in the declaration which defined the 'right to learn' at the 4th International Unesco Conference on Adult Education. The right to learn is:

- the right to read and write;
- the right to question and analyze;
- the right to imagine and create;
- the right to read about one's own world and to write history;
- the right to have access to educational resources;
- the right to develop individual and collective skills";

(Quoted in Education in Prison, 2.2).

If we see prisoners as members of our society we envisage them having such rights also, especially given the lack of educational opportunity most of them have had in earlier life. But, if we restrict our sense of them only to, or largely to, their image as 'offenders,' then we correspondingly restrict their education.

There are two further problems with such a policy. The first is that it represents very poor psychology. Even were one to be confined to "correctional goals" as described above, might there not be other ways of achieving them? Anger-management courses may be appropriate for some in prison, but might not art, for example, prove just as effective? Likewise, art or university study or

any number of other subjects can be priceless 'therapy' for many seeking to overcome substance abuse. It is a question of, at times, 'by indirection finding direction out'. Ideally, the direct and indirect methods—the anger-management or substance-abuse course and the art—should be available, to be pursued, alternatively or in combination, according as the prisoner-student judges his or her needs.

Duguid quotes T.A.A. Parlett as saying "to bluntly teach moral knowledge would be rejected by the inmates." One has to wonder just how effective many of the programs with a "correctional orientation" really are, given that so many inmates are obliged or pressurized into following them. Many courses that seek to "address offending behaviour" seem far too frontal and morally directive in their approach, which must be seen as a poor technique in any adult teaching setting, let alone with adults deeply alienated from authority and given to low self-image such as prisoners often are. Parlett's point is asserted by Stephen Brookfield (1990) in relation to adult learners generally: "In assisting learners to explore their assumptive worlds, the last thing that educators should do is to ask learners directly what assumptions they operate under in various aspects of their lives. Such generalized questioning often confuses or intimidates. A far more fruitful approach is to work from the specific to the general." One other problem with the Canadian Deputy Commissioners narrow focusing in on 'criminogenic factors' is that concentration on the personal, to the exclusion of the political or structural, dimension of criminal behaviour misses half of the picture. It is not a denial of personal responsibility, but rather an acknowledgment of part of the reality that prisoners often instinctively know, to explore in some way how violence or drug abuse or other anti social behaviour is in part shaped by the power relations in society.

Some of the insights of Mechthild Hart (1990) in relation to consciousness raising by women, especially the capacity of the 'personal' and the 'political' to illuminate each other, may apply to prisoners also, in so far as they are a marginalized group in society dealing with great difficulties. She sees consciousness raising as a form of transformative learning "for social groups that have been considered marginal, that have been denied full

social membership, and whose reality and experience is not reflected in mainstream analysis and theories. Consciousness raising is a process of reclaiming social membership.... The full cycle of consciousness raising therefore includes the actual experience of power on an individual level, a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality, and a practical orientation towards emancipatory action." Just as women needed to reject the dominant image in society as to who they were, as to what it meant to be a woman, likewise prisoners must (among other things) challenge and rise beyond the dominant image given by the 'Anglo-American' ideology as to who they are. The wider and the freer the curriculum is, the greater is the chance that they will progress in that direction.

In analyzing the effect of the 'Anglo-American' approach on the content of prison education just now, the discussion, perhaps inevitably, also moved into the area of teaching methodology. The impact on methodology was the forth issue listed earlier. Adult education is perhaps most distinguished by the way learning happens. Classically, real participation by the student in shaping the learning, a valuing of the student's life experience and a wide personal development aspect are among the key features of adult education. Yet, each of these characteristics envisage 'the whole person' and, in particular, imply genuine respect for the student. The penal approach being discussed, however, is manifestly lacking in such respect for its clients. Thus, there is inevitable tension between a genuine adult education approach and the 'Anglo-American' type penal policies. There is inevitable pressure to adopt ways of teaching that are less respectful and less holistic—and, therefore, less effective.

One restrictive tendency (a feature of education outside prison as much as inside, maybe) is an over reliance on certified or accredited courses. While these can often be very appropriate for some students, especially where they give a sense of taking part in what is 'normal' outside prison, adhering largely to accredited courses can often mean real needs are bypassed. Activities and study that offer personal growth, or that deepen collaborative attitudes and skills (such as drama!), can often be missed out. It is striking that the very large research project being conducted by the Correc-

tional Education Association (CEA) through a grant from U.S. Department of Education, to study the impact of prison education on "post-release success," deals almost exclusively with accredited educational programs—as if non-accredited education did not merit much attention. In Ireland, by contrast, the greater part of very extensive prison educational provision is not accredited—largely due to a deliberate choice, as this is seen to allow greater freedom to teachers and students to meet the aims described earlier.

But perhaps nowhere is the creative methodology of adult education more debased than in the practice of mandatory education courses, especially mandatory literacy programs. An essential principal of adult education is that the student should have a real say in shaping his or her education, and that principle is affronted where the 'education' is obligatory—all the more so in a penal context where the classes may then be seen as part of the punishment. Given that literacy difficulty among adults is as much a matter of negative self-image and sense of powerlessness, as it is to do with technical problems, a mandatory approach may well worsen things. It must also inhibit the quality of teaching in that the kind of dialogue between the student-teacher and teacher-student that Freire envisaged is much harder to achieve in such circumstances. Even with more conventional methodologies than that of Freire, the scope and incentive for teachers to strive towards facilitating the most effective learning is greatly reduced because of the inevitable damage to the relationship between learner and tutor. Indeed, mandatory education is an admission of failure on the part of the providers of education. If the education offered is even partly adequate, prisoners will opt for it in large numbers. Such is the experience in many European countries, at least. In Ireland, over 50% of all prisoners voluntarily take part in education. That figure reaches 60% or 70%, or even more, in prisons with good educational facilities.

Clearly, the more oppressive and demeaning the penal context in which education is offered, the more difficult will it be for that learning to be genuinely 'transformative' and 'emancipatory'; but it is not impossible. Heaney and Horton (1990) state: "Even within hegemonic institutions, open spaces can be found wherein educators play upon

the system's embedded contradictions and align themselves with movements for change." The Council of Europe report, *Education in Prison*, also advocates "a degree of autonomy for the education sector" within prisons. It asserts that it is appropriate that "some leeway or discretion be given to those involved in prison education in the way they approach their work."

The fifth way in which the Anglo-American model impacts negatively on education arises directly from the excessive use of incarceration. This happens in several ways. First of all, since building and running additional and enlarged prisons tends to be very costly, even with the most Spartan of regimes, activities such as education often suffer in the competition for scarce finance. In England, recent cost-cutting combined with an expanding prison system have been associated with severe cutbacks in prison education. (*Times Educational Supplement*, 20 October 1995). And even where the resources for education can be 'ring-fenced,' it is often extremely difficult to ensure education expands in pace with the increase in prison population. At times, the very accommodation used for educational activities will be diverted to use as living space for prisoners or for some other function to do with the administration of the prison. A less obvious, but nonetheless negative, impact of overcrowding is that it is far more difficult to learn when personal space—whether in a cell, a dormitory or recreation area—is reduced: in Ireland we have found that 'doubling-up' in cells has resulted in heretofore serious students dropping out of university courses.

Transformative Learning

Much has been made above of the richness offered by an 'adult education approach'. As with any other tradition, adult education may vary in its emphasis around fairly common core principles. Reference has already been made to Mezirow who, with associates, has contributed greatly in recent times to the theory of adult education. This penultimate section will briefly touch on some of that writing as an indication of the kind of issues with which I believe those concerned with the education of prisoners, like their colleagues in other adult education fields, should be centrally engaged.

A key concept for Mezirow (1990 a) is that of “meaning perspectives,” that is the structure of presuppositions that we use to interpret experience. One’s meaning perspectives are mostly uncritically acquired in childhood, but they may also be more formally learned. “Critical reflection” is a process in adult education (and outside education also) by which a person challenges the validity of his or her own presuppositions which may lead to “perspective transformation”; these can be individual, group or collective. Mezirow says:

“Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings.”

Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood is a text in which Mezirow and colleagues describe programs and methods in a wide range of settings through which critical reflection can be developed and lead to “transformative learning.” Because, as Mezirow says, we all find it difficult to free ourselves of bias, “our greatest assurance of objectivity comes from exposing an expressed idea to rational and reflective discourse.... No need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experiences. Free, full participation in critical and reflective discourse may be interpreted as a basic human right.” (Mezirow’s italics)

In a prison education context, this concept of free discourse again implies ‘an open space’ free from coercion and ‘a degree of autonomy within the education sector’. An adult education approach will try to deliver such conditions. Approaches too close to, or too dominated by, what I have called the ‘Anglo-American’ penal policy will be less likely to ensure there is enough scope for imprisoned people to explore and change at the deep level envisaged by Mezirow. Other features of the type of learning envisaged by Mezirow throw up similar interesting issues in a prison context. Mezirow expects educators to provide learners with “skillful emotional support and collaborate as

co-learners”—again requiring a situation where there is mutual respect and a democratic spirit. Such conditions favorable to significant learning seem to me much more likely under regimes described by the EPR or by Scudder than under some of the current oppressive regimes that are built on attitudes that stereotype and fail to respect.

For all their proclamations about seeking behavioral change, many ‘criminogenic’—focused courses, I suspect, lead to only superficial change: prisoners jump through the required hoops because life is more bearable for them if they do so. What adult education as envisaged by Mezirow is about is a process that leads to genuine change in the fundamental assumptions a person holds. Such growth, while brought about by educational aims, meets the kind of ‘correctional goals’ referred to earlier in relation to Canada. My guess is that -because it is more respectful, more genuinely participative and works with people on a wider and deeper level—such adult education approaches beat the ‘criminogenic’ ones even on the latter’s own terms.

Reference was made in the previous section to Hart’s essay in Mezirow’s book on consciousness raising among women as a form of transformative learning. I made the point that prisoners, as women did, need to challenge and rise beyond the established notion of who they are. Clearly, there are important differences between the situations of women or ethnic minorities and that of prisoners, not least the fact that men who are sent to prison can often themselves be oppressors, especially of women. Nevertheless, there can be illuminating parallels also, and those in prison often belong to other groupings for whom consciousness raising is seen as an appropriate process, such as ethnic minorities, the poor, those with literacy difficulties.

Much imagery nowadays depicts people in prison one-dimensionally: as perpetrators of crime. This is true (although, as we have seen, often overstated, due to exaggeration and stereotyping), and this criminality is a reality that needs to be addressed. But it is not the whole truth and many in this population are oppressed people also, due to discrimination, poverty, educational and other injustice. Therefore the consciousness raising process is appropriate for them, so that they can have the opportunity, in Hart’s words, of “reevaluating

and reinterpreting their own existence" and see that many difficulties are not a result of personal failure, but are "rooted in structures," in the "power relations" of society. Consciousness raising may begin with personal experience but this becomes 'generative' of wider themes. As Hart says:

"It ignites around the theme of oppression, presupposes a certain view about knowledge and knowing that empowers rather than extinguishes the individual knower, and calls for a relationship between theory and practice that begins with a however vaguely felt or articulated acknowledgment of power and finishes with a systematic understanding of the nature and complexity of the entire power-bound social reality. To 'raise consciousness' means to arrive at such an awareness and to anchor the process of becoming aware in individual reality rather than in analyses and theories that were produced elsewhere."

A prison education, then, that is in touch with developments in progressive adult education out in the community will be grappling with such issues, asking how the creativity of such approaches may be tapped within prison settings, while also enabling the learners to grow in their capacity to take personal responsibility for their criminality, their oppression of others, their addiction problems. Indeed, addressing in education the 'personal' and the 'political' are not opposing emphases, but complementary aspects of the one transformation. For example, it is credible that education providers might help prisoners come to recognize "the futility of a criminal life" but at the same time respect and give a more legitimate outlet to aspects of the prisoner's culture that can be seen as positive, or at least acceptable, such as "a critical view of authority, anger at social injustice, solidarity with are another in the face of adversity, etc." (Quotations are from the Council of Europe report, *Education in Prison*, 4.9.)

Drawing on the dynamic of adult education outside the prison, and seeking to create the same energy within, raises issues that may take some working out. But this at least should be the focus of our work. The 'criminogenic' focus, which is linked to the 'Anglo-American' perspective, is far

too narrow and distorting; its main fault is that it does not go beyond the personal, to the social dimension, in seeking to resolve problems, and it risks reinforcing negative self-image and being a disempowering process. I will refer to one other essay from Mezirow's book to further illustrate the kind of debate I believe we should be having and the areas we should be exploring in prison education i.e., Heaney and Horton's (1990) contribution, "Reflective Engagement for Social Change."

Drawing on Freire's approach, emphasizing social rather than individual empowerment, Heaney and Horton stress the link between learning and action to transform the society that limits and oppresses people. One task they see adult educators fulfilling is helping learners to develop "vision" as to how society might change:

"Developing vision, exploring the range of the possible, and strengthening the capacity and resolve for change are tasks for which adult educators should be well suited. However, vision is not rooted in education but in the social world itself. Education interprets and transmits but does not cause the conditions, the concrete tasks and limits, that shape social and historical change."

They make the point that, to give effect to this vision, "structures" that enable change must be available:

"Even with vision, the substitution of new theories for the old, fatalistic ones is simply not enough. At the same time, there must be structures at hand through which action can be undertaken—a reform government, political party, community organization, or a social movement—or the potential for developing such structures.... While education is critical to social transformation, it is not decisive. The celebrated 'National Literacy Initiative' of the Reagan administration was unable to accomplish in four years what Nicaragua accomplished in three months. Why? Because only in Nicaragua had education been linked with the mechanisms by which newly literate adults could have a voice and effect political change."

This is not to imply an indoctrinating role for the educator. As Mezirow (1990 b) says:

“Emancipatory education, which helps learners become aware and critical of the presuppositions that shape their beliefs, is not the same thing as prescribing a preferred action to be taken. Nor does the transformed meaning perspective itself prescribe the action to be taken; instead, it presents a set of rules, tactics, and criteria for judging.”

There are indeed pitfalls and complexities in such engagement with social issues, even outside the prison. Within the prison these are likely to be heightened.

But if we are to see the world within the prison as a part of that outside, then prison educators cannot ignore the linkages between the work they and their students are engaged in and larger social movements. To illustrate this point I will mention how I see some of the efforts in prison education in Ireland connecting with developments on the outside. Many of these linkages, I believe, will have parallels in other countries:

- ◆ Many prisoners, especially in Dublin, are heroin abusers, and a considerable amount of educational effort is directed to helping them resolve their addiction problems. The heroin problem is mainly confined to the poorest communities, from which these prisoners come, but in recent years these communities have organized to resist pushers and build alternative outlets for their young people in particular. Obviously, this kind of community action can offer help, support and ‘vision’ to the prisoner addicts.
- ◆ Much ‘social education’ in prisons is directed towards enabling men to change their role in relation to others, e.g., learning to share parenting and having more equal relationships with partners. This development may be seen as but a part of larger change in society in the respective roles of men and women.
- ◆ Some education courses, in particular, offer prisoners an alternative way to crime to express their opposition to the status quo

in society. This is particularly true of sociology, political and social studies—even of art in some circumstances. Such study enables prisoners to feel an identity with particular political positions or movements. And while prisoners tend to be anti-establishment in such expressions, connectedness with developments in society can also apply for those who learn to associate with more conventional views and thereby see ways of redirecting their energies—business studies students come to mind!

- ◆ Growth in participation in adult education is often associated with wider social change. In some respects, adult education opportunities have expanded in Ireland recently, linked perhaps to many kinds of change in society. Prisons and prisoners are not immune to such developments and pro-education attitudes outside encourage and facilitate participation within prisons. This happens in many ways: family or friends engaging in education in the community may urge the prisoner to do likewise; on a wider level, education becomes ‘fashionable’; the fact that there are now more openings to continue learning after release encourages participation within.

In the ‘Closing Note’ to his book, Mezirow envisages adult educators “committed to encourage the opening of public spheres of discourse and to actively oppose social and cultural constraints that impede free, full, participation in discursive learning.” The disconnection of the prison from society, and the prisoner from his or her humanity, which has been encouraged by the ‘Anglo American’ outlook, has contributed in some cases to a prison education that is not as in touch as it should be with “the public spheres of discourse,” with happenings in general in the outside world and with developments in adult education. A narrow criminogenic approach to prison education, in particular, misses the opportunity to develop awareness and understanding of society at large; as such, this approach represents one of those impediments to “free, full participation in discursive learning.” The work of Mezirow and colleagues was explored here to suggest the issues to which prison

or correctional education may not be giving enough attention.

Conclusion: A Way Forward

In this brief conclusion, I touch upon the main themes of this paper by pointing to four areas where it is necessary to develop attitudes and action if we are to meet the challenge posed by the penal policies I have criticized and ensure authentic education within humane and effective regimes:

One, prison or correctional educators cannot remain isolated or neutral in the face of current debates about penal policies. We must assert, in the penal context, those values consistent with good education and, inevitably, that will entail challenging the misrepresentations and destructiveness inherent in many current policies and practices. (One key issue in the United States is that of the death penalty: I believe that any true educator must work from some assumption that all people have the capacity to develop in some way; killing by the State represents a denial that those who have committed crime can change and progress. It, therefore, seems to me inconceivable that an educator of prisoners can take up any position other than opposition to the death penalty).

Two, we must actively work from an inclusive concept of society which regards those in prison as still being members of the community at large. Education offers enormous scope for promoting "interaction with the community," as illustrated throughout *Education in Prison*. The value of such interaction is twofold. On the one hand, it provides for prisoners a measure of 'normality' and validates their sense of being members of society and (where the contact has a specifically educational purpose) their sense of being learners like any others. On the other hand, people from outside prisons who engage in meaningful interaction with prisoners have much to learn themselves, not least in recognizing that so many of the stereotypes about those incarcerated are perversions of the truth.

Three, the education of prisoners should be guided mainly by the values and practice of adult education. This is the view taken in *The Education of Prisoners*:

"...professional integrity requires teachers and other educators working in prisons, like those in

other professions, to take their primary aims, the underlying orientation, from within their own professional field"—and, in that Council of Europe report, that field is seen as adult education. In the American context, Austin MacCormick, one of the founders of the Correctional Education Association, strongly advocated a similar view many years earlier: "Education of prisoners is fundamentally a problem of adult education, taking the term in its European sense.... We need to stress the normality rather than the abnormality of our prisoner-students, to apply standard educational practice to the problem rather than to try to develop a special educational technique designed for the criminal." MacCormick (1931) states: "Education for adult prisoners has an aim and a philosophy. Its philosophy is to consider the prisoner as primarily an adult in need of education and only secondarily as a criminal in need of reform. Its aim is to extend to prisoners as individuals every type of educational opportunity that experience or sound reasoning shows may be of benefit or of interest to them...." It is the argument of much of this paper that the inversion of the MacCormick philosophy (seeing criminals before potential learners) has led to much confusion and damaging policies. Connecting with the insights and developments of adult education, especially as outlined by writers such as Mezirow, offers educators in prisons scope for very fruitful work. And, the values of adult education tend also to be those needed for a credible and ethical penal policy.

Four, (the corollary of the above point) educators of prisoners, and organizations and institutions of which they are part, need to maintain and build bridges with individuals, groups and organizations engaged in the most creative adult education work out in the community. For example, the CEA as a body should, to a much greater extent, be tuned into progressive developments in adult education, and linked with organizations supporting and promoting such work.

The approach outlined here is premised on the view that "prisoners are people," as Scudder says, and that, to quote Tulkens, they have the capacity to become "responsible subjects" and (to conclude with the words of MacCormick) "be fitted to live more competently, satisfyingly and cooperatively as members of society."

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Biographical Sketch

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Historical Vignette

Earliest Reference to "High Technology" in Correctional Education

After dinner on Christmas Eve, 1857, the 200 Ragged School children at Mary Carpenter's Bristol, England institutions—Kingswood was the boys' facility and Red Lodge was the girls'—were treated to a high tech show funded, in part, by Lady Byron. The Kingswood hall was decorated with evergreens for the occasion. We have no record about the pictures displayed that night, but they probably represented traditional Christmas themes. In addition, the playground was expanded for the Holidays, and Mary Carpenter gave gifts to each student. (Carpenter, J. E., 1974/1881, *The Life and Work of Mary Carpenter*, p. 186).