

Resistance and Desistance:

the power and potential of adult basic
skills in prison

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PhD Project

Learning to Desist: Re-evaluating prison education's relationship with desistance from crime.

- ▶ Conducted May-November 2016
- ▶ Mid North Coast Correctional Centre ILC
- ▶ 12 students tracked through learning program
- ▶ Interviewed 3 times at 3 month intervals - beginning, middle and end of course
- ▶ Questionnaires administered 3 times at 3 month intervals
 - ▶ Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire (ASCQ)
 - ▶ Social and Emotional Learning Questionnaire (MESH-SEL)
 - ▶ Belief In Redeemability Questionnaire
- ▶ Identity maps - administered twice - beginning and end
- ▶ Reflective Learning Journals
- ▶ Teacher Reports - completed 3 times per participant (MESH-SEL)
- ▶ Staff Interviews - 11 staff interviewed once each











$\frac{1}{20}$ 0.05 5%	$\frac{1}{10}$ 0.10 10%	$\frac{1}{5}$ 0.2 20%
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$\frac{1}{4}$ 0.25 25%	$\frac{1}{3}$ 0.33 33.3%	$\frac{1}{2}$ 0.5 50%
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$\frac{2}{3}$ 0.66 66.6%	$\frac{3}{4}$ 0.75 75%
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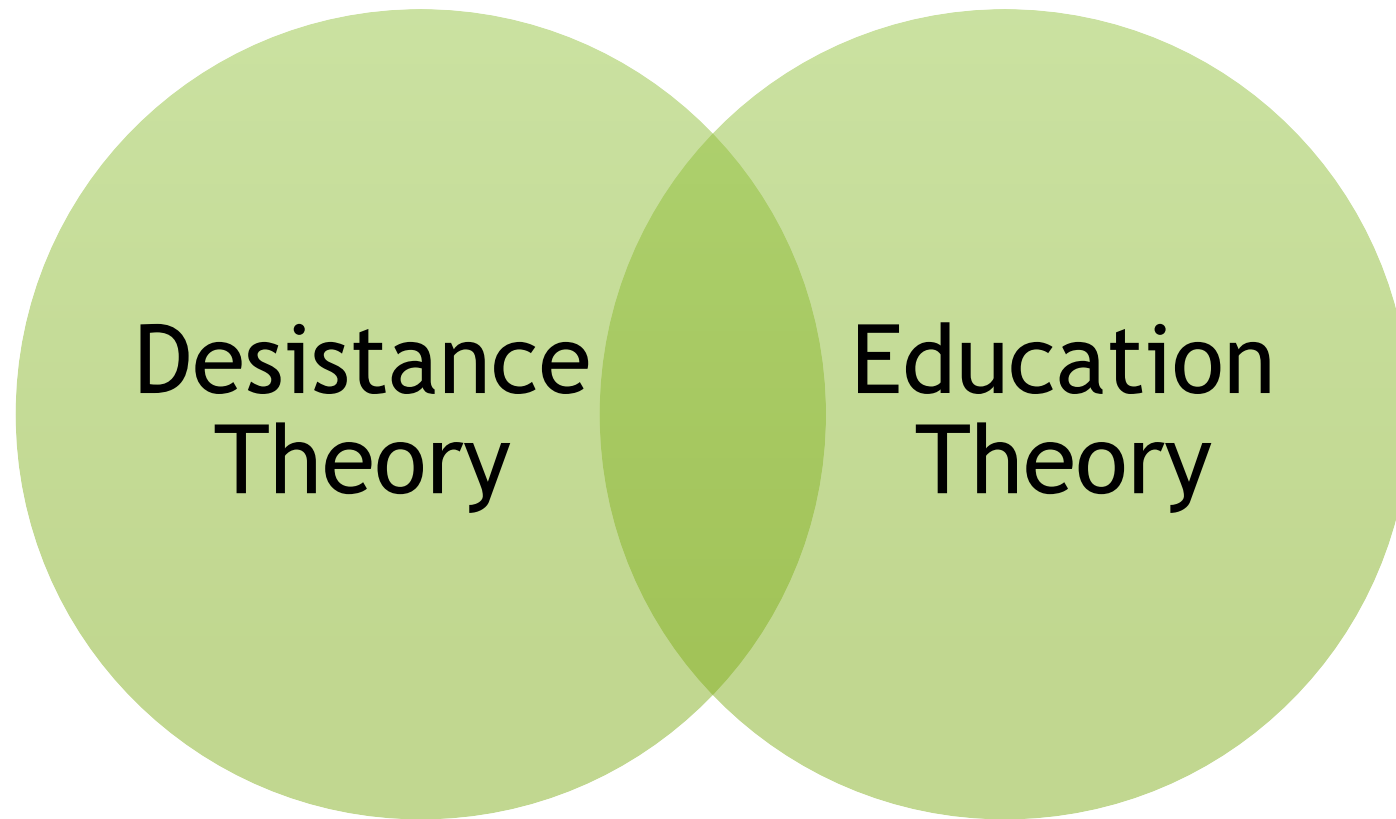
Times Table									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
3	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27
4	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36
5	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45
6	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54
7	7	14	21	28	35	42	49	56	63
8	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	72
9	9	18	27	36	45	54	63	72	81



Demographic details of the students

Name	DOB	Age as 25/05/16	Ethnicity	Time in ILC (months)	Cert Level	Previous ed
Aiden	12/7/90	25yrs 10mths	Turkish-Australian	>3	2	11/TAFE
Barry	21/7/94	21yrs 10mths	Aboriginal	>3	1	12
Brett	23/4/79	37yrs 1mths	White Australian	>3	2	10
Cavanaugh	4/6/69	46yrs 11mths	Aboriginal	>3	1	7
Darren	30/8/73	42yrs 9mths	Aboriginal	>3	1	7
Eddie	16/6/86	29yrs 11mths	Pacific Islander	>3	2	7
Gary	16/5/79	37 yrs 0mths	Aboriginal	6	2	10
James	13/6/50	65yrs 11mths	White South African	>3	2	Degree
Marc	22/9/81	34yrs 8mths	White Australian	>3	1	9
Neil	3/4/86	30yrs 1mths	Pacific Islander	>3	2	7
Shane	3/9/75	40yrs 8mths	White Australian	>3	2	11
Terence	10/12/55	60 years 5 mths	Aboriginal	6	1	5

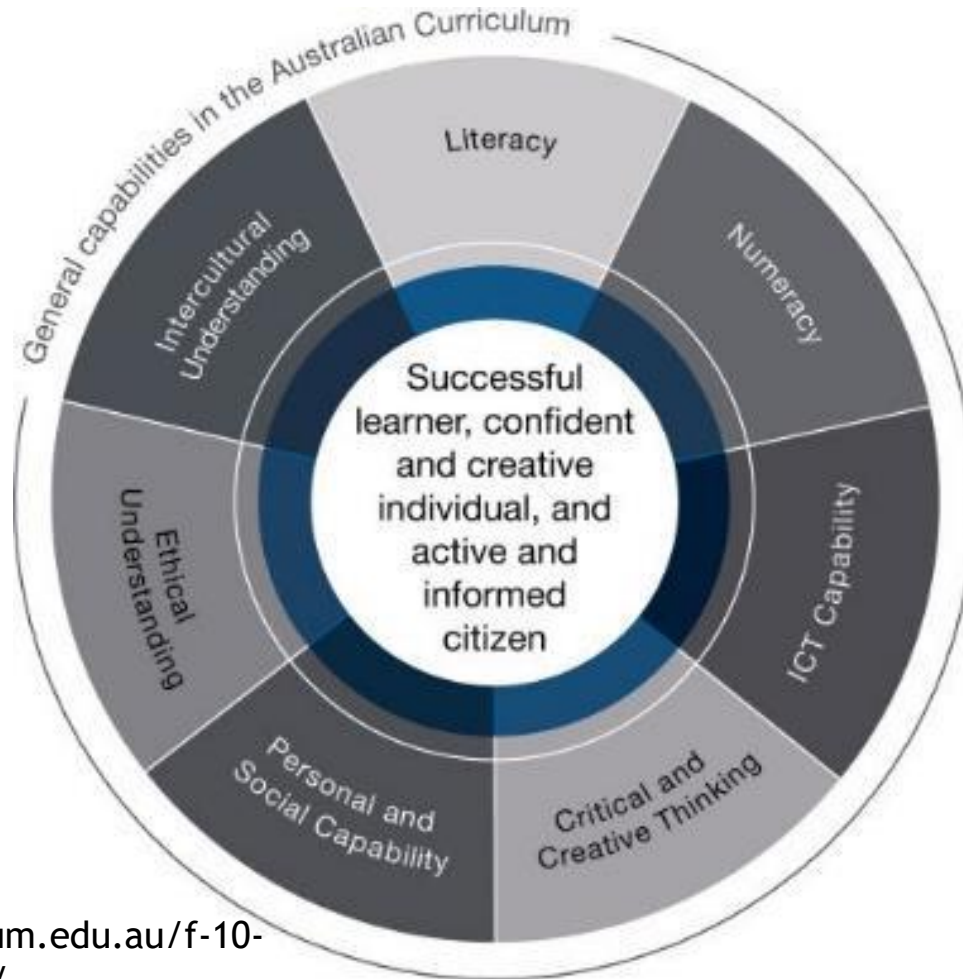
Theoretical Framework



Characteristics of successful desisters

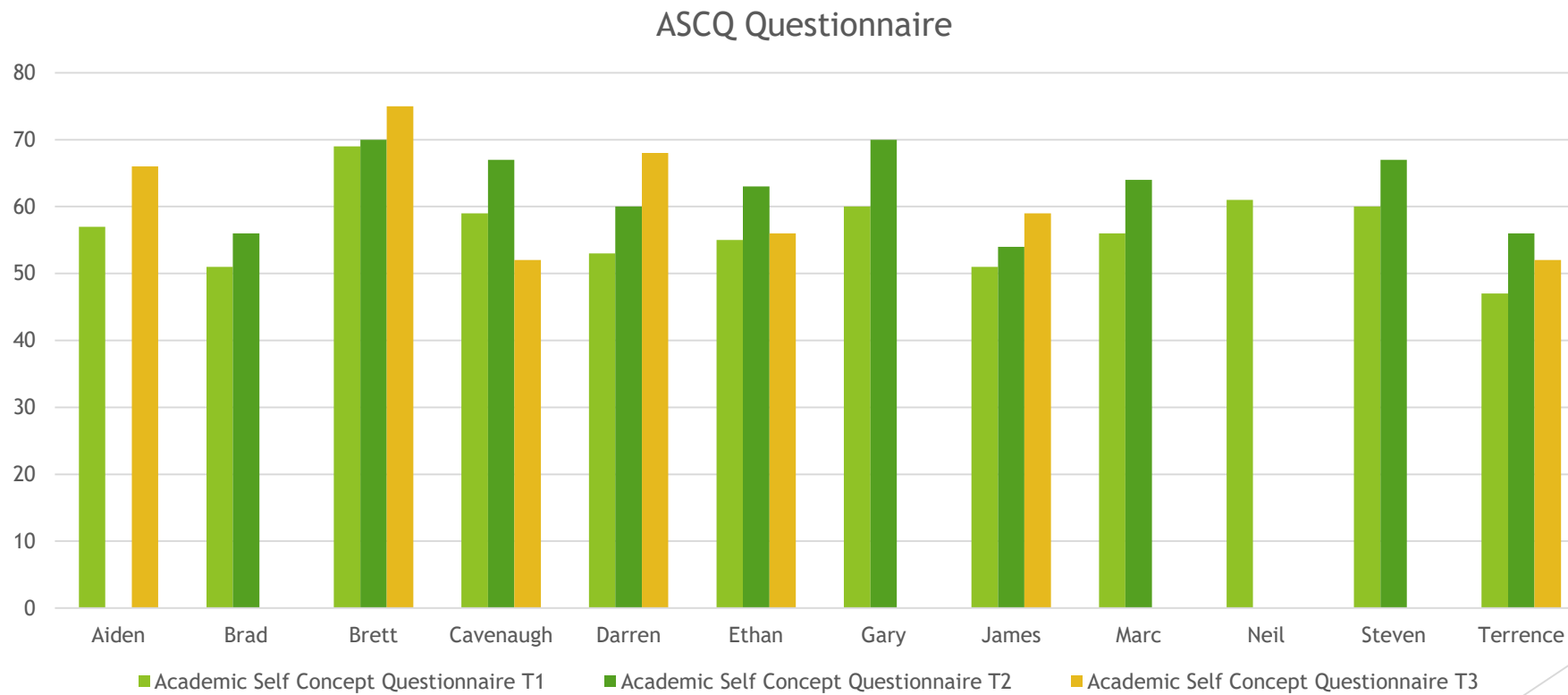
- ▶ Narrative of self that 'knives off the past'. Makes sense of past by saying 'I'm not that person any more'
- ▶ Imagined future non-offending self - Identity *not* in terms of offender or ex-offender, but of being defined in different, positive terms.
- ▶ Hope for future - becoming, having pathways to progression that are real and achievable
- ▶ Sense of agency - having choice, influence over what happens to self
- ▶ Social inclusion/Connection - belonging, strong pro-social bonds
- ▶ Maturation - not just age, social/emotional maturity
- ▶ Self-reflection - shifting perspectives
- ▶ Generative activity - desire to make amends, to do something to repair the damage caused, to 'make good'.

Australian National Curriculum 7 General Capabilities

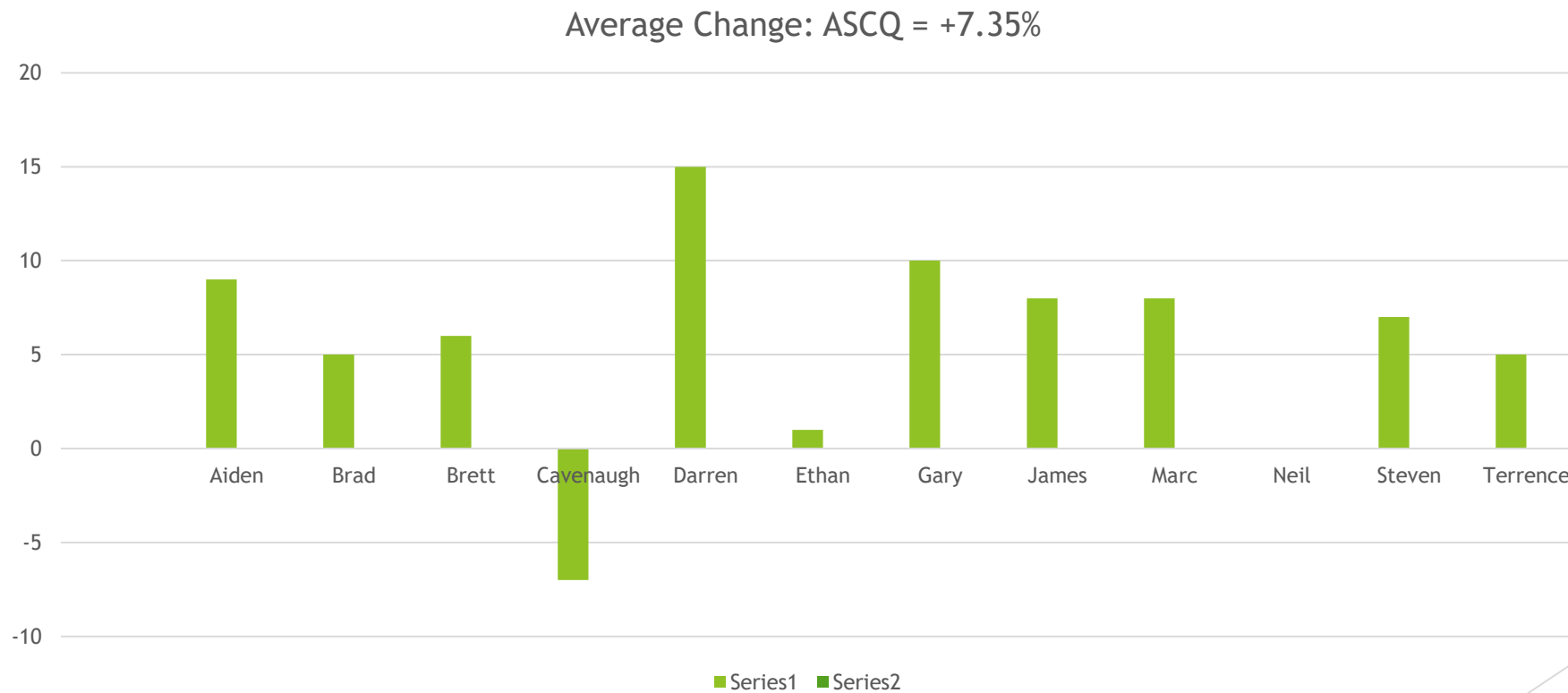


<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/>

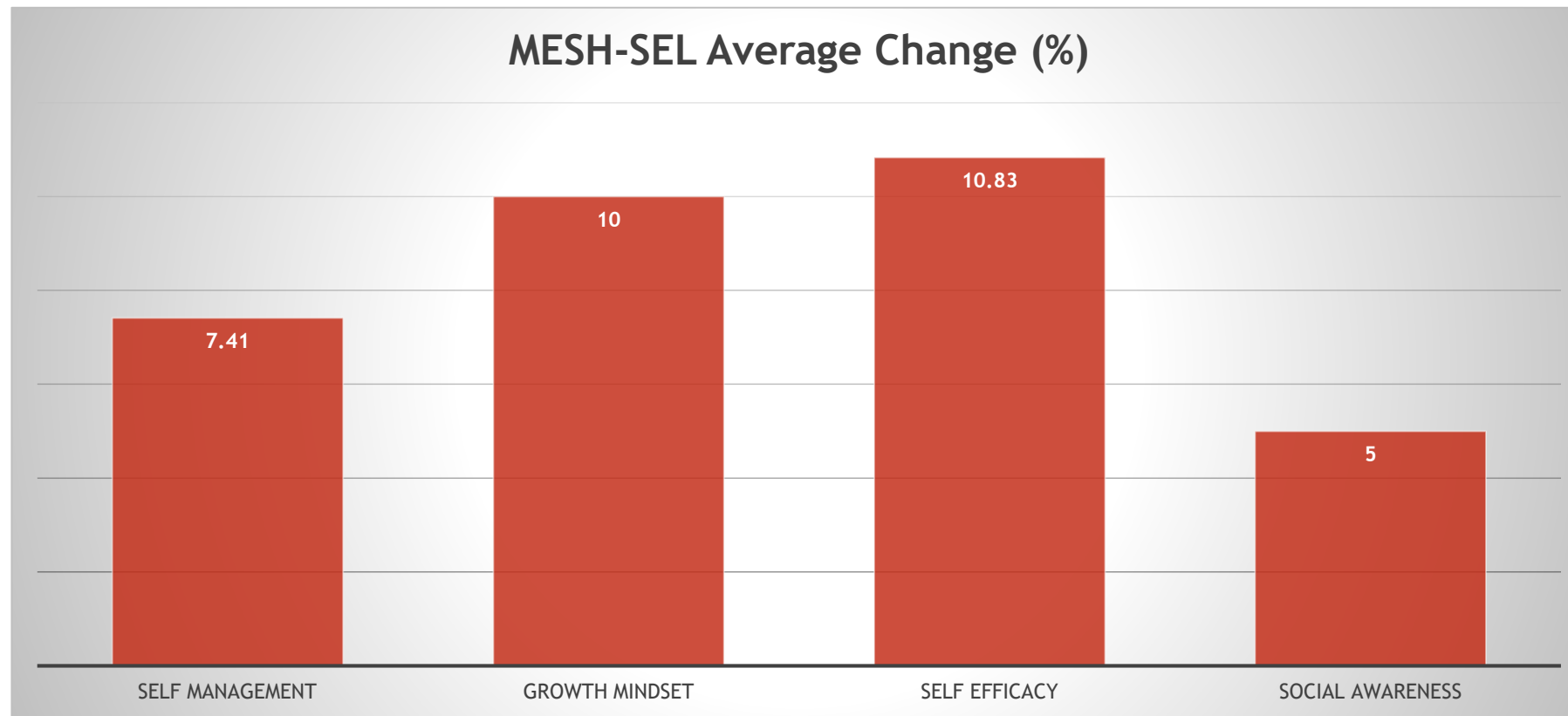
Academic Self Concept Questionnaire



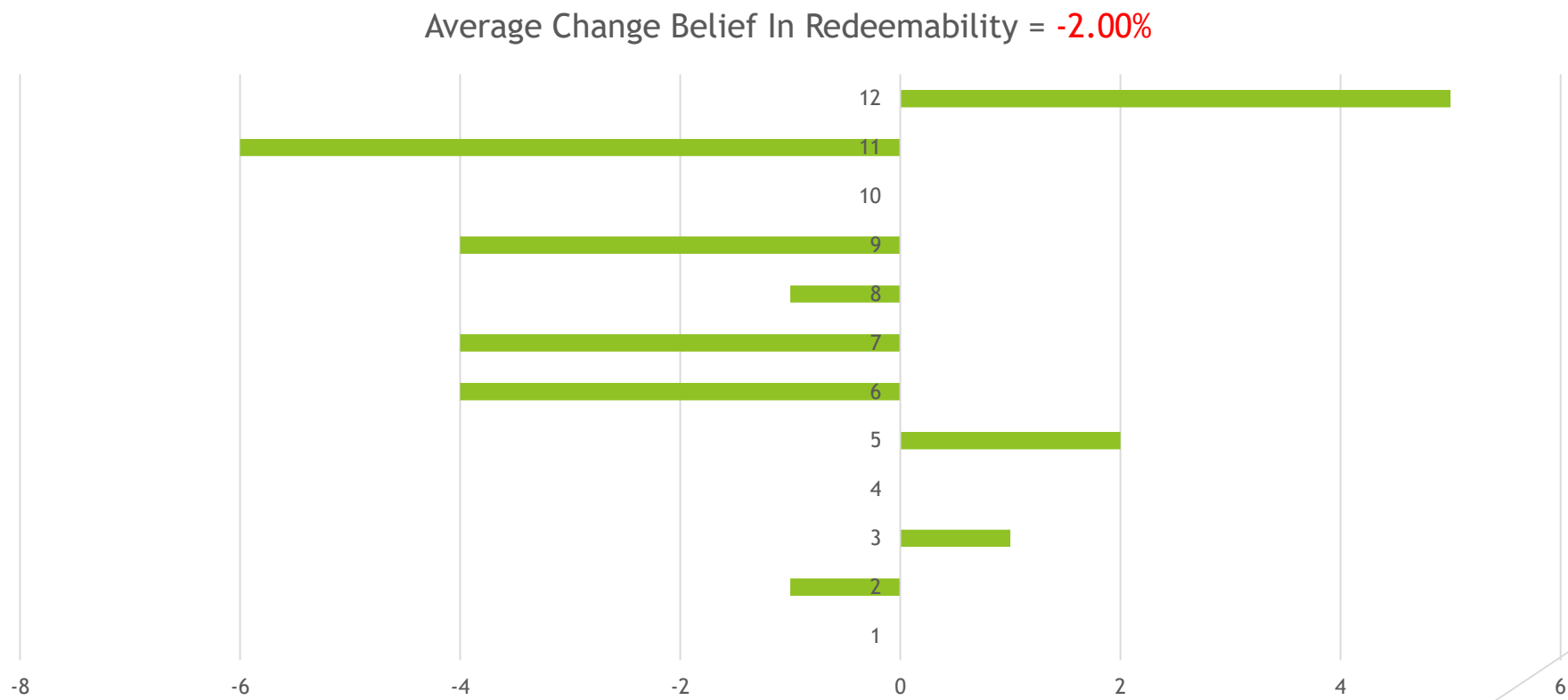
ASCQ Average Change = +7.35%



MESH-SEL Average Change = +7.74%



Belief in Redeemability Average Change = -2.00%



What else did we find?

- ▶ Motivation for engagement in education changes over time
 - ▶ Avoid CSI work
 - ▶ Avoid certain people
 - ▶ Seen as 'easy' option

Terence: Yeah, you see that's one of the reasons I came in here because I didn't want to do the same old, same old things. Come into jail, go to work, come back.

Fiona: So you kind of came in here to avoid the routine of the workshop?

Terence: Yeah.

Fiona: So then what happened?

Motivation changes over time

Terence: So I said I'll go to education. And I don't know if it was because of my health and that, because of my health, but I know I didn't want to go to the workshop. I tried it, but it didn't...

Fiona: It wasn't for you.

Terence: It wasn't for me, and I didn't feel it was right for me. You see you get these feelings about where you're supposed to be and where you're not supposed to be.

Fiona: Yeah, a sense of belonging?

Terence: Belonging. And you've got to be there for that reason, for a *reason*. And I sat in a class there for a while, maybe for a couple of months just thinking about a lot of things and just pretended to work, but then it just snapped and then you just do somethings because you *wanted* to do things, I just *wanted* to.

Fiona: Yeah? Your motivations have changed, do you think?

Terence: Yeah, they have changed because coming to jail, been coming to jail since I was a kid and been doing the same old thing, go and get fit, go to work, come back, pump iron, do the same old thing, not learning very much, learning nothing about much any more, so I decided to just go to education. It's...I wasn't expecting to be um...to *learn* something.

Fiona: You've been surprised?

Terence: I've surprised myself.

Sense of well-being

- ▶ Engaging the mind
 - ▶ Active use of mind
 - ▶ Conscious of learning and progress
- ▶ Feeling human
 - ▶ Treated with dignity and respect
 - ▶ Safe
 - ▶ Can be more authentically self
- ▶ Surroundings
 - ▶ Trees
 - ▶ Birds
 - ▶ Not-prison
 - ▶ normalising

Normalising/Well-being

Aiden: Yes. It's like you're away from...you're not in jail for this period in time. It has this impact, you know?

Fiona: So are people different, do people behave differently in here?

Aiden : 100%

Fiona: Really? Tell me about that, I'm so interested in that.

Aiden : It's really weird. I don't know what it is. I mean, I don't know...it's like I'm out. I talk to all the boys. It's like when we're out. It's like we're at TAFE or something, like *literally* like we're not in jail, like we're out, out of the jail system. Like we're at TAFE

Fiona : And that is good for the mind?

Aiden : That's right, it's like we feel human again. And once we feel human, we're actually learning as well and I actually take it in more, I can't explain why and we're actually feeling happier...

Empowerment through basic skills

- ▶ Importance of literacy and numeracy
 - ▶ Some mention of vocational skills
 - ▶ Access to dominant discourse
 - ▶ Generative activities - giving back to community/younger generation

Access to dominant discourse

Terence: It is an important thing, yes. It's like I can communicate these things where I might not be able to talk it, might not be able to talk it, express myself that way, but I learn how to write and express myself that way a bit better.

Fiona: Yeah, yeah.

Terence: In that way, in that language. Hmmmm...In your way. In white fellas' way.

Metacognition

- ▶ Initial focus on mechanics of basic skills
- ▶ Learning how to learn becomes focus
- ▶ Ability to apply knowledge in different areas
- ▶ Ability to learn ‘anything’
- ▶ Growth Mindset

Fiona: If you weren't in education now, what would you be doing instead in prison?

Aiden: Yeah exactly, I don't know. It's just once I've learned these things like problem solving and just basic maths even, it gives you more confidence to do...why can't I do other things, you know? Like, it opens doors up, you know?

Does not frame self as 'offender'

- ▶ Does not define self by offence
- ▶ Sees self in relation to family and others - strong role to play in family
- ▶ Does not want to reoffend
- ▶ Wants to 'make good'
- ▶ Sees self now as different to self who committed crime
 - ▶ Older and wiser now (maturation)
 - ▶ Changed motivations (I want to learn now)
- ▶ Can be most like 'self' in education space

Hopeful for the future

- ▶ Speaks often and positively about the future
- ▶ Sees self continuing learning
- ▶ Frustrated by blocked learning pathways
- ▶ Sees self returning to community to make a positive contribution
- ▶ Taking learning back

Need learning progression pathways

Fiona: Are you glad you came here?

Aiden: 100%.

Fiona: Things work out for a reason, huh?

Aiden: That's right. Funny thing even, I'm going for classification, what is it...6 months from now and because I'm B classo now, I could get a C classo back to minimum but the thing is I seriously, like I was thinking about it, for a couple of months in my cell...

Fiona: You would sacrifice that to keep going?

Aiden: Yes, if there was a Cert 3 to continue, 100%.

Importance of Indigenous culture in curriculum

- ▶ Transformative for Indigenous learners
- ▶ Development of empathy
- ▶ Reduction of anger
- ▶ Pride in own culture
- ▶ Excitement about own culture - want to share
- ▶ Sense of belonging

Importance of culture in curriculum

Terence: So it's like the world is a cruel place and a lot of people went through a lot of massacres like we did in this country. They went through the same things all around the world, so we weren't just the...

Fiona: And they still are?

Terence: And they still are, yeah. So that sort of opened my eyes a lot better and my attitude toward other people has changed a bit too.

Fiona: Has it?

Terence: Hmmm..

Fiona: So what, in what way has it changed?

Terence: They've been through genocide and everything like we did, and they had a raw deal, and we're not the only ones. Yeah , we suffered a lot but they suffered as well.

Fiona: And you didn't realize you had that almost similar history of cruelty against a particular people?

Terence: Yeah, yeah...yeah. It was like that you know? And I...yeah it just opened my eyes up a lot better and opened our minds up to it, to broader things, to wider things and looking at it in a different way to what I used to. Yeah.

Learning about culture is transformative

Terence: I used my colour and I used my culture for anger and it was there. I blamed it all on white people and anyone with colour in them for putting us where we are. You just come here, Captain Cook and you've done this and you've done that. And it was all there, it was right there amongst it all. And I couldn't let it go because that was...I was brought up that way and a lot of misjudgment come on me and put me displaced where I shouldn't have been and blah blah blah. But you know it happened and it happened for a reason and happened for a purpose. I believe that, I really believe that. And if I didn't go through all that I wouldn't be the man I am today, to where I am today and the way I think about things. And I'm blessed with a lot more things than the things that happened to me. I'm blessed with more things than ever happened to me in a bad way, so I've got to be grateful for that. So I am very grateful for that. I'm grateful to be alive and to have survived this system that many times.

Fiona: Which is an achievement in itself really because we all know it's not a fair system.

Terence: Yeah, and you know...another thing is that I come in here and I had at times let myself go and listen, listen to education. Without that I'd still be stuck back there. I'd still be back there.

Empathy

Fiona: Does it make you feel better to be this way?

Terence: Yeah, it makes me feel *heaps* better, that I can understand where they're coming from. Where other people are coming from.

Fiona: So it's almost like you've developed an empathy to understand someone else's point of view even if you don't agree with it?

Terence: Yeah, *exactly!* Exactly!

Importance of Indigenous curriculum content: Belonging→Connection

Fiona: What would you do if you were in charge of prison education?

Terence: I would get all aboriginal people and allow their culture. That's the first thing I would do here is have all the young people learning about their culture first then learning about the rest of the world.

Fiona: Do you think that helps with that sense of belonging and connection?

Terence: Yeah, they're belonging, where they're from. Knowing from here to there what culture they're from, what tribe they're from. Once they know all that, they'll connect. People connect, things will connect.

Resistance to dominant ideology

- ▶ Does not see paid employment as being end-goal
- ▶ Literacy and numeracy skills
 - ▶ Investing in own community
 - ▶ Investing in own children
 - ▶ Being a catalyst for change

Investing in children

Fiona: What are your plans for the future, Terence? What would you like to do?

Terence: Ah, I'm not quite sure yet where I am, what the future lies at the moment. If it was a possibility, I'd be, I'd be like, teach somethings, like here, give them some grandkids with the knowledge about some things and help them with every day learning.

What is Education For?

► Education and the economy?

“...[L]iteracy programs should preferably be linked with economic priorities...[They] must impart not only reading and writing, but also professional and technical knowledge, thereby leading to a fuller participation of adults in economic life.”

UNESCO (1966)

What is prison for?

- ▶ To punish
- ▶ To rehabilitate
- ▶ To keep communities safe

What is rehabilitation?

- ▶ Medical model
- ▶ Return to 'normal' standard'
- ▶ Make more law-abiding
- ▶ Make positive contribution to society/economy

What is prison education for?

- ▶ Purpose:
 - ▶ Equip offenders for Offending Behaviour Programs
 - ▶ Fit offenders for the purpose of CSI workshops
 - ▶ Help them get a job
 - ▶ Address learning deficits
 - ▶ Reduce recidivism

But what if...?

The purpose of education is to:

help individuals “live as full lives as possible” by equipping them with skills to build their capacity to do so.

A C Grayling (2015), Sydney's Festival of Dangerous Ideas

But what if...?

Ostrom (2009), Nobel Prize speech:

*“..extensive empirical research leads me to argue that instead, a core goal of public policy should be to **facilitate the development of public institutions that bring out the best in humans**”*

Public institutions: hospitals, schools, libraries...and **prisons**?

But what if...?

The purpose of:

- ▶ prisons
- ▶ education
- ▶ prison education

is to bring out the best in humans? To help them flourish?

What would those things look like then?

Redefine the purpose of education

‘Activities that give individuals the skills they need to unlock, gain employment and become assets to their communities. ***It should also build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences.***’

MoJ, 2017

A narrowly vocational curriculum can...

- ▶ incarcerate the curriculum
- ▶ stifle agency
- ▶ stifle creativity and critical thinking
- ▶ thwart learning pathways
- ▶ deskill teachers
- ▶ fail to maximise human potential

Curriculum/Pedagogies of Desistance

- ▶ Model of Australian National Curriculum - attend to all 7 General Capabilities
- ▶ Agency for teachers *and* learners
 - ▶ Allow teachers freedom to choose what to teach and how to meet curricula requirements
 - ▶ Less teacher centred teaching - scaffolding towards independent learners (Vygotsky)
- ▶ Progression Pathways
- ▶ Narratives of past, present and future selves
- ▶ Exploring identity
- ▶ Exploring cultural heritage
- ▶ Reflection on self
- ▶ Metacognition - learning how to learn
- ▶ Growth mindset - neuroplasticity
- ▶ Social and emotional learning

Prison education seems to catalyse the desistance process.

Prison educators support learners to desist from crime.

Prison education remains the most effective program known to reduce reoffending.

Understanding why it 'works' can help us do it better.

Let's connect

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