Technological Innovations in Prison Education

A work in progress presentation

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Growth proportionately faster than general population

In 2006-07 Australian prisons cost $2.3 billion to run, an average cost per prisoner per day of $245

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- Lower socioeconomic status
- Poor health
- High unemployment
- Low levels of education
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NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Increase in Prisoner Population (2002):

- 60% not functionally literate or numerate;
- 60% did not complete year 10;
- 64% have no stable family;
- 60% of males and 70% of females had a history of illicit drug use.
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For prisoners participating in education, this drops to 23.
Barriers to Prison Education

• Views that prisons are primarily places of correction, not training
• Lack of funding, support and facilities within prisons
• High costs of textbooks, prisoners earn about $20 a week
• Frequent and unexpected transfers between prisons
• Short sentences (under 3 years)
• Age and gender (older prisoners and re-offenders more inclined to study)
• Previous negative experiences with education

...... Policies of higher education institutions
• Increased movement of higher education institutions towards online course provision

• Large number of institutions are withdrawing support for incarcerated students and eliminating exceptions handling processes

• Access to the internet in prison is prohibited

• Results in further exclusion of the already socially excluded

• Choice of courses increasingly influenced by extent to which course requires internet access
Government policies & Processes
- Security constraints
- Power & perceptions
- Budgets and resources

Community
- Negative perceptions
- Fears
- Victims

Real world challenges
- Tangible restrictions on future employment
- Difficulties inherent to reintegration
- Digital, social & communication divide
- Temptations of previous lifestyles

Prison education needs to move forwards to meet 21st Century learning

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- Thinking and reflection
- Conversation and interaction
- Experience and activity
- Evidence and demonstration

Pedagogy

Incorporate experience & active learning

Challenges & Barriers

Key success factors

Measurement & evaluation

Overcome exceptions handling

Change perceptions

Technology Barriers & Risks
Research Project Scope

• Literature review of current initiatives in Australia to improve access to online / electronic / interactive learning experiences and enhance access to tertiary education opportunities

• Compare local to international initiatives in countries such as the US, UK and Europe (where prisoners are permitted access to the internet)

• Classify initiatives according to focus, use of technology, underlying pedagogies and evaluation criteria
Examples of current initiatives

Tasmania & Moodle:

- Tasmania Prison Service & Tasmanian Polytechnic developed a highly secure terminal ICT network
- Using e-learning software, this network allows secure communication between teachers in the Polytechnic and students in the prison
- Although students are unable to access the Internet, the network enables the teachers to provide students with digital copies of approved sites

N.S.W. :

- Prisoners’ permitted access to Internet sources from computer labs.
- Intranet system that puts appropriate limits on the information that can be accessed online. Prisoners will only be able to visit sites approved by prison management
Examples of current initiatives

TRULINCS:
• Initiative underway by Federal Bureau of Prisons in US to provides inmates with the capability to send and receive electronic messages without having access to the Internet

UK – Open University:
• Trial conducted with 9 students undertaking a computer sciences course using Moodle to deliver course content

Skien High Security Prison, Norway:
• Prisoners have access to computers in the classroom and individual computers in their cells.
• Addressed the issue of security by installing firewalls that maintain security protocols, while allowing limited access to the Internet and resources that promote educational aims.
Examples of current initiatives

Underway
Trial using contained Moodle and eBook readers with prisons at Southern Queensland Corrections centre studying TPP 7120

Proposed:
Development of a USQ Diploma and Degree Pathway using Portable Learning Environments for Incarcerated Adult Distance Education Students
“From a scholarly perspective, prison education reduces recidivism, enhances life skills, and is a cost-effective method of crime reduction...”

But from a humane and ethical perspective, prison education allows those who want to change their lifestyle the opportunity to do so.” Christopher Zoukis, former prisoner and contemporary author

References