



UNESCO Chair of applied Research
for Education in Prison



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Chair

**CÉGEP
MARIE-VICTORIN**

Newsletter

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A Word from the Chairholder



Frédéric Armstrong, Ph.D.

Principal Researcher and UNESCO Chair in Applied
Research for Education in Prison

2025, a year marked by departures, new beginnings and a particularly enriching international event!

On the departure front, Julie Hautin, who was Chair-holder since 2022, has left her position to devote herself to other professional activities. I personally thank her for her commitment, her trust and her professionalism.

We also said goodbye, for the last time, to Paul Bélanger, retired professor in the Department of Special Education and Training at UQAM, long-time collaborator and co-founder of the Chair. We join Jean-Pierre Miron and Jean-Pierre Simoneau in paying him a **final tribute** at the end of this bulletin. Thank you for everything, Paul!

In terms of new beginnings, the Cégep has appointed an assistant director of institutional development, innovation and research, who will now oversee the Chair's activities. Mélanie Fontaine is masterfully leading these projects, contributing in particular to the drafting of the Chair's new strategic development plan, which will be adopted by our Steering Committee in June. At Mélanie's request, I accepted the position of chair holder of the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison. I will be supported in this task by

Marc-André Lacelle, principal investigator and research development advisor, and Camille Trembley, coordinator and pedagogical advisor.

Finally, if the first report card of 2024–2025 comes so late, it's because our small team started the year on a high note with the first Montreal International Conference on Education in Prison, held at UQAM between October 16 and 18, 2024. The first event of its kind in Canada, the Conference brought together more than a hundred people working in practice and research on and for education in prisons. We have produced a special bulletin to talk about the event. **Read it here!**

In the next few pages, you will find our regular sections, including portraits of researcher **Dorien Brosens** and learner-turned-practitioner **Jamar Williams**. I would also like to acknowledge special collaborations from **Marie Michèle Grenon**, a postdoctoral researcher affiliated with UQAM's Department of Specialized Education and Training, who describes her research on community art learning, and Émilie Cousineau, an intern at the Chair and a master's student in educational technology at Université Laval, who produced three abstracts for our research portrait.

I want to conclude by saying that we know that it has not been an easy year for most of us who are committed to defending the rights of incarcerated people. We also know that political and economic instability of all kinds will not make our job any easier in the months and even years to come. Know that you are not alone, that there is a whole community behind you! Thank you for your commitment and for your efforts!

Enjoy our newsletter!



Chair Activities

News about us

On August 22, 2024, Marc-André Lacelle and Frédérick Armstrong participated in the National Education Symposium, hosted by Correctional Service Canada. They prepared a workshop that presented the research work and activities of the Chair. The Symposium, «Connecting from Coast to Coast,» presented by the Chiefs of Education, the Reintegration Programs Division and the Reintegration Services Division, provided an opportunity for individuals, who contribute in different ways to the education of people incarcerated in Canadian penitentiaries, to come together for workshops, network and share good practices. It took place over two days in September, by videoconference, and brought together people from all provinces in Canada.

On October 1, 2024, Frédérick Armstrong, Principal Researcher and Co-holder of the UNESCO Chair for Applied Research in Prison Education, participated via videoconference in a study day titled «Teaching in Detention,» organized by the French Prison Administration Directorate. This event brought together experts and professionals from the education and prison sectors to discuss the challenges and practices of education in prison settings.

During this event, Frédérick Armstrong shared his expertise on the importance of prison education as a tool for social reintegration, as well as the findings of recent research conducted under the UNESCO Chair.

He shared this forum with Pierre-Jean Fave, technical advisor in charge of special education and schooling for disabled students to the rector of the Dijon academy, Fabien Marmonier-Lechat, deputy to the national head of education, sub-directorate for integration and probation and Jeanne Gavard-Veau, doctoral student in educational sciences, Université de Bourgogne.

UNESCO 2024 Chair Award: Celebrating Innovation in Prison Education

The UNESCO Chair, in collaboration with the Centre de services scolaires de la Rivière-du-Nord and the Centre de services scolaires des Mille-Îles, presented the UNESCO Chair Prize during the annual Spring School event, which took place on April 9 at the Delta Hotel in Trois-Rivières. This award recognizes an innovative project, teaching material, or pedagogical strategy in the context of prison education.

The UNESCO Chair Prize aims to highlight and acknowledge the outstanding work carried out daily by educators in Quebec's federal penitentiaries and provincial detention centres. A jury evaluated the nominated projects based on the following criteria:

- Innovative nature
- Relevance and feasibility for incarcerated learners
- Transferability to other institutions
- Direct impact on learners' educational progress

Community of Interests



The award was presented in person by Marc-André Lacelle and Camille Trembley during the event. At the provincial level, Nathalie Dion, Nicole Ranger, and Natacha St-Amand from the Saint-Jérôme Detention Centre were recognized for their project *Le Journal Le Phoénix*. Published four to five times per year, the newspaper gives voice to incarcerated individuals through narrative texts, personal reflections, poetry, illustrations, and practical recipes made with canteen ingredients. It also features games such as riddles, sudoku, and crosswords, along with themed creative contests offering canteen prizes. The newspaper highlights the various services and professionals available to incarcerated individuals—such as the library, OPEX, and the SAMIS program—while offering support for personal development and reintegration efforts. It also showcases academic achievements such as the successful completion of TDG, TENS, and DES exams, promoting educational perseverance and personal growth.

At the federal level, Geneviève Pelletier (Donnacona Institution) and Judith Bernier (Port-Cartier Institution) were rewarded for their project *Visual Arts in Maximum Security*. In response to the limited availability of optional courses in prison, these two educators developed a series of accessible visual arts workshops based on the 10th and 11th grade arts curriculum. Using minimal materials, the workshops fostered creativity and provided inmates with a chance to earn credits toward their high school diploma. The sessions can be delivered individually or in cohorts and will soon be shared with other institutions interested in implementing a similar approach.

Two workshops were also offered during the event:

- «*What Your Students Think of You!*», led by Lyne Bisson and Frédéric Armstrong, explored the impact of prison education on school perseverance and social reintegration. By comparing the perspectives of incarcerated learners and educators, the workshop shed light on often-overlooked dimensions of educational success.
- «*School in Prison as a Transformative Space*», led by Camille Tremblay and Marc-André Lacelle, examined how prison schools can serve as both physical and pedagogical spaces of transformation. Drawing from international initiatives, the workshop illustrated how education can support desistance and foster genuine personal reconstruction.

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↗ Cover of the newspaper "Le Phoenix" and team of the Saint-Jérôme Facility. © Marc-André Lacelle



↗ Works by students from the "Visual Arts in Maximum Security" project and team from the Donnacona and Port-Cartier Facilities. © Camille Trembley



Community of Interests

Certification in Research Program Presentation

For the past two years, Cégep Marie-Victorin has offered a student research certification program. This certification is part of an institutional initiative aimed at strengthening academic and professional engagement. This year, the program provided an opportunity for eleven students from the Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Arts, Literature and Communication, and Social Work programs to be introduced to the world of research. As part of this program, the Chair welcomed two students : Roxanne Larivée and Anaïs Redjal. Working alongside the Chair's team, they were introduced to the field of applied research in prison settings.

Research Week and Student Participation

The Chair also took part in the Research, Innovation, and Creativity Week organized at Cégep Marie-Victorin. This event seeks to build bridges between theoretical knowledge and practical experience while encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration. Through a diverse program, the week highlights the essential role of college-level research as a driver of pedagogical, social, and institutional transformation.



→ © Marc-André Lacelle

In this context, Roxanne Larivée and Anaïs Redjal had the opportunity to present the work they completed as part of the certification in research, as well as two poster projects. Each of them presented a poster exploring, from their own perspective, a theme related to the unique realities faced by incarcerated women—particularly Indigenous women—and the transformative effects of education on their life paths.

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➔ What is the Importance of Non-Formal Education for Incarcerated Indigenous Women?

By Roxanne Larrivée

What programs currently exist? What does “non-formal education” mean in this context? What is the real impact of these programs on incarcerated Indigenous women, and how are their life trajectories connected to them? How can these programs be effectively integrated and improved?

This student research project, conducted as part of the Student Research Certification and supervised by the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison, seeks to answer these questions through a review of existing literature on the subject.

SEMAINE DE LA RECHERCHE 2025 AU CÉGEP MARIE-VICTORIN, CHAIRE UNESCO DE RECHERCHE APPLIQUÉE POUR L'ÉDUCATION EN PRISON

QUELLE EST L'IMPORTANCE DE L'ÉDUCATION NON FORMELLE POUR LES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES INCARCÉRÉES ?

Introduction	Résultats	Discussion
<p>L'éducation non formelle désigne l'ensemble des enseignements qui ne sont pas évalués et n'ont pas comme but de mener à une certification particulière. Ce type d'éducation ne suit pas nécessairement une forme linéaire et a comme objectif le développement personnel, ainsi que d'une multitude de compétences. Dans le cas des Autochtones, cette éducation non formelle, dans un contexte d'incarcération ou de réinsertion, peut prendre la forme d'enseignements variés qui permettent notamment la guérison et la reconnaissance de l'identité (parlage, chants de gorge, rituels de réinsertion traditionnels, thérapie, tentes de méditation...).</p>	<p>1. Trajectoires de vie des femmes autochtones incarcérées : Avant (Qu'elles viennent de milieux familiaux plus sains ou qu'elles soient victimes de placement institutionnel très précoce, le retour de vie des femmes autochtones incarcérées à l'égalité n'est pas simple. Elles sont souvent surpeuplées à la fois de la violence, dont elles sont victimes, et en plus d'entretenir une relation fragile avec le marché de l'emploi et le système d'éducation. Pendant Les crimes commis choquent souvent les femmes en sécurité maximale, où l'accès aux programmes d'éducation est plus difficile, tout comme dans les prisons provinciales d'ailleurs. De plus, elles sont exposées de manière continue aux risques de criminalité qu'elles ont encourus à l'extérieur (drogues, prostitution...).</p> <p>2. La prison Les crimes commis choquent souvent les femmes en sécurité maximale, où l'accès aux programmes d'éducation est plus difficile, tout comme dans les prisons provinciales d'ailleurs. De plus, elles sont exposées de manière continue aux risques de criminalité qu'elles ont encourus à l'extérieur (drogues, prostitution...).</p> <p>La prison a comme effet de causer une rupture dans les liens familiaux, particulièrement pour les détenues qui vivaient en communauté. De plus, en manque d'accompagnement pendant la réinsertion, il est facile pour les femmes autochtones qui vivent en milieu urbain de récidiver, sans compter qu'en ville, elles sont surpeuplées à la violence policière.</p> <p>3. Les programmes d'éducation Les programmes d'éducation destinés aux femmes autochtones incarcérées en la prison : tenter de garantir les besoins éducatifs, pour éviter de les reproduire à leur tour, tenter de garantir les besoins laissés par des enfants souvent très délaissés, tenter de répondre à un besoin, voire incertain, avec l'éducation.</p> <p>4. Les programmes d'éducation Section 1) : pratiques de renforcement (flexibles, contextuelles, en nature, avec accès à des ressources psychologiques et des activités spirituelles et culturelles) Section 2) : thérapie conditionnelle/programmes de réinsertion en communauté autochtone Activités culturelles (renforcement avec l'identité par la parole, création de musique, chants de gorge, rituels de tentes de méditation, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Les théâtres, psychodramatiques et travailleurs sociaux, modèles à suivre pour les détenues • Intégration du PCI dans les programmes d'éducation 	<p>Manque d'accès de programmes d'éducation et d'accompagnement en réinsertion dans les prisons provinciales Niveau de sécurité maximum : complexité l'accès aux programmes éducatifs conçus à leur endroit – paradoxe avec les grilles d'évaluation multiples à leur concert (évaluation de la prison) Obstacles à l'implémentation des programmes d'éducation non formelle qui incluent le PCI dans les prisons (isolement, incarcération) Manque de réinsertion dans les communautés autochtones pour être des programmes de réinsertion d'éducation Rapport Global : un outil adapté, mais trop peu utilisé et consulté Rapport Global : rapport personnel d'après ce programme les détenues profitent sans avoir accès à des programmes d'éducation</p>
Contexte	Méthodologie	Conclusion
<p>L'acte pour ce projet est formel et il est des ressources passées en compagnie des chercheurs à la Chaire UNESCO, à un accord plus sur leur travail. Le phénomène de la surreprésentation des femmes autochtones dans les prisons est flagrant et soulève de nombreuses questions, quel en est le contexte qui a mené à cette surreprésentation? Quelle est l'expérience vécue par ces femmes autochtones incarcérées? Comment se déroule la réinsertion? L'éducation, quelle sont les moments clés en place pour tenter de corriger cette situation? Les espaces aménagés leur font les Autochtones au Québec et au Canada dénotent d'un système imposé par les colonisateurs. Il est important pour nous de le décrire et le réviser, dans l'espoir où nous avons tous notre part de responsabilité, et où il est de notre devoir d'être de manière à offrir les ressources nécessaires pour contribuer à réparer les liens cassés.</p>	<p>Documentaire avec les chercheurs : Marie-Josée Laflamme, Frédéric Amourag, Camille Tremblay – (les moyens de diffuser l'information, les outils d'organisation de l'information et les outils et méthodes de recherche de l'information) Recensement des documents relatifs au sujet des femmes autochtones incarcérées au Québec et au Canada et sur les programmes d'éducation Recherche de articles de revues sur la population indigène en Amérique – sont restés de documents de la littérature appliquée et similaires à la situation canadienne Recherche sur les différences culturelles et historiques complexes entre les Premières Nations et les limites, et en fonction de la littérature restée, et projet l'aiterese principalement aux femmes autochtones de Premières Nations</p>	<p>Les programmes d'éducation en prison peuvent permettre aux femmes autochtones de développer leur identité, de prendre conscience de leurs actions, de reconnaître avec leur identité et d'apprendre à gérer leurs émotions, culture, réhabilitation de soi-même, communication. Pour que ces programmes aient un réel impact pour les femmes autochtones, ils doivent être conçus spécifiquement en prenant en compte leur complexe héritage colonial et leur identité propre. Les programmes d'éducation non formelle sont effectivement liés aux trajectoires de vie des femmes autochtones, car ils peuvent fournir les outils nécessaires pour gérer de la santé mentale et développer les compétences nécessaires pour réintégrer la société, trouver du travail, obtenir un logement, retourner à l'école ou prendre soin des enfants dont elles ont souvent la garde, de manière autonome.</p>
Références	<p>1. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>2. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>3. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>4. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>5. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>6. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>7. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>8. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>9. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p> <p>10. Bouchard, M. (2019). <i>La violence policière en milieu urbain</i>. Montréal: Éditions Écosociété.</p>	

D'UNE RÉSERVE À UNE CELLULE : LA SURPRÉSENTATION AUTOCHTONE

Anais Redjal

SEMAINE DE LA RECHERCHE AU CÉGEP MARIE-VICTORIN CHAIRE UNESCO DE RECHERCHE APPLIQUÉE POUR L'ÉDUCATION EN PRISON



Les femmes autochtones sont incarcérées à un taux 15,4 fois plus élevé que les femmes non autochtones. Chez les hommes, le taux est 8,4 fois plus élevé pour les Autochtones.

Surreprésentation carcérale des Autochtones au sein (Canada, 2010-2021)

Population	Taux d'incarcération (2021)
Autochtones	~15.4
Femmes non autochtones	~1.0
Hommes non autochtones	~8.4

03. Méthodologie

- Analyse documentaire basée sur des rapports officiels (Statistique Canada, Ministère de la Justice)
- des études universitaires et des témoignages autochtones
- Approche qualitative et critique, avec un ancrage décolonial et intersectionnel.

04. Discussion

- Héritage colonial : génocide culturel, pensionnats, politiques d'assimilation.
- Évaluations biaisées : outils non adaptés aux réalités autochtones.
- Manque de ressources : peu d'accès à des programmes culturellement appropriés.
- Femmes en sécurité maximale : accès limité aux services et à la réinsertion.
- Racisme systémique : discrimination, criminalisation de la pauvreté.

05. Résultats

- Les données reflètent une situation alarmante :
- 28 % des détenus sous juridiction fédérale en 2018 étaient Autochtones, alors qu'ils ne représentent que 4,3 % de la population canadienne.
- Chez les femmes, la surreprésentation est encore plus marquée : 40 % des femmes incarcérées étaient autochtones.
- De 2009 à 2018, la population carcérale autochtone a augmenté de 42,8 %, contre moins de 1 % pour la population carcérale globale.
- Les Autochtones sont aussi :
 - plus souvent détenus avant leur procès,
 - ont moins accès à la libération sous caution,
 - et passent moins de temps avec un avocat.
- En 2020-2021, les Autochtones représentaient environ 33 % des admissions en détention fédérale, alors qu'ils constituaient environ 5 % de la population adulte canadienne.

06. Conclusion

Pour que le système de justice réponde véritablement aux réalités et aux besoins des peuples autochtones, il ne suffit pas d'ajuster les mécanismes existants, il faut un changement profond, ancré dans la reconnaissance du tort causé par des siècles d'oppression coloniale. Cela implique d'intégrer des approches culturellement éclairées, comme la justice réparatrice autochtone, de former les intervenants à la réalité historique et culturelle des Premières Nations, et surtout, de redonner aux communautés autochtones le pouvoir de participer activement aux décisions qui les concernent. La guérison passe par l'écoute, la reconnaissance et la justice.

➔ From the Reserve to the Cell: Colonial Legacy and the Overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples.

By Anais Redjal

Longhouses, once symbols of community, have become silent witnesses to a brutal colonialism largely erased from dominant narratives. The history of Indigenous peoples—marginalized even in school textbooks—reveals a deliberate effort at assimilation and cultural erasure that began with colonization. The residential school system embodies this oppression, aiming to destroy identities and traditions. This painful past, still very much present, calls for awareness, recognition, and memory-based justice.

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News

In Finland

The *Smart Prison* project, conducted in Finland from 2018 to 2022, aimed to digitalize prisons and develop AI-based solutions for inmate management and rehabilitation. Initiatives included using AI for sentence planning, virtual reality for therapeutic purposes, and training inmates in AI. The program also introduced projects like RISE AI and Aurora AI to support inmates in their release planning. Pia Puolakka, a researcher and psychologist, presents the results, lessons learned, and ethical challenges related to the use of AI in the correctional system.

Pia Puolakka is a Finnish psychologist and psychotherapist, specialized in forensic psychology and hypnotherapy. She has worked for 14 years in the Finnish prison system, holding various positions, notably as a prison psychologist. Since 2012, she has been a member of the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency.

Australasian Corrections Education Association. (2024, February 19). The Learning Chronicles (Edition 8).

Prisoners in Finland Are Learning AI and Taking Online Tech Courses - Business Insider

In the United State



REFORM Alliance, a nonprofit organization founded in 2019, works to reform probation, parole, and prison sentences by advocating for changes in laws, systems, and culture to create genuine pathways to employment and well-being. The organization highlighted the story of James «Yaya» Hough, a former inmate who served 27 years in prison and created portraits of his fellow prisoners. After his release, he was welcomed as an artist in residence at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, where he created portraits of individuals involved in justice reform, including lawyers, judges, and victims, as part of the Points of Connection exhibition.

The mission of *REFORM Alliance* is to bring together experts, leaders in the justice system, advocates, and policymakers to find practical solutions aimed at transforming probation and parole. The goal is to significantly reduce the number of people needlessly trapped in the criminal justice system and increase the

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number of individuals transitioning from supervision to employment and well-being.

Ulaby, N. (2020, 19 octobre). **Meet The First Artist In Residence At Philadelphia's District Attorney's Office.** NPR.

REFORM Alliance. (n.d.). **Our approach.**

In the UK

Education correspondent, Sally Weale, presents an innovative educational initiative in English prisons, where inmates have the opportunity to study ancient philosophy, including Aristotle's teachings on ethics and rhetoric. This program aims to help prisoners develop communication skills, decision-making abilities, and emotional management, while also engaging them in the study of the Greek tragedy *Philoctetes* by Sophocles. Participants report significant impacts, such as improved self-reflection and more effective communication. Supported by the University of Durham and the educational charity Novus, this program is currently implemented in two prisons for men, with plans to expand to female institutions.

Weale, S. (2025, 12 avril). **Classicists take 'ancient philosophical wisdom' into English jails.** *The Guardian*.

In Belgium

Belgian prisons, facing overcrowding and a shortage of staff, struggle to provide education in prison, even though education is a human right and a social need. Three-quarters of inmates are undereducated, and the recidivism rate reaches 60%. The Council of Europe has urged the federal government to reform its prison policy. Education in prison has become a key issue in this difficult context.

Fillon, T. (2024, 1^{er} avril). Éducation en prison : un droit encore en détention? **La Ligue de l'Enseignement et de l'Éducation permanente.**

The situation in Belgian prisons was also the subject of an article in *The Brussels Times*, signed by Ciara Carolan. Carolan quotes researcher and postdoctoral fellow Dorien Brosens at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel who says she is convinced of the goodwill of the people who work in the prison system, but who also points out that it is impossible to offer quality services because of a persistent lack of staff. Basically, Belgian prisons are overcrowded and chronically understaffed. In addition to emphasizing that incarceration is not the best solution for all people who are in trouble with the law, Brosens emphasizes that social reintegration, a collective responsibility according to her, must be at the heart of reflections to improve the system as a whole, particularly through education programs in prisons.

Carolan, C. (2024, 7 décembre). **Why are Belgian prison workers always on strike?** *The Brussels Times*.

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Internationally

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has launched a global collection of best practices in prison education. This initiative presents 16 case studies illustrating innovative and effective approaches to promoting access to education for incarcerated individuals. These projects, led by prison authorities, NGOs, civil society groups, international organizations, and educational institutions, aim to reduce recidivism, promote the social and professional reintegration of inmates, and foster more cohesive societies.

Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). (2024, October 16). **Case studies on prison education**. UNESCO.

In the Philippines: Case Studies

The *Read Your Way Out* (RYWO) project, launched in 2022 in the Philippines, aims to reduce prison overcrowding by offering inmates the opportunity to reduce their sentences by participating in educational activities, including reading and engaging in book clubs. This program, supported by UNODC, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), and the National Library of the Philippines, has led to the creation of 13 prison libraries, thus providing inmates with access to educational resources for their personal development and social reintegration.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2024, October 11). **Read Your Way Out, Philippines**. Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).

By Marie Michèle Grenon, Postdoctoral Researcher affiliated with the Department of Specialized Education and Training at UQAM.

Learning Through Community Art: A Look into the Creative Process Behind *Inconditionnelles* by Art Entr'Elles.

In the spring of 2022, the Art Entr'Elles Collective launched a new community art project centered on the voices of criminalized women. The aim was to support each participant in developing a personal story in the form of an audio capsule and to collectively design an artwork presented in two parts: an in situ installation and a web platform. A group of seven women, who became community artists, were supported by two professional artists and a coordinator affiliated with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Québec, which supports the Art Entr'Elles Collective.

After obtaining the necessary ethical approvals and the consent of the participants, I joined the group as a researcher. As part of my postdoctoral work, I examined Art Entr'Elles as a site of informal adult learning. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork throughout the creative process leading to the installation *Inconditionnelles*, exhibited in April 2023. I engaged in participant observation during research-creation workshops led by five professional artists whose practices focus on storytelling. Through the activities of a poet, a sound artist, a filmmaker, a screenwriter, and a storyteller, the women explored various artistic disciplines while preparing their personal narratives. I also took part in three skills-recognition workshops alongside them.

Following a summer break, eleven additional workshops were held to finalize each participant's individual piece and prepare for recording in a professional studio. Group discussions were also held to shape the structure of the individual capsules and to design the collective sound installation.

While the professional artistic team worked on editing the capsules and designing the in situ listening experience, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with the community artists to delve deeper into their experiences and the learning that occurred. I also interviewed the project coordinator and the professional artists, whose insights supported and contextualized the women's testimonies.

Learning Through an Artistic Process

Preliminary analysis of the data reveals that participants' learning experiences fall into at least three categories: artistic and/or technological skills, writing abilities, and self-knowledge.

During the workshops, the professional artists introduced the women to a variety of media, techniques, and artistic influences, many of which were unfamiliar to them. The participants explored sound composition and installation, podcasting, sound effects, and were introduced to poetic and cinematic works that deeply resonated with them. These experiences enriched their creative process and expanded their artistic and general cultural knowledge.

Writing quickly emerged as central to the artistic process, particularly in preparing the audio capsules. The women were required to write their narratives as texts to support the

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recording and editing phases. Although most participants reported writing infrequently in their daily lives, they succeeded in composing deeply introspective and powerful texts. As the project progressed, they developed greater confidence in expressing themselves through writing, and some even reported incorporating this skill more regularly into their personal lives post-project.

Reflecting on their experience, participants expressed that the Art Entr'Elles project helped them better understand themselves and develop new capabilities. Through the artistic and skills-recognition workshops, they discovered hidden talents and became more aware of their strengths and qualities. The narrative creation process encouraged introspection, and many felt it helped them advance in their personal journeys. They expressed great pride in their collective work during the final exhibition.

In sum, my research findings show that this community art project was far more than a leisure activity. The participants engaged in meaningful learning related to the arts, technology, literacy, and personal development. Perhaps most importantly, they found a platform to articulate and voice issues that matter to them. You can now hear their stories by visiting the web platform www.inconditionnelles.com, where you can also find upcoming exhibition dates for the in situ installation.

Marie Michèle Grenon is a postdoctoral researcher affiliated with the Department of Specialized Education and Training at UQAM. She holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Université Laval. Her research interests include adult literacy and education, multimodality, and access to and understanding of information. Alongside Virginie Thériault, she co-authored the article "Literacy learning and changing social practices in a community art project for women with experience of the criminal justice system" published in the International Journal of Lifelong Education (2024).

Portrait of a Researcher

Dorien Brosens



Dorien Brosens is an assistant professor / postdoctoral researcher in the field of Adult Educational Sciences. As one of the founding members of the PALD research group, Dorien's work focuses on peer programs, active citizenship, and innovative forms of learning within prisons. Her research spans across formal, non-formal and informal learning activities. She coordinates multiple research projects and supervises PhD-students on topics related to learning and participation in prison.

Frédéric Armstrong : Can you tell us about your background as a researcher, your current field of research and what led you to work with incarcerated learners.

Dorien Brosens : It started in 2010–2011, when I did my masters in adult educational sciences. For my master thesis, I conducted interviews with partners of incarcerated persons to gain insight into how they experience the detention of their partner. And that was actually the start of triggered me to dive deeper into imprisonment prisons as institutions.

At the end of my master's program, I was approached by my Ph.D. promoter. And at that time, they got the request of the prison of Antwerp, in Flanders, to conduct research about the needs of people in prison, related to programs and activities (education, sports activities, cultural activities...). My advisor asked me if I wanted to participate in this study, to set up participatory action research on that topic. And I said yes. It started like this.

Currently, I'm especially interested or working on active involvement, active types of participation and peer programs in prison. This project came out of a second study I conducted in the prison of Ghent. The prison administrators wanted to gain insight into which types of participation or involvement that incarcerated people had in this prison. While doing the literature review for that study, I came across peer programs in the UK and it triggered me to dive deeper into those programs.

F.A. : You mentioned something about active participation. Can you elaborate on what makes participation active as opposed to passive?

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D.B. : Citizen participation presents different levels of engagement in program development. For example, you can be informed about the programs without having a say in their format, which is quite a non-active type of participation. You can also be consulted in a survey. Once again, the participation in program orientation is not very active: administrators can choose to ignore these survey results.

In more active types of participation, individuals have a voice throughout the process, from conception to implementation. On this format, the voice of incarcerated individuals is not merely considered. Incarcerated persons become part of working groups with professionals. They are actively involved in program development and decision-making.

As I said, my first studies in prison were participatory action research projects, which have led to concrete action in practice and that is also what motivates me to do research on this topic. I want to be part of concrete changes for incarcerated individuals. Coming back to the study in Ghent's prison, I initially thought programs available in the UK, like peer-led induction programs for incoming prisoners or emotional support for people who are at risk of suicide, were very interesting. At first, I was told such programs were impossible and that prison manager will never allow such things. Indeed, these types of initiatives are very difficult to sell to prison administrators, because they seem to give too much power to incarcerated persons. Yet, 7–8 years after the completion of that study, there are peer-led induction programs in three or four prisons in Flanders. It's a long process, but it works!

F.A. : So just to paint the picture a little bit for readers who don't know the Belgian carceral system. Can you describe the prisons you worked in?

D.B. : The induction programs I talked about are mostly in remand prisons, for people who aren't sentenced yet. But to explain the Belgian system in very simple terms, we have

F.A. : Ah! We know nothing is simple in Belgium!

D.B. : Right ... it is a very complex system, but, in short, the federal government is responsible for the prison, the buildings, the prison managers, the security stuff and then the communities, Flanders and Wallonia, are responsible to provide services and activities in prison, including educational programs. Courses in prison are provided by the adult educational systems of each region. Other cultural activities or sports are sometimes organized by nonprofit organizations that come inside prisons.

F.A.: So since we're on the topic of Belgium, is there something particular about conducting research on this topic in Belgium?

D.B.: Of course, participatory action research is not easy to do in prisons. I imagine that's true everywhere, not only in Belgium. Nevertheless, we were able to do it in two prisons because the prison administrators asked us to do a research project and showed a willingness to find solutions to the issues we unearthed in our studies. Some people think there is a little too much research currently, but we still have good relations with administrators.

Marc-André Lacelle: Are there particular challenges to provide educational programs in Belgian prisons?

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D.B. : In Belgium, about 44% of our prison population does not have the Belgian nationality. And that is a reason why from I must think 2017 until 2020 we had a project focused on participation of foreign nationals in our prisons. We went in four prisons to gain insight into in which type of activity foreigners could participate in, what were the barriers to participation, etc.?

We found that, while in principle everyone has the right to participate to educational activities, in practice, if people do not speak Dutch, they are excluded from many activities. They first have to learn Dutch and then they are able to participate in other activities. Even the, when people do not have the right to stay in Belgium, it is hard to prepare them for employment. In short, foreign national can't really participate in activities explicitly focusing on reintegration. That is a huge challenge for the practitioners as well.

More generally, our prison system is in a huge crisis. This week we had over 13,000 people in our prisons. We are a very small country and that is the biggest amount we have ever had. Many of our prisons are overcrowded. It is also very challenging for our activity providers to do what they have to do because our prison staff are often on strike. Prison officers are overworked, and prisons are understaffed.

M-A.L: We're facing similar challenges in our own jurisdictions.

F.A.: I'm curious because you said you were approached by the prison administration to conduct research in their establishment. What's relationship with the prison administration as a whole as researcher and as an advocate for the rights of prisoners?

D.B.: This is a complex issue, partly because of the complexity of the Belgian system. The general prison administration is responsible for the prison infrastructure and our involvement with them is very basic. Our relationship with education providers and the people that coordinate the activities in prisons is deeper and I think we have quite a good connection with them. We are involved in their policy planning process, and we provide input based on research.

I can be a little more delicate with the staff on the field. Some people wonder what we are they doing and why we come in their prisons?

F.A.: How do you manage these tensions?

D.B.: That can be challenging, yes. But we can gain a lot of insight working with prison staff. During our participatory research project, in Ghent, we had two guards sitting on our steering committee. So that was really valuable. They had another perspective and that was great, but it is really challenging, in general.

Many members of the staff are in favour of activities and research about it, but many remain skeptical. They wonder why we conduct research, why we don't spend the money on something else, etc.

F.A.: So what's the obstacle for them? Is it lack of training? Is it a cultural thing? Is it a difference in values?

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D.B.: Lack of training, I would say. You can become a prison guard just after secondary education. They have to do some training, but it is very limited and it's focused on operations and security rather than intervention and rehabilitation. There are efforts to improve this, but we do not see a lot of changes in practice.

F.A.: Yeah, it's complicated. And it's not a job that's attractive for many people.

D.B.: No, and also there is a lot of very negative attention in the media with issues of overcrowding and all those things, so. It's difficult for prison staff members.

MAL: Again, it seems Québec and Belgium are facing very similar challenges...

F.A.: Can you tell us more about these peer-led induction programs you mentioned earlier?

D.B.: Many people who come to prison for the first time don't know anything about the way it works. Induction programs are meant to answer all basic questions, like where and when you take a shower, how you can make phone calls, etc. Peer-led induction programs decrease the workload of the prison staff and provide very good information for incoming prisoners. Moreover, it is important to not that the people who provide these induction programs are trained on the information itself and how to communicate it. This training is very important and rewarding for these individuals.

F.A.: OK. I'd like to perhaps preface this next question with the fact we actually talked about this topic with a learner talk, a few newsletters back, and they were very skeptical of peer support programs in prison. Can you tell us more about these peer learning and peer support programs and that tells us what you think about them? Does it help? Should we implement them, etc. ?

D.B.: So if you look at research about peer programs, but do you have a broad range of topics that they can address, it can be about like I explained earlier about welcoming, but it can also be about peer education about. It can be about raising awareness for HIV or hepatitis C in prison. It can also be about suicide prevention. In short, peer-led programs vary a lot and they are all organized in a different way.

Speaking of peer programs, in general terms is not so easy. But we see that if there is institutional buy-in, if the prison manager and the prison staff are in favour of it, that they can be organized, that they can have a huge potential.

Most of the time these initiatives start with a specific reason, like for instance decreasing the workload of the prison staff. This is particularly true for welcoming programs or suicide prevention programs.

In this latter case, the idea is to reduce the number of suicide attempts. But actually, when those programs are implemented, we see that the biggest effect these programs have is on the learning opportunities for the people who are supporting other incarcerated persons.

Our studies demonstrate that peer providers can learn new skills, like communication skills for instance, and their knowledge is improved. What knowledge is improved largely depend on the program, the experience in general can also contribute to identity reconstruction. Peer-providers come to look at themselves differently. They see that can

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help other people; that they are worth something; that they're not just criminals. And when they talk about their role as a peer provider, they make the connection with their role as family members and friends.

This experience also provides a more meaningful time in prison even if it can also have some negative effects. That's particularly true for peer providers who work in those programs focused on suicide prevention. They hear very different, very difficult or heavy stories from other incarcerated persons, and that can have negative effects on their own mental well-being and it might lead to burnout.

For that reason, the structure around that program is so important. Peer-providers must be supported by professionals, so that they can talk about their experiences with professional or sometimes also with other people providers and that they can learn from each other.

F.A.: So you need somebody they can debrief with.

D.B.: That is really important. They also need to feel supported.

F.A.: Are there are good practices or things to avoid when implementing this kind of peer program?

D.B.: The first thing I would say is about the involvement of people with experiences of incarceration in those programs themselves. Some of them are very skeptical about peer-led programs and one thing that I've heard that reduces skepticism is to discuss openly with the first group and ask them what training they need. What challenges do they come across? Which tools you have and which ones you need?

Peer-led programs have to integrate the experience of the peers. Programs should be codeveloped by the prison staff and the first group of educators or peer providers, and then later when you train new people, and you can tell them this training is codeveloped. This increases confidence and trust from everyone involved in the program.

Another example of the integration of those with lived experiences is experimented with in New Mexico, USA, where people who worked as peer educators in detention are hired after release to go to prison and train new peer educators. That also leads increases trust in the program among the prison population.

However, if you work with people with lived experiences, you must also support them. And you cannot leave it up to them completely, of course.

MAL: So there's sort of a of continuity between inside the walls and outside prison afterwards.

D.B.: Yes.

F.A.: We don't have peer support programs in Quebec yet, so it's very interesting to see how we could perhaps implement and I'm sure the people reading the newsletter find it very interesting. Thank for that.

We would now like to shift and talk about the PArticipation & Learning in Detention (PALD) research group, a very interesting mix of expertise and fields of studies that includes criminology, educational sciences and sports sciences, in the study of education

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in prison. Could you describe the research group?

D.B.: The group was established in 2017, and we have four research pillars. The first one is innovative types of learning in prison, things like the peer learning, peer support, active citizenship programs we talked about earlier. We also have a PhD researcher who is focusing on the transformative power of music and participatory music programs in prison.

The second pillar is about transitions in participation and learning, to determine what motivates people to participate in prison activities and how these motivations change over time.

The third pillar is about reintegration, taken from a multidimensional perspective that focuses on different domains like education, housing, money, finances and mental health.

The last pillar which spans across the first three pillars to generate innovative or creative research methods for sports sciences in prisons. A few weeks ago, we submitted a project proposal, together with a professor in sports sciences, that focuses on the role of sports in the reintegration process.

All our projects are not joint research projects, but the exchange between the different departments is important. We are all linked to the same university, but coming together in practice with our colleagues from criminology and sports sciences allows everyone to be aware of the different things that are going on as well.

M-A.L.: Can you talk more about the BRuG-project which pertains to the importance of continuity between programs on the inside and program outside?

D.B.: Yes, this project is the result of wide research on reintegration in Flanders and Brussels. One of the first things we noticed is that when people are released, everything that is done in prison stops. We wanted to find something that would allow us to make a bridge between inside and outside prison which lead to the learning inside out project, a project that started with funding from the European social funds.

The idea of the project is to have a conversation with each person to find out what they want to do after detention, if it's actually possible to do it with a criminal record and then what kind of education do you need to get to that point?

The program was based on the needs of individuals. For instance, a person could complete the secondary education through participating in the group activities in prison, or, if that was not possible or if they did not fit within the program, then they tried to see if it could be organized in a different way. Connections were made between unit and universities or with high schools.

Unfortunately, the funding for this program stopped and our government decided not to fund it anymore.

M-A.L.: Why do you think makes this kind of program particularly important of efficient?

D.B.: The individual guidance is key, but continuity is also very important. It supports motivation and other things that are really important in this transition like trust. Many incarcerated persons we talked to told us they were tired of always telling their story and always having to build trust with new educators or other service providers.

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D.B.: Yes, I recently published a paper, a study we did among females in prison in Belgium and in Norway on the symptoms of reading and writing difficulties and ADHD, in collaboration Lisa Jones from the University of Bergen.*

Another thing still coming up is a research project in the Netherlands about informal types of peer support relationships, in which people provide support to each other, provide information, provide emotional support, etc., but which remain invisible to education practitioners and researchers because it happens informally.

F.A.: Do you have anything you would like to conclude with?

D.B.: It seems that many of the interventions on incarcerated people are focused on deficits, on things that are supposedly wrong with them. I would like to focus more on the strengths and talents that people have, on other positive things they do when they are in prison. And make those things visible!

To go further on the topic:

- Brosens, D., Helland, W. A., Jones, L. Ø., Marynissen, S., & Morken, F. (2025). *SelfReported Symptoms of Reading and Writing Difficulties and ADHD Among Females in Prison: A Comparison Between Belgium and Norway*. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.13101>
- Marynissen, S., Vandermeersche, G., & Brosens, D. (2024). *A realist lens on music programmes in prison*. In *Arts in Criminal Justice and Corrections: International perspectives on methods, journeys and challenges* (pp. 67-84). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003401582-6>



Education and Raising Awareness



Portrait of a Learner — Jamar Williams



Jamar Williams is newer to the BPI Team, but not to the world of prison reentry. His role as Lead Reentry Advisor brings him to over a decade of experience operating within prison walls. Jamar believes that one of the wealthiest places in the United States is our prison system. Within its bars are the ideas and dreams of individuals just waiting to be realized and released into our world. Jamar has taken his enthusiasm and wisdom to campuses and conferences to advise others in reentry matters. When it comes to the psychology of exiting prison, he knows, both professionally and personally. Jamar Williams is newer to the BPI team, but not to the world of prison reentry. He bring over a decade of experience operating within prison walls to his position as Lead Reentry Advisor. Jamar believes that one of the wealthiest places in the United States is our prison system. Within its bars are the ideas and dreams of individuals just waiting to be realized and released into our world. Jamar has taken his enthusiasm and wisdom to campuses and conferences to advise others in reentry matters.

Interview led, transcribed and edited by Frédéric Armstrong

F.A. : Thank you, Jamar, for agreeing to talk with us. Can you tell me more about your background. Who are you? What do you do now? What's your life trajectory, your academic background and the relationship you have with education?

J.M. : I'm Jamar Williams. I serve as the lead reentry advisor at BPI for prison initiative. It's a job that I really enjoy.

F.A. : How long have you been doing it?

J.M. : I've been there for about 18 months. And in this role, you know, I work inside of seven prisons which we're in. Helping or assisting students in the reentry process and all that entails reentering back into society after being in prison.

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F.A. : So you're kind of a liaison between what they do and the BPI project. You talk with BPI members inside and you walk them through or at least accompany them through the reentry process.

J.M. : Yes, it's kind of like advising, but then also coaching.

Through the process and, you know, when they are first entered. I welcome them in the program but I also inform them about what reentry is and how I'll be working with them at different points along the way.

When they are first enrolled with the cohort, we have what is called "first-year talks" to introduce them, immerse them into the culture of BPI, what it means, but then also in that same space, what reentry looks like because they're going to be getting out someday, right. We have some conversations upfront and allow them to drive some points, drive in the direction in which they want to go as they're going along their trajectory with education and their prison sentence.

F.A. : What brought you to work for the BPI project?

J.M. : You know, I've been in this field of reentry for a little over a decade, probably about 12 years. I assisted some other guys get out from a different facility. And so, we were working on some projects, and he told me he was working with someone in academics. And so, he says, I want to connect you with somebody that's really looking for somebody to do some great work. We had a conversation and she informed me about the needs of the students and within the organization. She asked me if it was something that I would be interested in. I said that sounds like it's right up my alleyway, so I applied and then came on board.

F.A. : What's your alleyway?

J.M. : Aligning myself with organizations or institutions that are trying to make a difference in people's lives as far as reentering back into society in a way that's more holistic and in a way that is palpable and realistic. Assisting people in becoming a better version of themselves.

F.A. : What makes your type of intervention more realistic and more holistic?

J.M. : I've been doing reentry work in a few different states, and, sometimes, people think that, as long as you give someone a job and provide some type of housing, everything is going to be OK. And that's far from the truth.

In order to really move forward, you must first provide some type of tools, so that they're better off than they were before. Coming out with more than they had when they went in #1 but secondly it is managing that reentry process.

F.A. : Do you have any concrete examples of the type of tools that one needs to successfully manage the reentry process?

J.M. : Oh, absolutely. You know when people are reentering there is what I call the trauma of transitioning. Because it's going to be traumatic. When you're inside, you develop a sense of community. It may not be the best community for some folks when they're thinking about it, but there's a community. Absolutely. There's community, there

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are friends, there's mentors, there are brothers. And what happens is you're ripping somebody from that space. And they, I mean, they want to be free, but they're still being ripped from that community and being placed into this new world with these new responsibilities and having to develop a new community all over again. It can be very difficult, and they need tools to construct or enter a new community for themselves.

F.A.: Do you think the type of education that comes with being in college while incarcerated provides the kind of tools that you're talking about?

J.W. : Yes. I do. It does create a community because, on the outside, there are people that have been released and that are moving on and a lot of times they're there to help facilitate and open up doors as needed.

The other piece to that is that being in college helps you to think outside the box to form a new trajectory. To create ideas. To get a more expansive way of seeing life. You know, education changes the mindset. And also, it builds self-esteem and self-worth.

F.A.: Do you think that teachers and professors have a specific role to play in the pattern you're describing where people rebuild their self-esteem and self-worth?

J.W.: Absolutely. And you know, maybe this is just my perspective, but I think professors should be able to grade on a curve even for people who are incarcerated. Professors should be realistic in their grading and preparation. You cannot give chances to someone preparing for reentering because life does not give chances. When you face a challenge, you're either going to measure up or you're not going to. And when it comes to life, with real responsibilities and those, there could be negative consequences when someone doesn't measure up to it. And I think professors have a role to play in preparing people to measure up to life's challenges.

F.A.: You know, since we're on this topic, I'd like to maybe take a step back and ask you to recount a little bit on your own experience of going out and then going back to school. I understand your school experience before prison was not great. So, you get out and then you decide to go to school. Can you tell me about your thought process and the challenges you went through and the sort of things you had to face to succeed?

J.W.: It was very difficult. I'll say that first. Some of my challenges were related to the fact that I needed to have a full-time job while also attending school full-time. At the same time, I was trying to learn who I am and to develop a new community, because everyone that I had known was either in prison or still living an illegal lifestyle.

There was a lack of community and learning how to live life as a law-abiding citizen. That can be difficult when you were raised in an area that's predominantly impoverished, where most of the people are engaged in some type of illegal activities.

So, you must sort of rebuild your community.

F.A.: How did you do it? Did you have mentors? Did you have people who could guide you? Or you must do it all by yourself?

J.W.: I've taken bits and pieces of things and places and people. I identified with people like Denzel Washington, even though I don't know him personally, but looking at him and how

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he carries himself, that was sort of a mentor.

The other thing is I figured out how to dress and how to manage myself when I was in college. I observed a lot. I would sit in a place and read. Constantly, but also read people, you know. How do people carry themselves? How do they interact? How do they dress? I was picking up a lot of what was taking place in that area.

F.A.: OK. But I can't help myself to think that it took tremendous courage to do it by yourself. You say you read a lot. When did you realize that you could enjoy reading, that you could enjoy going to school?

J.W.: I was always a dreamer, man. You know, I've spent numerous times inside of juvenile facilities. And there was a math teacher who was teaching me about the world of accounting and architecture. Although I left that facility, I didn't take full advantage. I went back into the street life, but it never left me. What she was teaching me in that class never left me. So, when I had this opportunity. I jumped on it all the way because I knew that education was a key component in changing the trajectory of my life. I had to have an education.

F.A.: Right. And when you say, education, what does it bring? What's concrete about the education that brought you where you wanted to be?

J.W.: Hmm... education was a tool to help me to communicate with the world.

And it provided me with the necessary skill set and knowledge and wisdom to navigate the world so that I could kind of break some of the cycles that had been taking place in my family's life and those that were around me.

F.A.: Can you tell me a bit about your motivation to help people in their reentry process and how you see your interventions helping people in their trajectory?

J.W.: OK. I think the key component of why I became involved was because I was seeing more of my friends get out and they saw me as an accountant dressed up and they're like "How?!" You know? Well, because they knew me from the streets and when they get out, they're like, "How did you do that?" So, I started showing them what you do, this is how you do it. And so, then they started saying, "Wow...", and started getting their lives together. And what I didn't know at the time, I was developing a system. And I started to assist others on a more systemic basis to do the same thing.

You know, sometimes. No, not sometimes 99.9 of the times when people see me and they hear about my story, they are like "How'd you do that?" And they automatically get a sort of hope. And then they latch on to words, but I'm selling some apple pie. I'm going to tell you the good, the bad and the ugly, and I'm going to challenge you to create a new life for yourself.

F.A.: What's your book and what does it talk about? And why should we read it?

J.W.: The book talks about the four Ps of prison reentry and it is specifically aimed at those that are working with people in the field with incarcerated people.

You know, I was teaching at the University of Duquesne and there were some students that were, you know, entering various fields. But we were dealing with prison reentry

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prison reentry and students were like, WOW, because they were entering these various fields of whether it's law, medical, even. Some of them went to school to be actuaries and so I was telling them about how their job is very important because they help show how numbers can tell a story that helps with policies and programs. To either succeed or fail, but they're telling a story. And so, when I investigated the four Ps of prison reentry, I just wanted to be able to share some education that often times is overlooked or unknown so that we don't have people with good intentions that can do harm to those that are on the inside. Or to the families of those.

And so, the first of the four P's was "Pace yourself." Pace yourself, #1, because when people come into it with full energy, they want to do good, they want to do good, they want to do good, and so it's going over the critical aspects of pacing yourself because this work is hard and you're going to pick up a lot of traumas along the way and you will burn out quickly if you don't pace yourself, because it's a long game. It's critical to play the long game.

After pacing yourself, you need to "Find your People," finding your peeps. You got to know your community, because these are some of the people that you're going to be talking to or around. And when you're going through things, you're going to have these conversations with somebody that knows exclusively what's happening, so you don't have to bring someone up to speed before having a conversation about what's taking place inside of you or what you're dealing with. And so having that community is very vital to the long game.

The third P is "Process." It's critical to process and I have outlined a few ways and how to process what's going on. You have to deal with a lot of vicarious trauma working in prison with incarcerated people, but you can't bring it back into your home and your family life, because it can be detrimental to many families and loved ones and I've seen that over the years as well. So you have to find ways to process with your people.

And then finally the last P is "Know when to Peace out." You got to know when and how to leave and how to do it effectively. Because you came into this line of work in whatever capacity that you came to do good. To leave the world a better place. It's exciting, but your exit is just as important as the way that you enter so that you don't cause more harm or damage or trauma to those with whom you're working with.

F.A.: When you started writing this book, were you motivated by problems that you were seeing and that you wanted to address?

J.W. : Thanks for this question. Yes, there's been people that I've seen, they've come in and they're gung-ho and they think they're going to change the world overnight. Because they may have a Ph. D. and they think that they're just going to come in and change. Well, that really is not going to work. And so, they bump up against the system and they become frustrated. And then sometimes they may break some rules or law and then, you know, they don't last too long, because they boxed themselves out.

And I like to think of it as incremental progress, because you can't have a lasting impact if you don't pace yourself and know that you're not going to change the world within three months or three years. It's one person at a time, for sure, but also finding your peeps. Working with a reentry group. We did more work that was changing because of the culture

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that we had. It was a really a real tight community. But we had to build that community and have vulnerability in that community and be able to call on each other in that community. And sometimes that meant going for a walk after work or having a coffee after work or whatever activity it may have been. Before we exited to go to our respective homes. It's important not to drag that on with us.

It's also important to process and this is even for correctional officers. You know, when you're working in the place for a long time, you tend to build relationships and one of the correctional officers was saying his wife had kind of cussing him out. Because he was bringing the culture of prison home, she said. You're not coming home like this, this will be over if you bring it here, she says. I don't know what that is, but don't bring that up here. Don't bring that into our house.

It's so critical to do the processing. But even having that processing space, it helps for the person that's in there to do better work with the individuals in which they're working with as you're able to understand yourself.

And then it's in this space that you come. Because I've trained people that work in prisons, I've trained police officers, people that are working with families like, you know. Educators, early childhood educators. And when you come into this work, you're not going to be the same afterwards.

So I tell people, write down why you've entered this work, your motivations, and create your boundaries, knowing that those boundaries are going to move. You still have to identify this is my bottom line. Know that you're going to see a few things. You're going to experience a few things that are going to ultimately alter who you were prior to coming in. And so that's one of the key pieces where I talk about processing and finding your peeps, so that you're more self-aware..

F.A.: And be able to play the long game in that context and not burn yourself out.

J.W.: Oh, absolutely, yeah! I've seen it in the past where someone literally took their badge and said I'm done. And they just threw their keys and said I'm done and just dropped everything. All the classes they were facilitating, all the responsibilities. And not only did that disrupt, you know, the organization, but thinking about all the men and women or the lives that were underneath of them. That's traumatic. And then also, it's disturbing. So, knowing how to stay in the game is very important.

F.A.: Do you have any insight on what we can do to improve education in prison?

J.W.: I think that education in prison is a great endeavour, and I applaud everybody that's doing the work in this field to bring education to people inside of prison because it's invaluable to see all their lives change as a result.

Two things that really crop up when I think about it. I think : #1 is teachers should remain strict. Flexible but strict, so that is because in essence, it prepares people for reentry, albeit indirectly. It prepares people for reentry because it sets the bar and expectations and keeps those expectations consistent. Because I haven't... Yes, I'll just leave it there.

Education and Raising Awareness



And then #2 is to begin with the end in mind. Know that there's going to be a time when the student will exit. And so, begin with the end in mind. Begin with reentry in mind and understand what is necessary, what critical pieces are necessary to have in place along their journey. So that it's not abrupt "Oh I'm getting out, oh my god now what do I do?" People need to be prepared, and preparation starts with determining the end goal.

F.A.: Do you have anything else you wanted to add, something that you absolutely want us to publish, or thoughts or concerns?

J.W.: I think it's important to know that prison reentry begins the minute someone goes inside. The minute they enter, the reentry processes should start. That's when it really starts. It's imperative to prepare students from the start. Not to obtain a grade but to prepare them for life. That's what I focus on in my role. Teachers help and professors help to prepare students for certain academic settings. Everybody has their specific niche where they excel and they focus on the student. But I focus on the person.

Because it's, it's not just about a student a grade, but it's about the person. Some more people centred, and that's the distinct function in my role.

Yes, and it's not the job or the duty of the professor to take that on, it's not. They're supposed to stay focused on what they're saying and not blur that line.

F.A.: It's teamwork. Teachers have a job to do and others, like you, can support people in the longer reentry process. Thanks, Jamar! It was very, very nice to talk to you and I'm very thankful for your insight and for your words of wisdom.

J.W.: Thank you for having me!

Research and Practices Overview

Unlocking Learning: International Perspectives on Education in Prison

- This collective volume explores educational practices in prisons through eleven case studies conducted in various international contexts (Norway, Mexico, Slovakia, Italy, Poland, etc.). The authors analyze the individual and systemic impacts of these initiatives, emphasizing that education in detention promotes reintegration, reduces recidivism and improves the well-being of incarcerated people. The introduction theorizes prison education as a lever for human dignity, while the empirical chapters demonstrate the importance of inter-institutional collaboration, equitable access to training, and a rights-based approach. The book calls for a systemic transformation where education becomes part of public safety and social justice policies.

McDevitt, J. et Gellman, M. (dir.). (2024). *Unlocking Learning: International Perspectives on Education in Prison*. Brandeis University Press.

Supplementary Open and Distance Education for Imprisoned Adults

- The article presents an action-research carried out in Greek prisons, focusing on the implementation of a complementary and inclusive distance learning programme. By analysing e-inclusion practices, the authors show how multimodal tools and pedagogical mediation can meet the learning needs of prisoners, particularly those in situations of educational vulnerability. The results indicate an improvement in the participants' autonomy, digital skills and motivation. The study advocates for a hybridization between face-to-face and distance learning in order to guarantee educational continuity, while strengthening digital literacy and educational justice in detention.

Koutzeklidou, V., Sakkoulai, N. et Lionarakis, A. (2024). *Supplementary Open and Distance Education for Imprisoned Adults*. *European Journal of Open Education and E-learning Studies*, 9(1). DOI:[10.46827/ejoe.v9i1.5566](https://doi.org/10.46827/ejoe.v9i1.5566)

Transformative Learning With Mexican Cartel Members

- In the context of organized violence in Mexico, Danielle Strickland explores the effect of a transformative learning program with inmates linked to cartels. Through action research using Inside-Out pedagogy and autobiographical narratives, the article shows how education can promote desistance, identity reconstruction and critical reflection. Participants develop a better moral conscience, challenge the norms of the criminal underworld, and consider new trajectories. Strickland highlights the challenges of corruption, cartel self-governance of prisons, and lack of educational resources, while championing education as a tool for dignity, accountability, and social transformation.

Strickland, D. (2024). *Transformative Learning With Mexican Cartel Members*. *The Prison Journal*, 104(5), 661–678. DOI:[10.1177/00328855241278320](https://doi.org/10.1177/00328855241278320)

Research and Practices Overview

Prison Education Is Dangerous

- In her article *Prison Education Is Dangerous*, Erin L. Castro (2024) highlights the unequal power dynamics between non-incarcerated educators and incarcerated students, emphasizing that these imbalances can cause real harm to individuals in prison. She advocates for greater awareness of the ethical implications and responsibilities of educators in these contexts, in order to minimize the risk of reproducing oppressive structures within prison education programs.

Castro, E. L. (2024). *Prison education is dangerous*. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2024(208), 17–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20515>

Debates in Digital Pedagogy Within Prisons

- In his article, Bill Davies examines the power dynamics inherent in digital education within prisons, particularly in England and Wales. Drawing on critical sociological theories from thinkers such as Freire, Gramsci, and Kant, the author analyzes how social hierarchies shape incarcerated individuals' access to digital education. Davies highlights that although some digital programs have emerged in prisons, their implementation is often driven by capitalist interests rather than genuine pedagogical goals. He advocates for a more inclusive and emancipatory educational approach, while acknowledging the institutional and ideological challenges that must be overcome for a true digital transformation of prison education.

Davies, B. (2024). *Debates in digital pedagogy within prisons*. *Power and Education*, 16(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438241265456>

Health Education for Women Released from Prison in Brazil: Barriers and Possibilities for Intervention

- The article explores the health needs of women recently released from prison in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, with a focus on the obstacles they face during social reintegration. Through semi-structured interviews and narrative body mapping, the authors identify health issues such as chronic illnesses, mental health disorders, gynecological problems, and sexually transmitted infections. These individual challenges are compounded by relational, institutional, and political barriers, including a lack of family support, social stigma, and difficulties accessing healthcare services. The authors suggest that health education interventions—such as the use of visual aids and peer support—could enhance these women's autonomy and quality of life by improving their access to care and strengthening their health literacy.

Bonato, P. d. P. Q., Ventura, C. A. A., Reis, R. K., Amaral, C. d. P., De Smet, S., Grossi, S., de Brito, E. S., & Craveiro, I. (2024). *Health education for women released from prison in Brazil: Barriers and possibilities for intervention*. *Social Sciences*, 13(5), 249. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13050249>

Memento mori :

Paul Bélanger (1939-2025) an Exceptional Man



We share here a message from Jean-Pierre Miron and Jean-Pierre Simoneau, both of whom collaborated with the late Paul Bélanger to bring the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Prison Education to life. Thank you, Paul!

" Paul Bélanger, a man of remarkable kindness and generosity, graciously accepted to join forces with Jean-Pierre Simoneau and myself in the creation and development of the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison, supported by the General Director of Cégep Marie-Victorin, Ms. Nicole Rouiller.

Meeting Paul was a privilege. We experienced extraordinary moments of learning together.

He knew how to channel the passion of the two «JPs» into a shared commitment to the right of incarcerated individuals to education, helping to build and shape the Chair into what is now a national and international reference in prison education.

Paul inspired countless individuals, regardless of their social status or position. Paul, thank you for your all-too-brief presence in our lives...

Your humanity, intellectual rigor, tireless advocacy for education for all and social justice, your wit and charm — they continue to inspire us each and every day.

Dear friend, you will forever remain in our hearts.

When we think of you, a wave of joy fills our thoughts."

The Two "JPs"

Jean-Pierre Simoneau, former Director of Operations of the Chair

Jean-Pierre Miron, former Chairholder



UNESCO Chair of applied Research
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