

Chapter 70

Responding to the Needs of Prisoners with Learning Difficulties in Australia

Jason Skues

Faculty of Health, Arts, and Design, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

Jeffrey Pfeifer

Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

Alfie Oliva

Corrections Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Lisa Wise

Faculty of Health, Arts, and Design, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Offenders who are convicted of a crime in Australia are encouraged to participate in educational and vocational training programs during their time in prison. However, one of the significant challenges encountered by not only prisoners who enroll in educational and vocational training programs, but also for the staff who teach into these programs, are prisoners who experience learning difficulties. Prison teachers and other staff are ordinarily unaware of which offenders experience such difficulties. Given that unidentified learning difficulties are associated with poor educational, employment and psychological outcomes, it is critical that prisoners who experience specific learning difficulties are identified, and that educational and vocational training programs offered in prisons cater for the diverse learning needs of all prisoners. This review highlights issues with the identification of learning difficulties and proposes methods of supporting prisoners who experience learning difficulties and the people tasked with managing them. Such a review offers an important contribution to the literature on educational and vocational training programs in prisons as well as practical implications for prisoners, teachers and administrators.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3542-7.ch070

INTRODUCTION

Very little is known about prisoners who experience learning difficulties in Australian prisons. Indeed, a review of the corrections literature reveals limited emphasis on prisoners who experience learning difficulties, despite evidence that these individuals form a significant proportion of the prisoner population (Baldry, Clarence, Dowse & Trollor, 2013; Dias, Ware, Kinner & Lennox, 2013; Hayes 2007; Hayes, Shackell, Mottram & Lancaster, 2007; Hyun, Hahn & McConnell, 2014; O'Brien, 2008; Talbot & Riley, 2007). The aim of the current review is to discuss issues with the definition and identification of learning difficulties, as well as to propose improved methods of supporting prisoners who experience learning difficulties and the people tasked with managing them. This review will provide an understanding of some of the systematic issues confronted by prisoners who experience learning difficulties and how these issues impact on prison teachers who need to cater for the learning needs of these individuals, and prison administrators who are responsible for providing appropriate support and services for prisoners during their sentence. Recommendations for how to address some of these issues are also discussed.

Background

In 2016, there were 38,845 prisoners in Australia, with more than 50,000 prisoners moved through the prison system (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). These prisoners were either sentenced or on remand while awaiting trial and sentencing, with about one-quarter of the prison population on remand on an average day. All prisoners convicted of a crime and sentenced are encouraged to enroll in some form of educational program, vocational training, or undertake employment during their time in prison. The aim is to provide prisoners with the necessary knowledge and skills to obtain employment after release, as well as to provide activities that will build their self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-control during their time in prison (Callan & Gardner, 2007; Farley & Murphy, 2012). Previous research conducted between 2008 and 2015 showed that 34 percent of eligible prisoners enrolled in one of the educational programs that were available in prisons, with most enrolling in vocational education and training programs (Baldry et al., 2016). Other programs offered included Year 12 equivalence and higher education degrees undertaken online or via distance education. Although not all prisoners who enroll in a program are expected to finish all of the modules in that program, it is important to highlight that there are still benefits for participation in terms of prisoner engagement and upskilling that may be beneficial in securing employment after release. More generally, however, participation and completion of prison education and vocational training programs benefits not only the individual through their acquisition of new skills to obtain employment after release, but also society more broadly due to the fact that offenders with higher educational attainment levels are less likely to re-offend if they are working and earning an income (Bahn, 2011; Jovanic, 2011; Newton, Day, Giles, Wodak, Graffam & Baldry, 2016; Vacca, 2004).

The Problem

There are several challenges to engaging prisoners to enroll in and complete education and training programs during their time in prison. Some are individual factors such as lack of perceived competence and value, low educational attainment levels (i.e., 32 percent of prison entrants have not completed Year 10 (see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015) compared with 74 percent of school students completing Year 12 or equivalent in the general population (see Lamb, Jackson, Walstab & Huo, 2015),

9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/responding-to-the-needs-of-prisoners-with-learning-difficulties-in-australia/289121

Related Content

Integrated Model of Affordable Housing Delivery for the City of Windhoek

Isaac Okoth Randa (2016). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 1-15).

www.irma-international.org/article/integrated-model-of-affordable-housing-delivery-for-the-city-of-windhoek/175635

The Relationship Between Child Labour and Hyperactivity

Daman Ahujaand Kalpana B. (2021). *International Journal of Political Activism and Engagement* (pp. 55-63).

www.irma-international.org/article/relationship-between-child-labour-hyperactivity/298602

Poor Public Management and Public Governance Failure: Nigerian Experience on Oil Resource Curse or Blessing Debate

John Ugoani (2020). *International Journal of Political Activism and Engagement* (pp. 56-72).

www.irma-international.org/article/poor-public-management-and-public-governance-failure/258307

Living in the Art-Like Reality: Trading in Derivatives vs. Derivative Writing

(2020). *Contemporary Art Impacts on Scientific, Social, and Cultural Paradigms: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 53-71).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/living-in-the-art-like-reality/254838

The Impact of Population Aging on Economic Growth: Panel Data Evidence from Middle East Countries

Abdullah Abdulaziz Bawazir, Mohamed Aslamand Ahmad Farid Osman (2021). *Handbook of Research on Economic and Social Impacts of Population Aging* (pp. 67-86).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-impact-of-population-aging-on-economic-growth-panel-data-evidence-from-middle-east-countries/280420