Prisoner education reform and recidivism – are we there yet?

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Paper for 2015 ACEA conference
Hobart, Australia
He's irrational and he goes on and on.
What do I want to talk about?

• How well are we preparing prison educators?

  • Reflect on 2 stories from the past
    • Joseph Akeroyd
    • MALWAYS
  • What do these learnings mean to me?
Why is it important to talk about this?

Key among the report’s findings are that an increase in prisoner numbers sparked by reforms to sentencing, bail and parole arrangements is reducing access to programs aimed at reducing recidivism. Ombudsman’s report (2015)

Offering prisoners the opportunity to train or retrain is a valuable use of time and resources, however our prisons regularly fail to meet benchmarks for the education and training they have committed to. Ombudsman’s report (2015)
Why reflect on these stories?

• Education and recidivism

• Reform
  • individual
  • systemic
Reform in Prisons

Reform
• change motivated by benevolence, altruism with an ideological underpinning (Cohen, 1985)

Transparent reform
• alignment of ideology, practice and language (Cohen, 1985; Wilson 2014)

Opaque reform
• ideology, practice and language not aligned (Cohen, 1985; Young, 1997, 2010; Wilson 2014)
Joseph Akeroyd – prison reformer revisitd

“Enunciated the three principles of (1) classification (2) work of an interesting nature and (3) right ideals with living conditions conducive to self respect. These are the three principles of teaching as they appear to underlie penology” Akeroyd personal diary, January 24 1924
### Akeroyd’s reforms

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<th>Transparent reform</th>
<th><strong>Prison Management</strong></th>
<th><strong>Prisoner Management</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Staff selection and promotion on educational levels</td>
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<td>Staff development through education</td>
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<td>Classification based on individual needs assessment</td>
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Prison education talk to U3A
Akeroyd reform

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<td><strong>Sentencing</strong> indeterminate sentence and determinate sentence</td>
<td><strong>Punishment</strong> Application of corporal punishment as treatment</td>
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Prison education talk to U3A
Akeroyd insights – systemic complexity

Operational and theoretical challenges

• Focus on individual deficit and treatment
• Staff capability
• Growing awareness of sub cultural / labelling theory well ahead of its time

Difficulties in reconciliation

• Treatment and punishment
• Individual pathology vs social structures
The “Malways” experience

From

To

MALWAYS
What do these stories mean?

• Prison and prisoner management policy is complex
• Reform is both transparent and opaque often working in parallel
  • Alignment between ideology, policy, practice and language
• Risk of simplifying the relationship between education achievement and reduced recidivism
  • Is the curriculum critical? Is it the application of the curriculum? Is it the qualities of the teacher?
• Where is the voice of the prisoner?
  • The Malways learnings
• How well do we prepare prison educators to work in this critical environment?
What next?

Some thoughts

Ask ACEA to take leadership in:

• Mapping current prison educator preparation practice in each state
• Identify elements of good practice in each state
• Consider best practice standards for Australian prisoner educator training
Finish

• Questions?
• Discussion

Thankyou