Introduction

It is my belief that the purpose of prison education, should be “to address the offending behaviour of prisoners by improving employability and therefore reduce the likelihood of re offending upon release”. Since we know that the majority of prisoners do not have the basic skills that are considered necessary to gain and maintain steady employment. We need to acknowledge that releasing prisoners who are not equipped educationally to gain employment makes their return to crime inevitable.

Basic skills are of crucial importance and I acknowledge that for some prisoners, classes in literacy, numeracy and Information Technology may be appropriate, however many prisoners benefit and flourish from taking part in practical classes such as art and craft, creative writing, or in performance arts. The best education in prison and outside offers a balance of activities and the opportunity to learn through a variety of media and approaches.

Providers of education in prisons are aware of the potential for channelling the enthusiasm for the arts into structured programmes leading to national accreditation. Some providers have gone further with the development of mechanisms whereby participation in accredited arts courses can act as vehicles for the acquisition of competencies in Basic skills as well as the aesthetic skills which form the core skills of these courses. Through the development of these programs and mechanisms prisoners involvement in the arts can be powerful contributors to reducing offending behaviour.

Lessons from the arts

(Professor Roger Graef, filmmaker and political commentator, speaking about the impact of a London Shakespeare Workout session led by Bruce Wall with young men in HMYOI Rochester, 18th July 2001 in which the participants are introduced to Shakespeare and after two and a half hours, write their own sonnets. August 2001)

Creative activities can be seen as the antithesis of imprisonment. In prison, decisions are made for you, there is a pressure to conform and real life is suspended. The arts counter by encouraging people to make choices, decisions and personal statements, to be open to stimuli, assimilate influences, have enthusiasm, take risks and take responsibility.
Research into arts activities in criminal justice may therefore appear to be an attempt to bring together two different, even opposed worlds of experience – “to reconcile the irreconcilable” (Peaker and Vincent 1991)

In Prison Theatre, Perspectives and Practices, the editor, James Thompson, speaks about the arts on the one hand and the treatment of criminals on the other, as: “indicators of a community or society’s virtue and degree of civilization.” (Thompson, J (ed) 1998). He asks the question: “How far does the very existence of arts in criminal justice contribute to our society being judged as civilized?” While accepting that the concepts of virtue, civilization and soul are ambiguous, relative and highly contested he suggests that: “The arts and criminal justice are given significance beyond the fields themselves; they become indicators of the stored-up strength of a nation”. (ibid)

He continues: “What happens when these two 'litmus tests' are brought together – when 'soul' is brought to the place that measures society’s 'virtue'?” What follows here addresses this question with a particular focus on the arts in the criminal justice system in Greater London (1999 – 2001) There is a debate in the world of the arts in criminal justice that polarizes the value of the arts into two camps:

- Intrinsic – the arts experience in its own right and for its own sake
- Extrinsic – the arts 'used' as a method/vehicle to meet criminal justice aims and targets.

Criminal justice personnel who contest the value of arts activities for people caught up in the cycle of offending often fire their arguments at the first camp: the arts are a 'soft option', 'arty farty', fun, enjoyable and therefore nothing to do with punishment.

Arts organizations and individual practitioners who passionately support the intrinsic value of aesthetic experiences aim their criticism at functional arts interventions that deliver within other agendas, such as working with offending behaviour or to improve Basic Skills, arguing that this approach undermines the quality of the arts experience.

This polarization is unhelpful and unnecessary because both camps have more in common than first meets the eye. Both sides do actually support the notion of personal and social growth, change and development.

- It has been demonstrated that for the arts to have any impact at all in delivering within criminal justice agendas, they must be of the highest quality.
- When you take a closer look at the way in which arts projects with no other agenda other than to introduce, foster, facilitate and develop aesthetic experiences are evaluated, the extent to which the participants feel better about themselves and their lives are often included as criteria for success – the statements made are actually not a million miles away from those made in relation to personal and social development within rehabilitation and education.

The arts provide for a basic human need, creating access to the aesthetic realm as a fundamental human right, encouraging morality and transforming people's lives. Their
relevance to the world of criminal justice with its own set of aims and objectives in relation to rehabilitating offenders, preventing crime and ensuring the safety of the public rests on this intrinsic value and is not in conflict with it.

It positions the arts as part of the fabric of daily life and the way in which we continually transform and re-create ourselves by having that unique human characteristic of being able to both ‘be’ and reflect on our own existence.

(The Council of Europe, referring to education in prisons, 1989)

For some considerable time the arts have played a significant role amongst the range of opportunities offered to prisoners and ex-offenders.

• The power of the arts in prisons lies partly in their appeal to a very broad cross section of offenders.
• The arts offer an experiential approach that incorporates and accommodates a diversity of learning needs and styles.
• Through the simple act of engaging in the arts people can make sense of difficult, complex, vital and universally human experiences and they do so with amazing power, facility, richness and effect.
• The arts can help a person to move from offender to citizen by building a positive sense of self that can contribute to a personal journey towards economic well-being (the skills necessary to get a job); critical thinking (in order to make judgments and communicate); critical self-reflection (personal integration of moral standards rather than imposed); social participation and bodily health.

The Vocational Art Studies Curriculum for New South Wales Correctional Centres, devised and produced by Susan Paull in 1992, begins with a 'Preface' by Dr Brian Noad, Principal of NSW Inmate Education Program. Dr Noad writes

Through its development of programs in Vocational Art Studies, The NSW Department of Corrective Services recognises the vital role that the visual arts play in contemporary society. In a world where visual information is such a primary form of social communication, programs which seek to develop practical skills in visual literacy are an essential part of inmate education. ... The curriculum (is) designed to enable continuity in the art programs offered in Correctional Centres across NSW. ... The studio exercises described in the various modules give inmates a broad exposure to the diversity of art practices. In this way the curriculum opens up a number of opportunities for inmates to discover and develop their individual artistic concerns. Creative expression has many forms. Programs in Vocational Art Studies complement other inmate education programs in areas such as craft and literacy. For inmates who wish to pursue a future career in art, this curriculum facilitates the acquisition of technical skills as well as an understanding of the forms and concept of art.¹

¹. Noad, Brian 1992, 'Preface', Vocational Art Studies Curriculum for New South Wales Correctional Centres, NSW Inmate Education Programs, NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney, p.7
To conclude, I maintain that the making of art and the education processes that it engenders, is rehabilitative in that it enables another vision, a new way of seeing and interpreting the world, a more informed and rational methodology of engaging with its numerous readings, and the ability to visualise and process a creative interaction with its fundamental elements. I ask: Is not all art a narrative, an expressive statement, a creative interpretation of the fundamental elements of a place within the self and within a world encoded by all of us. There is no comprehensive therapy or counseling in prisons that can achieve the positive outcomes that art education can provide. Theatre, music and art are directly therapeutic – as well as educational in all senses of that word.

The arts are not an alternative or an optional extra to education: they offer a far more effective way of reaching the same goals. In place of passive formal classes, the arts provide the first form of learning. Direct experience, lived by the participants who own the journey to knowledge in ways much more likely to be retained when they leave than the more conventional educational relationship between teacher and pupil. Through art, such learning passes not only through the brain but also through the heart.

Research

Evidence-based practice is the key to impressing skeptics. There is an acknowledgement within criminal justice agencies, however, that long-term hard evidence is difficult to come by in relation to proving the value of any work with offenders, let alone an arts intervention, using their number one key performance indicator – a reduction in offending or re-offending. It is often therefore daunting for arts educators to prove the value of their work in such a context.

Peter Raynor in his preface to A Handbook for Evaluating Probation Work with Offenders speaks from the heart: “When I first became involved in research on the effectiveness of probation, I naively imagined that change could be produced by a few researchers carrying out studies, publishing and disseminating the results and waiting for the probation services to say ‘That looks like a good idea: let's try that here.’ I now realise, using the new language of program accreditation criteria, that this is a hopelessly inadequate ‘model for change’, doomed to score zero in any accreditation and panel scrutiny”.

(Merrington, S, Hine, J 2001) David Utting in his presentation to a Youth Justice Board conference in March 1999: What Works in the UK? (Utting 1999) distinguishes between ‘what works’ and ‘promising programmes’; the former relates to those “where the effectiveness of an intervention has not only been established through rigorous evaluation, but also replicated under equally rigorous research conditions. To qualify as ‘promising’, the intervention must have demonstrated positive results in at least one rigorous evaluation”.

Many evaluations fall down in terms of rigour because control groups are not used. Attempts to demonstrate the value of the arts for offenders and ex-offenders have also encountered similar issues and obstacles to those encountered in the history of arts evaluation in education, health and other community contexts. The central issues revolve around the relationship between:
In recent times, one significant publication has grappled with some of these issues in relation to the social impact of participatory arts work in community contexts: Francois Matarasso’s Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of participation in the Arts (1997). This study demonstrated 50 social impacts of participating in the arts but not all of the case studies took place in the social exclusion arena and only one of the eight case studies refers to arts and offenders.

“One area where people did relate crime to arts activity, and where there was some evidence of impact, was Batley Carr Estate” (ibid).

The history of arts evaluation in criminal justice has included many short-term studies of prison-based arts projects undertaken in-house in response to the needs of funding bodies. Most evaluation of arts in criminal justice rests on anecdotal evidence, personal accounts and subjective reports of the positive short-term benefits for offenders and ex-offenders engaging in arts projects in prison, probation and community contexts. The benefits were broadly related to personal and social development and change and can be categorised under the following headings:

- Increasing motivation
- Challenging preconceptions
- Developing insight
- Developing a sense of connection to others
- Exploring issues in a safe and distanced way by working with metaphor
- Teaching specific skills such as social analysis, problem solving, decision making and communication skills
- Enhancing cognitive skills
- Encouraging effective teamwork
- Giving a positive outlet for energies
- Developing concentration
- Providing opportunities for self-expression and the release of tension
- Lifting confidence and self-esteem through the production of creative work
- Providing opportunities for individuals to ‘stretch’ themselves and perhaps exceed their own expectations
- Developing positive social relationships

Little systematic evaluation of prison arts programs has been undertaken in Australia, however in Britain in 1991, Peaker and Vincent in Arts in Prisons: Towards A Sense of Achievement documented the scope and impact of arts in prisons for the first time. The report...
was commissioned by the Home Office Research and Planning Unit and the Arts Council of England and was written by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. It undertook a survey of 123 prisons between March 1987 and March 1989 with a 83% response rate. The research indicated that the arts were seen to have an important part to play, not only in relation to the rehabilitation of offenders but also in relation to the life of the prisons in which they took place. The report frames the use of the arts in prisons in the context of an overriding concern with security and found that the arts were brought into establishments under the broad headings: personal/therapeutic, educational, social/recreational and commercial.

The report looked at arts in prisons from the perspective of the education staff, artists and other prison Education staff who often had the following aims:

- Gaining information and wider skills
- Broadening intellectual and emotional horizons
- Offering alternative means of learning
- Demonstrating creativity
- Giving transferable skills
- Learning to listen and empathies
- Producing things to help maintain family relationships, such as books for children
- Providing an adult approach in which people make decisions, choices and take responsibility. The research found that the views held about the value of arts activities by arts practitioners and prison art tutors related to the view of themselves as either ‘artists’ or ‘teachers using art’.

The response of prison staff included negative views - that the arts were essentially a ‘soft option’ and that nothing should dilute the experience of prison as being essentially about punishment - and positive views of the success of such work with different criteria:

- Impact on relationships between prisoners and staff
- Helping the prison to run more smoothly and/or efficiently
- Improving the environment
- Releasing frustration
- Controlling aggression
- Softening a ‘hard’ character
- Having a calming effect
- Providing a constructive use of time

Governors predominantly valued the arts as giving purposeful activity and constructive occupation within the broad framework of dynamic security.

In 1985 Dunbar in a Sense of Direction stated that activities for prisoners were vital to a ‘widely shared concept of dynamic security’. The British Prison Service Annual Reports reinforce that purposeful activity, as well as being crucial to the quality of a prisoner’s life, is a positive way of helping to maintain security and control. The Prison Service Working Party on the Arts in Prison supported the findings of Peaker and Vincent in the 1991 report and Riches...
(Riches, C 1992), that participation in the arts may offer benefits to the individual prisoner and to the institution in which they are held by helping them to:

- Use their time constructively and channel their energies in a positive way
- Express themselves effectively and in an acceptable manner
- Develop self-awareness and understanding and achieve a sense of self-worth
- Work collaboratively and respect the work of others
- Develop real skills in which they can take a pride and which may of benefit to themselves and others
- Find a route back into education if they have poor literacy skills
- Come more deeply in touch with themselves and their behavior (particularly through the arts therapies)
- Maintain and strengthen links with family and friends
- Make choices and take on responsibility
- Find a way into employment
- Relate more effectively to prison staff and others through a shared interest

In 1995, the British Prison Service established the Standing Committee on Arts in Prisons (SCAP) to support the development of this work. The unit for the Arts and Offenders’ report: “The Arts in Prison: Just a Good Doss or Purposeful Activity” 1996 featured 14 projects from 1993 – 1995. They found that there was a popular misconception that, in the context of prisons, creative arts activities were a soft option because for people to be prepared to be engaged in them they have to be enjoyable.

The report also stressed that “without the creative content of the arts projects being of he highest quality few of these other benefits would be achieved. It is only through participation in activities which are intellectually and emotionally stimulating and which demand a high level of performance that prisoners will see the arts to be more than 'just a good doss'.”

The report also found that: “The recording and evaluating of arts activities are by no means standard practice” (ibid)

Australian and international prison managers and governments have demanded evaluation that gathers both hard and soft evidence by using a range of evaluation methodologies in relation to specific performance indicators. The evaluation methodologies used locally and internationally include:

- Category Evaluation criteria Measuring Hard Educational achievement
- Learning outcomes related to performance criteria
- Records of achievement
- Hard Cognitive/behavioral psychology
- Attitudinal change
- Hard Rates of re-offending Behavioral change
- Prison Adjudication Sheets
- Hard Social and Life Skills Acquisition
- Learning outcomes related to performance indicators
- Records of achievement Soft Psychological,
- Artistic and Social Development
- Self-reported change
Pre and post project self-assessment forms and individual and group interview. The comparative value of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ evidence/outcomes is open to debate. On the one hand, so-called hard evidence, often presented as statistics, can clearly be manipulated, and on the other, ‘soft’ evidence in which an individual comments first-hand on the impact of having participated in any project in terms of their self-image and their understanding of their life and their issues, can be substantial and reliable. The difficulties of undertaking longer-term evaluation have proved to be universal including the following facts:

- The difficulty of keeping track of prisoners as they move through the system and on release – many ex-offenders do not wish to be labeled any longer than they need to be and are therefore not keen for their progress to be tracked and monitored
- The lack of funding for sustained evaluation
- The problems around identifying and taking into account the influence and effect of a range of other factors/variables over a longer period of time.

**Current situation**

Of the sixteen Victorian prisons/Juvenile Justice Centres that are members of the Corrections Education Consortium (The CEMC is made up of the TAFE colleges that provide education to all the prisons in Victoria) less than 50% offer any formal nationally accredited Arts programs. It is a fact that only five adult prisons offer accredited arts programs. Although formally accredited arts programs have a limited profile in the adult prison system several genuine pathways exist.

Informal arts programs exist in all the adult prisons in Victoria, these programs vary from formal classes managed by individual prison managements/program managers to hobby work managed by individual offenders. The Coorong Tongala program initiated in 2001 has utilised numerous arts programs. These programs have proven to be highly successful with all participants making genuine progress in both “soft and hard” criteria used to evaluate offender programs. The arts programs that are or have been conducted in the Victorian prison system include the following programs:

- Certificate 4 Arts (Ceramics)
- Certificate 4 Art and Design
- Certificate 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Design
- Coorong Tongala Art and Cultural modules
- Courses in Further Education (CGEA) Art as (General Curriculum Options)
- Courses in Further Education (CGEA) Creative Writing and Poetry (General Curriculum Options)
- Certificate 2 Drawing and Design
- Multi media/Arts (Information Technology)
- Silk Screen (Prison Industry at Ararat)
- Textiles (Prison Industry at Ararat and Langi Kal Kal)
- “Somebodies Daughter Theatre Company” (Primarily the two women’s prisons, performing both inside and out of the prison environment)
  * singing
To conclude, I maintain that the making of art and the education processes that it engenders, is rehabilitative in that it enables another vision, a new way of seeing and interpreting the world, a more informed and rational methodology of engaging with its numerous readings, and the ability to visualise and process a creative interaction with its fundamental elements. I ask: Is not all art a narrative, an expressive statement, a creative interpretation of the fundamental elements of a place within the self and within a world encoded by all of us. There is no comprehensive therapy or counselling in prisons that can achieve the positive outcomes that art education can provide. Theatre, music and art are directly therapeutic – as well as educational in all senses of that word.
The arts are not an alternative or an optional extra to education: they offer a far more effective way of reaching the same goals. In place of passive formal classes, the arts provide the first form of learning. Direct experience, lived by the participants who own the journey to knowledge in ways much more likely to be retained when they leave than the more conventional educational relationship between teacher and pupil. Through art, such learning passes not only through the brain but also through the heart.