

# **Learning Together: Bringing students and prisoners together to learn in a prison environment**

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# Background

- the US and the UK are making progress with prisoner education programs
- these programs are less well established in Australia
- less than one-third of prisoners take part in accredited education and training and only 1.5% participate in higher education, even though higher education has been found to have the most beneficial impacts
- internationally, programs in which universities deliver course material to mixed groups of mainstream students and prisoners inside prison have had numerous benefits

# Learning Together (LT) – UK

- LT program developed by two criminologists at the University of Cambridge, Amy Ludlow and Ruth Armstrong
- LT brings together people in prison and university students to study alongside each other in inclusive and transformative learning communities
- started in 2014 as a partnership between the University of Cambridge and HMP Grendon
- first course ran January-May 2015 with 12 students from HMP Grendon and 12 Master of Philosophy students from Cambridge

## LT – UK ctd.

- each session included a short interactive lecture (around 20 minutes), followed by small group discussion on the lecture and two background readings, facilitated by a trained PhD student, post-doc or visiting scholar
- each session concluded with feedback from each group and whole group discussion
- to successfully complete the course, students wrote a 1200 word essay reflecting on their experiences of LT, in light of a criminological theory studied during the course
- the essays were blind-marked
- the top student was a prisoner – he has since had his work accepted for publication in peer-reviewed criminology journals

## LT – UK ctd.

- graduation ceremony for students, family and friends held at HMP Grendon in April 2015
- LT has now grown to a national network of >20 partnerships involving 14 universities and 16 prison facilities across England
- not just criminology courses – also sociology; social science research methods; education for social justice; and literary criticism
- Vision: ‘education to be the practice of freedom’
- mission: ‘to provide evidence-led and robustly evaluated intellectually ambitious and individually and socially transformative learning opportunities through partnership working between higher education and criminal justice organisations’

# LT – UK ctd.

## Values

- Potential Nurturing talent wherever it is found.
- Progression Providing routes for our learners to reach their potential and challenging structures and practices that limit this.
- Participation Collaborating with our students and with each other.
- Praxis Acting in theoretically informed ways that shape and change the world and our knowledge, and feeding new knowledge back into our action.
- the goal is for the so-called ‘learning communities’ to be aspirational and transformative

# LT – Australia

- Bartels, Ewing and Richards secured funding from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to run pilot LT program
- Collaboration with Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) to pilot and evaluate delivery in prison and/or post-release setting

## *Objectives*

- provide pipeline opportunities for prisoners as students and mentors
- trial and evaluate LT with criminology students and adult prisoners to identify its impact on their engagement in learning about social justice issues
- assist QCS meet its aim of rehabilitating prisoners
- refine LT for expanded use into the future

## LT – Australia ctd.

- LT pilot has ethics approval from QUT and QCS
- Adjunct Professor Russell Hogg will deliver lectures on
  - Justice: what is the right thing to do?
  - Authority: Obedience and the limits of freedom and reason
  - Belonging: Citizenship and community
  - Democracy and education
  - Knowledge, truth and denial
  - Victims of injustice
  - Social exclusion and its costs
  - Human rights
- aim to deliver in early 2018
- action research using mixed-methods



# Other uni/prison partnerships in Australia

## Inside Out (RMIT)

- US-based Inside-Out program established in 1997
- first Aus program delivered by Marietta Martinovic

<https://www.rmit.edu.au/news/all-news/2015/july/jail-no-bar-to-equal--justice-for-rmit-students>

<http://www.insideoutcenter.org>

## Legal Literacy Program (ANU)

- running at the prison at AMC since 2010
- students explain different aspects of the legal system to the detainees

<https://2015site.law.anu.edu.au:444/lrsj/prisonissuesproject>

# Issues, challenges, benefits

## Challenges and responses

- setting up programs of this nature isn't easy
- consultation at all levels is vital
  - all parties need to understand and be committed to the objectives
- there are inevitable risks but these shouldn't be overstated
- political perceptions matter
- be flexible in both design and delivery
- ensure university students are trained in how to behave
  - intake interviews can help ensure students bring the right mindset
- start the program with some ice-breaking activities

# Issues, challenges, benefits ctd.

## Benefits

### For prisoners

- potential to reduce reoffending
- can increase prisoner enrolments in education more generally
- may contribute to increased acceptance of the system
- strengthened sense of community connectedness?
- potential to break intergenerational cycle of incarceration

### For university students

- real-world learning opportunities
- challenge perceptions of prison and social justice
- may increase support for rehabilitative programs?
- ability to see 'end users' as human beings?
- potential to benefit society more broadly?

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/inside-information-students-and-prisoners-study-together-in-course-that-reveals-the-power-of>

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