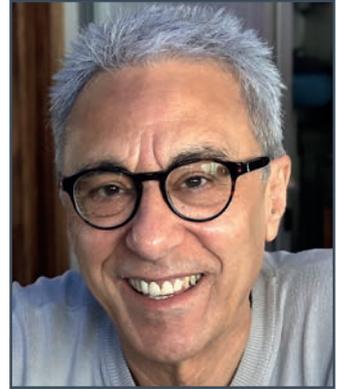


## Innovation in Education: Voices from the Front Line

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This will be a short Foreword since this is a long issue that has run the risk of exceeding our word limit for *Advancing Corrections*. We received 29 original manuscripts for this special Edition and were able to publish 16. That is a testament to the relevance of our chosen 'theme' but perhaps also a reflection of the growing popularity of the Journal. I want to thank all of the contributors, our reviewers and most of all, my three Associate Editors for this Edition, Helen Farley, Anne Pike and Fiona McGregor.



As I do usually in my Foreword, here is a quick summary of the content. The first two papers are from 'incarcerated learners' – the ones who it is all about and who we should listen to more often. The first paper (by **Kris McPherson**) is both a personal and very powerful account of how education in prison can engage and transform. In Kris's case, he eventually came across the growing scholarly literature on desistance. As he notes, he began to realize he was 'living the literature', a phrase that nicely endorses Kris's path but also the depth and validity of that literature. Kris is perhaps unusual in some respects but the awakening of the 'inner learner' and 'emerging desister' he speaks about is no doubt occurring quietly every day in many prisons, in many countries. The second incarcerated learner, who chose to remain anonymous, is more constructively critical than personally reflective. Transformation through education could be happening even more often if prison schooling was challenged to reach community standards. This learner's prison experience was described by one reviewer as 'telling a common depressing story' about the prison schooling experience. Corrections can do better!

The next set of papers present the 'voices' of Educators; academics who are trained to write dispassionately but who in this case clearly lean into what they believe deeply. **Professor Kevin Warner** from Ireland gives us as articulate and compelling an argument as I can imagine for why education in prisons should be seen as a right and not a privilege; a right that all individuals should have to help expand their minds and thereby nurture their humanity. Correctional administrators should aim towards this ideal. The next two papers come from the two ends of Canada – one from **Jennifer Kilty and Sandra Lehalle** from the University of Ottawa, and the other from **Lauren Mayes** and her colleagues from Nanaimo, British Columbia. Both papers highlight an innovation in prison education that was first introduced in the US in the late 90s and is now being modelled around the world. The Inside-Out program is a university-prison partnership where university students (outside learners) and incarcerated students (inside learners) learn together within a correctional facility, with the same expectations, and on equal footing in terms of access to learning resources. The papers discuss the obvious operational barriers that might need to be overcome in welcoming this kind of non-traditional approach to postgraduate education. But the strength of both papers is their discussion of the observed benefits – both for the inside and the outside students. Though we tend to revere only quantitative outcome data as 'evidence', the feedback from both kinds of students

about their experience is distinctly convincing. We round off this section on the 'voices' of educators with two papers addressing key issues in the area of prison education. It has been noted often that incarcerated learners are typically at significant disadvantage because of their limited (if any) access to our new digital world of information. The paper by **Helen Nichols** turns this observation on its head and instead tries to focus on the benefits. Her conclusion resonates with my own views on this issue that 'The liberating quality of a lack of technological comforts ... stands as a sound reminder that there is no substitute for human interaction in any educational environment ... and that a lack of technological tools in learning spaces can be something to be embraced rather than feared'. The last paper in this section by two of my Associate Editors, **Anne Pike and Helen Farley**, dares to challenge a widespread sacred cow in the field of prison education – the utilitarian perspective that corrections should offer only those learning opportunities that can lead directly to 'employability'. There are many reasons to disagree with this traditional perspective that tends to over-emphasize only literacy and vocational training. Anne and Helen present their case cogently and convincingly for a more nuanced approach to education and training in corrections.

The voices of a few 'Researchers' in the field of prison education are presented in the next set of papers. From the Department of Corrections in New Zealand, **Bronwyn Morrison & Jill Bowman** unpack some of the findings from an impressive longitudinal study of New Zealand prisoners. Through qualitative analysis of a number of engaging case studies they arrive at what I consider to be a critically important insight – applicable to all of our attempts to offer 'rehabilitative' services to prisoners – and maybe especially for education. In their words, they conclude that 'the mechanisms through which prison education 'works' are complex and highly individualised, and should be understood within the broader context of learners' biographies and narratives.' In my own words – nothing works for everyone the same way. There will be different strokes that can lead to change for different folks. We have a long way to go in incorporating this knowledge into our practice. We were quite pleased to receive the next paper from **Márta Takács-Miklósi** of the University of Debrecen in Hungary. Marta and her co-authors were interested in the views and experiences of 'the prison teachers who design and deliver the prison programs.' They collected interview and questionnaire data from corrections educators and staff inside two Hungarian correctional centres and four 'outside' educational institutions or colleges. Perhaps not surprisingly, their findings highlight how the commitment of these line staff survives but may be difficult to sustain unless a wide spectrum of conditions improves measurably. The last paper in this section, by **Yilma Woldgabreal** and his many co-authors from South Australia, presents a disciplined researcher's approach to program design – the development and implementation of a positive psychology psycho-education curriculum with remand prisoners. The chosen target group which is often ignored (remand prisoners), the approach (positive psychology) and the expectation that this kind of early engagement can lead to increased interest in other programming, all make this initiative quite unique.

We turn to the Administrator's 'voice' for the next set of papers. The Commissioner for the Michigan Department of Corrections, **Heidi Washington**, proudly outlines the restructuring and enhancement of their educational programs, including their innovative Vocational Village concept, efforts to embrace technology, and their significant level of support for post-secondary educational opportunities. **Helen Farley & Susan Hopkins** from the University of Southern Queensland describe their work in establishing an impressive array of university-prison collaborations giving greater quality of access to 'disconnected' incarcerated students in Australian correctional centres. Their unique *Making the*

*Connection* project has taken an innovative tech-forward approach to the problem and it should be modeled around the world. From the UK, **Ruth McFarlane and Andrew Morris**, describe three innovative Open University projects in UK prisons giving students a more personalized distance-education experience – ‘...including responsibility for administration and peer support, Student Councils offering students voices to be heard and academic seminars to introduce prisoners to exciting new areas of study.’ Finally, in this section, **Jon Eilenberg, Amy Pearce and Howard Williamson** look at both experience and research in delivery of the long-standing Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award as a ‘holistic and effective intervention for young offenders in correctional facilities.’ As the Author’s note, the Award is not a ‘catch-all solution.’ But when properly embedded with other practice and followed through with continued support, it can serve as the necessary spark for change for many young people entwined in the justice system.

In the usual way we end each of our *Advancing Corrections* Editions, our last two papers profile two examples of ‘Practice Innovation in Corrections’ – on this occasion from Africa, illustrating that innovation in prison education can occur even when conditions may be less than optimal. **Zanele Vandala** gives us an interesting description of Ekuseni Secondary School for incarcerated youth, one of the many initiatives flowing from Nelson Mandela’s commitment to empower his nation and his people, in this case to equip incarcerated youth with skills for smooth transition into communities. Among all of the other wonderful qualities of Nelson Mandela was an abiding respect for education as a means of uplifting the human spirit. A little-known fact is that while in Robben Island, Mandela designed his own school to teach his fellow political prisoners to read and write. Referred to as ‘Robben Island University,’ it made use of the ‘white sand in the quarry ... as a writing and drawing tool.’ Zanele Vandala’s paper appropriately celebrates the way that Ekuseni, initiated with funding raised personally by Mandela, now carries on his legacy with a well-equipped secondary school for youth that is contributing significantly to reductions in reoffending. The last paper in this Edition by **Dr. Juliana Ndunagu and Nebath Tanglang** from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) gives us perhaps an unexpected example of how a still developing correctional system is nonetheless capitalizing on new technology to give greater access to education for more prisoners. Referred to as the NOUN initiative, the authors describe how prisoners are recruited and registered, given digital access to learning materials in various prison ‘study centres,’ assessed for their progress and then moved finally towards matriculation and graduation ceremonies. Importantly, the authors note how enrollment in the NOUN distance education has grown steadily.

I want to close with my usual thanks to the reviewers on our Editorial Board. For this Special Edition, we also reached out to a few guest reviewers who deserve thanks – Kevin Warner, Barrie Friel, and Susan Hopkins. I also want to extend yet another thanks to my Associate Editors for this Edition – Helen Farley, Anne Pike and Fiona McGregor. They were each consistently responsive and helpful whenever I called upon them. This Edition of *Advancing Corrections* is my favorite so far – both because of the quality of the content and the importance of the theme it examines. Once again, the contributions are international; from Scotland, Ireland, Canada, the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Hungary and Africa. Providing some information and research about good practice in corrections around the world is one of our aims. But a more fundamental aim is to be thought-provoking in how we can do better. The highly respected RAND Corporation concluded recently that for every dollar invested in correctional education we can save nearly five dollars in reincarceration costs over three years ([https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)). Correctional policy makers and

administrators around the world should pay attention and try to do better!

For some people, it is easier to express their views and feelings in ways other than words. I want to extend a special thank you to the Koestler Trust, UK for allowing us to reproduce some of their 'prisoner art' in this Edition of *Advancing Corrections*. We may make this a regular feature of the Journal.

We welcome your feedback on this Edition and any other thoughts you may have about our *Advancing Corrections Journal*.

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