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Education for productive futures: a white woman learning from Aboriginal voices

Abstract

High incarceration rates of Aboriginal Western Australians leads to between 1800 and 2000 Aboriginal prisoners at any one time. Despite this little is written or noted in Australian peer reviewed academic literature about education provision to Aboriginal prisoners. *"Closing the Gap: learning from and privileging Aboriginal voices to learn what helps and hinders education in WA prisons"* is a PhD project nearing submission. It has been conducted in partnership with the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee as well as with the support of a local community legal service. The findings are relevant beyond a prison context.

This paper specifically focuses on how understandings of the concept of productivity can differ. It considers what might or might not be helpful in achieving productive educational and training outcomes in Western Australian prisons for Indigenous individuals, families and communities. It relies heavily on the words of the author's teachers; the Aboriginal participants in the project alongside Indigenous authors and academics. The paper concludes by considering implications for developing and evaluating training programs in more flexible ways that respect diversity.

Introduction: Locating this research

This paper and project are based upon the premise that research is about learning (Iseke & Brennus, 2011: 247) and, while the researcher may have a number of roles, the most significant one is as a student, learning. The participants and Indigenous academics I read are my teachers. *"Closing the Gap: learning from and privileging Aboriginal voices to learn what helps and hinders education in WA prisons"* is a PhD project nearing submission. It was developed in consultation with the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee in Western Australia and also received support from a local community legal service. Wadjella is the Noongar term for whitefella's like

me and use of it situates both the research and myself, as a wadjella woman, on Noongar country. Participants in this research have been imprisoned on, and hail from a range of countries including Yamatji, Wongi, Binjarub, Eora, Ngaanyatjarra.

Responses to the question “What helps and hinders education in Western Australian prisons?” go beyond a western concept of education and beyond a prison setting. Experiences in prisons are not seen by my teachers as divorced from the web of relationships, country, colonisation, justice and personal experiences that provide the context of both their lives and this research.

A neo-liberal agenda around the Western world places the market as the central organizing principle for political, social and economic decisions. This ensures education focuses on preparing students to be workers in the global market (Down, 2009: 51). Kevin Rudd’s ‘education revolution’ of 2007 has an agenda of productivity. He believes that education will drive productivity in a competitive, knowledge based economy and, in turn bring prosperity (Kayrooz and Parker, 2010). The danger in such an approach is that it is then likely that “education is valued only to the extent that knowledge and skills contribute to economic growth...the inherent problem is that the requirements of the market will ultimately determine what is taught and how it is taught” (Down, 2009:59).

Long before Kevin Rudd and the education productivity revolution, however, the focus of prisoner education in Australia is geared toward productivity. Since 1996, at a national level the policy for prisoner education has a goal “to provide adult prisoners and offenders with educational and vocational pathways which will support their productive contribution to the economic and social life of the community” (Australian National Training Authority, 2001: 3). The *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia* is developed by ANTA in 2001 and endorsed by all state and territory government departments

responsible for vocational education and training as well as those in each state responsible for correctional services (Dawe, 2007: 7-8). In the context of prisoner education for Aboriginal people in Western Australia this raises questions such as, ‘What is productivity? Who decides what is productive?’”

Literature: the Context and Background

As ABS statistics illustrate (Figure 1) Indigenous Australians are over-represented in prisons, with Western Australia having a much higher rate per hundred thousand than the national average. The question then arises as to why this large gap between figures for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians might arise. There is no simple answer to this question, however, consideration of where the power and control lie provides some clues.

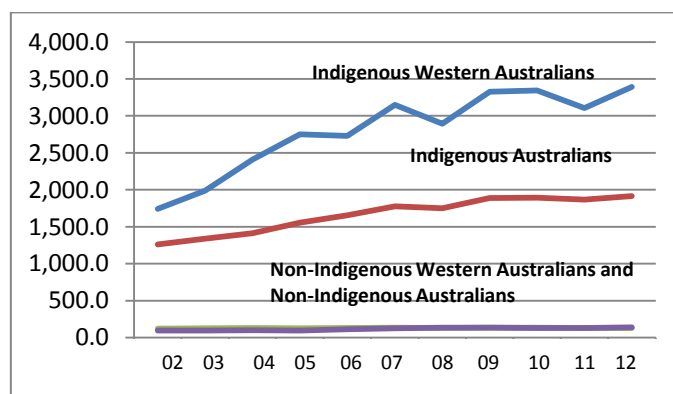


Figure 1 Comparing the imprisonment rate of Australia and Western Australia - 2002-2012 by Indigeneity; rate per hundred thousand (figures sourced from ABS, 2012: 56)

More than two decades ago Cunneen & Robb (1987: 220) first provide a “dual explanation for the over-representation of Aboriginal people” in the criminal justice system. They believe that whether it is viewed as the fault of socio-economic factors leading to criminal behavior or Aboriginal people being policed in a different manner to non-Aboriginal people, the reason for the high rate of incarceration has its foundations in “a strong historical continuity in the position of Aboriginal people in white society.”

Based on figures available from the Western Australian Corrective Services website (www.correctiveservices.wa.gov.au/about-us/statistics-publications/default.aspx) the incarceration rate for Aboriginal people remains around 39% with the rate for juveniles in detention consistently above 70%. The percentage of Aboriginal people in the Western Australian population is less than 4%. This equates to between 1700 and 1800 adults as well as around 150 young people being in detention on any one night in Western Australia. Despite this, those I yarn with have not experienced any education programs developed, delivered, 'owned' and evaluated by Aboriginal people. What constitutes education and training is ultimately decided by whitefellas institutions that developed from European settlement.

When referring to Aboriginal people and education in prisons, Semmens (1998: 1-2) laments that it "is probably the most persistently serious problem that the various governments of Australia have never faced with much resolve or dedication." Analysing all reports of Western Australia's adult prisons by the Western Australian Inspector of Custodial Services from 2001 to 2011 reveals that little has changed since Semmens made his comments in 1998 (Carnes, 2011c: 171). Overall, five common themes emerge in the analysis that reveal a picture of inadequate resources, a need for more extensive and up to date IT technology, difficulty providing innovative training programs, the need to focus more specifically on cultural needs and cultural awareness training for prison staff as well as a need for more equitable access to education.

Methodology: research project as a respectful learning journey

By privileging and prioritising Indigenous voices I learn from those voices, even though it is inherently difficult for a non-Indigenous researcher to listen and hear Indigenous voices effectively. *White noise* (Carnes, 2011a) occurs in the thinking, decision making and communication of dominant Settler cultures in relation to Indigenous people. Like the indistinct, fuzzy static of a not quite properly tuned radio white noise inhibits a clear reception and prevents

hearing messages distinctly. As much a systemic issue as an individual one, it results from assumed privilege and lack of knowledge of worldviews other than the dominant.

The listening/ yarning methodology used in this research focuses on relatedness and aims to be both academically and culturally rigorous (Martin, 2008 a: foreword). Yarning is a legitimate way of collecting data in Indigenous communities; oral and aural method is the nature of teaching in Indigenous culture (Power, 2004; Bessarab & Ngandu, 2010). Importantly, ‘yarning’ is an informal process (Power, 2004) that relies heavily on strong relationships because “research that seeks objectivity by maintaining distance between the investigator and informants violates Aboriginal ethics of reciprocal relationship and collective validation.” (Castellano, 2004: 104).

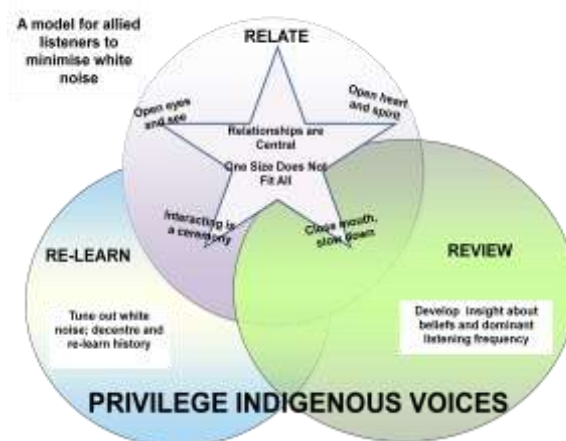


Figure 2 Listening as a critical ally (Carnes, 2011: 182)

The way of listening I use (see Figure 2) aims to de-centre a singularly white outlook, and muffle white noise. Re-learning history from an Indigenous perspective, reflecting on and reviewing white, colonial dominant assumptions and basing the research on relatedness aims to develop respect. I aim to be an “apprentice of listening rather than a master of discourse” (Corradi Fiumara, 1990: 57).

Such listening and yarning is “an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study.”(Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010: 38). Yarning as a methodology is as much about relating and maintaining relationships as it is about speaking. The time of “gathering data” begins when it begins and ends when it ends. Therefore some meetings were short and simple and others happened over several occasions and shared a lot of deeper, more personal information.

Findings and discussion: What was learnt

Due to the constraints of academic tradition and word limit, only a very small snapshot from participants stories are relayed here. Stories told by Aboriginal people are not all dreaming stories passed down over thousands of years; new dreaming stories are told as well and continue to be created. Such stories reveal how current issues are impacting on Aboriginal people, communities and families (Chilisa, 2011: 143). They also include possible solutions.

This section of the paper explores the concept of productivity, considers some potential points of conflict and identifies possible solutions from the stories of yarning I hear and Indigenous academics I read. Quotes from participants are bolded and italicized to reinforce and honour their importance and value.

What is productive. Who says so?

Concerned about falling productivity growth in Australia, Rudd and Smith propose that the future prosperity of Australia is dependent upon increased investment in education stating that “a significant increase in investment in education will give Australians more fulfilling work, lifting participation rates and contributing to happier, healthier and more secure lives. It will also build a fairer society, providing greater life opportunities for all Australians”, (Rudd and Smith, 2007: 5). Productivity here is tied to fiscal prosperity but also happiness, health and security. Productivity

as determined by Rudd and Smith is based on *'Productivity isn't everything, but in the long run it is almost everything. A country's ability to improve its standard of living over time depends almost entirely on its ability to raise its output per worker'*. This is the work of Princeton economist Krugman (1992) and is included in *The Age of Diminished Expectations: US Economic Policy in the 1980s*, MIT Press, Cambridge. The theory of the late 1980's seemed to be defining the future of twenty first century Australian productivity.

Indigenous education academic Sandy Grande confirms that the dominant western culture defines world crises and the way to address them in economic terms. Her work provides an enlightening comparison of dominant, western world views and traditional Indigenous world views of world crises, the central goal of education and what scholars from each world view tend to focus most on. The points she makes are summarised in Figure 3. This table does not intend to place all Indigenous scholars on one side and all non-Indigenous scholars on the other. Rather, it provides an image of where clashes and points of conflict might occur in education. It also provides a point of reference for consideration of elements of productivity that lie outside a purely economic agenda.

The western vocational education system in Western Australian prisons has a goal of eventual economic involvement of ex-prisoners in society, participating productively in the economic and social life of the community (Australian National Training Authority, 2001: 3).by improving their skill level as an individual. An Indigenous world view would be likely to take that definition to a broader level and also consider productivity in terms of the spiritual, Aboriginal sovereignty and the contribution to the individual in relation to their clearly defined community.

The Issue	Dominant, western world views	Indigenous world views
World crises can be addressed via	The economic	The spiritual
Educations central goal is	Democracy and greater equality	Sovereignty and self determination
Scholars focus largely on	Intellectual & political	Mind/ spirit/ body connection

Figure 3 Potential tensions in ‘white’ and Indigenous approaches to education (adapted from Grande 2000: 356)

Beyond 3R’s

Moving beyond an economic, individualistic focus provides an opportunity for productivity and success to have richer meanings. Indigenous world views of the spiritual, self determination and the mind/body/spirit connection can be operationalised using the “5 R’s” discussed by Atkinson (2012). While the 3 R’s of reading, writing and arithmetic are often key indicators of success in mainstream western education, these five principles of respect, reciprocity, relatedness, rights and responsibilities provide a way to measure success that is inclusive of Indigenous world views.

Lesley’s comment reveals the lack of success with the current system from her perspective, *There is no way that any blackfella that I have ever known or ever heard of, after years of workin’ in justice, mining companies, housing and family and friends working out there too ... there is not one time I have seen a blackfella pick up any skill in any gaol and get employed with that skill when he gets out.* If, as Lesley says, employment is more the exception than the norm for Aboriginal people leaving prison it would seem that an education revolution as envisaged by Rudd and Smith in 2007 has not reached the Western Australian prison system. Could a different kind of revolution occur if the 5Rs were included in the development, delivery

and evaluation of prisoner education? If resourcing and provision of prisoner education were based on respect, reciprocity, relatedness, rights and responsibilities, might this experience have been different for Glen and Gary? *When they imprison you, they take away all your responsibilities, they take away your identity, you get your clothes washed three times a week, you get ...everything's done for you eh. Then you get out and its like woah....what do I do now? What rehabilitation is there in prison anyway? Nothing man.. ...You get stuff all in prison. You go in there and what you learn is...what you learn is... you learn the newest tricks, how to make the drugs, steal more cars... I went in there knowing how to steal one vehicle. When I got out I knew how to steal every car. That's the kind of education you get when you go to prison... It's a criminal breeding ground; that's exactly what it is.*

Is prisoner education productive, in either Western or traditional Indigenous terms?

How productive is current prisoner education, in terms of either western or Indigenous world views as outlined by Grande (2000)? Does education in Western Australian prisons help achieve economic equality, the ability to participate actively in democracy or the access to intellectual and political awareness? Alternatively, or additionally, does it assist in developing the spiritual, feeling strong in sovereignty and self determination? Does it strengthen the mind/spirit body connection? Is it, as envisioned by Rudd and Smith (2007: 5) developing a productive Australia with access to “fulfilling work, lifting participation rates and contributing to happier, healthier and more secure lives...a fairer society, providing greater life opportunities for all Australians”?

Gaps in provision of prisoner education are identified by Carnes (2011a or b) in her review of reports from the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services in Western Australia. Relating these gaps to the voices of the participants it can be seen that neither Indigenous or western concepts of productivity are being achieved. The “gaps” identified by Carnes that need filling are the level of resourcing, more extensive and up to date IT technology, provision of innovative training

programs, equitable access to education, focus on provision of cultural needs for all Aboriginal prisoners and cultural awareness training for staff. Here the voices of the research participants speak for themselves. I only make comment to provide some background information if required for clarity.

Level of resourcing

Tyrone points out that even where there might be more options in some prisons such as Banksia or maybe Acacia, *they have to wait, you always have to wait*. Marlon's words echo this. *At Hakea they have 2 sides to the prison and over one side they have all the education and if you're on the side where the education isn't you just don't get anything. And you just sit around all day ... doing nothing, just go for a walk and like it gets to you like it does your head in quite a lot... all day every day and the same thing every day. Just play cards go outside, wait for lunch then eat lunch, have a shower wake up and do the same things over and over.* Marlon

Lesley speaks of her time in Greenough prison, which is located outside Geraldton. *They still don't have very much education wise in Greenough that's geared towards the blackfella. And what books are there, well you have to be able to read. And the books didn't start at like basic reading level where you could come in and someone could help you learn to read. They started here* (gestures high up). *Quite high up, so there was nothing, no foundation, no stepping stones to get any better. It was geared towards white people.*

There was actually nobody to teach you, no teacher. There was one woman who was the co-ordinator of the education service and I think they thought like she had this magic wand up her arse and could teach everything. So, unless you had some basic skills and could you know self-study you were fucked. ... You would only have from 9-12 and then you knock off for lunch and in the afternoon you're like in your cell or doing something else. So you've only got like 2

or 3 hours a day. So if you if you wanted to do more than basic stuff ...or you couldn't read and write English you were fucked.

Such comments are further validated in reports from the Custodial Inspector as noted by Carnes(2011b: 6) who says, “ While there are many dedicated and quality staff working in prisons, they are doing so under significant resourcing pressures which “cause the under resourcing of employment, training and general education initiatives...[and] demonstrably inadequate infrastructure” (OICS, September 2010b: iii-iv). Another pressure on education provision is the tendency to employ education staff on casual and fixed term contracts (OICS, September 2010a: 63-64; OICS, September 2010b: 33; OICS, September 2009: 24; OICS July 2008a: 20). It is not difficult to understand that planning and implementation of strong education programs that cater for a diversity of individual needs would be easier said than done in these circumstances.

Investment in education has been shown to be twice as effective as prison building in reducing future crime (Steurer et al, 2010: 41). Not ensuring adequate resources does not meet anyone's concept of productivity.

Access to up to date IT

A number of Custodial Inspector reports raise the issue of lack of computer access for any purpose in prisons (Carnes, 2011b). Access to computers was not raised by the majority of the participants. Lesley, however, had this to say, *..remember you have no internet access, you have no access to a fucking library, and you are not allowed to make phone calls unless they're on your ARUNTA¹ system. So trying to get a tutor to ring you back or to ring them was impossible coz they have to accept your phone calls personally so you'd have to keep ringing until you got*

¹ The telephone system through which prisoners make calls.

'em. With the ARUNTA system x amount of dollars just plops through as soon as someone picks up the phone so you'd waste all your money leaving messages on their fucking phone and of course they can't ring you back.

O'Brien (2010: 57) sees technology for learning as the next frontier to be overcome in prisoner education and says that "the future challenge will be to increase access to Internet-based services that can reduce the risk of reoffending while working within security and public safety limitations." She sees this as a challenge for governments as it will "take some political courage and goes against the risk-averse nature of successive governments approaches to prison policy". There are no plans to change the current blanket ban on internet access in prisons in Western Australia. It is difficult to see how this increases potential productivity in our technologically driven world and easy to see why Gary says, *But really, all you learn is... you just learn how to be a better criminal...that's the education I got.*

Provision of innovative training programs,

Lesley describes how the education provided to a family member in prison did not help him learn to read and write. *R was a ward of the state when he was 6 ...he had been in that system from the time he was six years old until he died in his 30's. He couldn't read and write very well, maybe the level of an 8 or 9 year old... Even in the gaol he never learned to read and write.*

She pauses and recalls another person she has known. *I remember this guy W; he had 2 governor's pleasures in his career and still couldn't read and write; he'd done over 35 years in gaol and couldn't read and write.* For these men, part of the reason is that they have a series of short term sentences. Prisoners sentenced for short terms are not able to access training in Western Australian prisons.

Some people for whom English is not a first language return to very remote locations and are not helped by mainstream vocational education. *English could be a second or third language and they couldn't get involved in bingo or anything else coz their skills and their numeracy skills precluded them from playing. Kimberley mob, desert mobs, some of these peoples ...the first whitefella they saw was 50 or 60 years ago.* Lesley.

The Director of Education in the Northern Territory in 1977 points out that, “vocational education alone does not create jobs. It creates unemployed technicians”, (Eedle, 1977: 28). Lesley puts it more bluntly. *To teach those boys all bobcat and forklift is all well and good but the bottom line is; “what’s the use of a fucking forklift license on the community?” Who’s gunna buy ‘em a bobcat or a D10 to run around in? These are useless skills that they’re trying to give them. Even for most white folks it’ll take more than a fuckin bobcat license – “I’m sorry, you’ve done 20 years in gaol; we want more than a forklift license.”*

Equitable access to education

Some prisoners are far from their families and country which makes provision of traditional cultural education difficult yet a traditional spiritual learning basis that is related to their own country is still essential for Aboriginal people to feel strength, pride and a sense of wholeness (Bessarab, 2008: 57-58). Kate sees that systemic ignorance perpetuates this gap. *Aboriginal people are seen by departments as this insurmountable problem... “we don’t know how to deal with it so we’ll just ignore it”. Western Australia is the biggest education area in the southern hemisphere and there’s lots of differences. In central office they don’t understand...in the Kimberly you’ve got something like 54 language groups, you’ve got different protocols and you can’t say “this is what is going to happen across the state”. It won’t work. They don’t understand the differences and that each region and community is different to one another.*

Even where courses are mandated for individual prisoners by the court, they might not be accessible as the following two examples show. *...my uncle, he's at Woorooloo and he got 3 years and he came to his parole day but because the course was booked up he couldn't do his course to try and get out and they said no you haven't done the course and he goes "I want someone to help me get on the course"... but it didn't happen. He did all his time.* Frank

Well my son's in prison at the moment. He got denied parole not long ago but that's because the course he has to do is not available... the course is not available there for 2 years. And he will be out before the course comes up again. Jo

Some prisons are not built to accommodate access for everyone. *Greenough has education facilities set up on the men's side of the prison and the men have daily access, while women cannot cross over to that side of the prison. They receive a few hours access a week.* Lesley

Provision of cultural education

The days of hunting with spears is over and we can't go back but the culture isn't over. So says Daisy. Meeting cultural needs, where such a high percentage of the prison population are Indigenous, would seem an obvious priority. Kate, an ex educator in prisons, sees that it does not happen that way, *Once you get in there and those gates close behind you, they have their own laws and politics and are not answerable to anyone. They do the paperwork but it doesn't reflect what's really goin' on; they just put whatever they want to.*

Sometimes there can be a clash of priorities. A cultural centre built for Casuarina, for example, was utilised as an education centre instead, due to overcrowding in prisons creating a lack of facilities available for education (OICS, September 2010a: 53-54). *It's really sad to say but there has been a loss of culture in today's world and nobody addresses that really. I think there needs to be more education around culture and in prisons too.* Glen.

The violation of dignity for extended family is felt in Marlon's words. ...*it's real hard with your family and not seeing them and all that.* He pauses and looks down at the table in front of him. *In juvenile its easy coz family can just pop in whenever they want but in mans' prisons they have to ring up and book and sometimes they are all booked up and family can't visit.* The room is silent as Marlon continues his story. *Visitors have to get tapped down and then they can get the dog sit on 'em. When I walked in for my visit a couple of times my mum was cryin and it was makin me upset seein my mum crying. She doesn't touch drugs but the dog sat on her coz people at home mess around with that stuff or she mighta been sitting on the steps out the front of the visitors centre...and the dog smelt the drugs and that upset her and she was cryin'.*

The impact on Indigenous cultures is not always acknowledged when considering incarceration rates. There is a significant impact on traditional cultural knowledge, as Daisy points out. *When all the young men are in prison, who is going to then learn the stories; who will learn all the things that the old people know? Who will be able to teach the children?.* This is productive in neither of the 3R's and economic productivity or the 5R's and cultural productivity.

Cultural awareness training for prison staff,

Glen provides insight into the issue of meeting cultural needs of Aboriginal prisoners. *Our current history and education is colonial; it ain't ours. I tell ya who needs educatin'; wadjellas. The Aboriginal side of history needs teachin' as well.* Daisy echoes this when she says *white people should learn about their place in the history of Aboriginal people from Aboriginal people point of view and learn from Aboriginal people. This is really important.*

Cultural awareness training" is also targeted by the Custodial Inspector as needing to be addressed more adequately (OICS, September 2010a; OICS, August 2010). Cultural awareness training alone will not, however, improve the quality of service provision to Indigenous people

(Westerman, 2007: 138-139). There is a need to go beyond cultural awareness and commit to cultural safety in education provision (Fredericks, 2008). To provide learning and training only at the level of cultural awareness does not challenge institutions or individuals to increase awareness of their own assumptions and prejudices. At present, however, the provision of even cultural awareness training in WA prisons is not provided consistently (Carnes, 2011b: 13- 14).

Such prejudices could underlie some of these experiences; ... *the guards, you might have been a bit smart with them, and they want to get you back and they'll say "we'll get you visitor non-contact" and that non-contact's awful...you know... they're just there and you want to touch em and that and you can't.* Marlon

There are some screws in there that are like dogs, you know, I was paintin one day and I was smiling and then he sees me and he says to me "oh what the fuck are you smiling at?" I'm like "what the fuck!" ...You know, why say somethin if someone's happy ... why change their mood you know... instead of just lettin' em stay in their happy mood. Lewis

Vocational education alone is not a panacea

Vocational education "by itself cannot resolve the fundamental causes of poverty, unemployment or economic inequality" (Down & Smyth, 2012: 203). Nor can it deal with the deep wounding, pain and grief often experienced by many Aboriginal people and communities. Even when the whitefella-identified gaps in education and income have been closed and she is an economically 'productive community member', the frustration and powerlessness Lesley fights daily is palpable when she says, *This is my fucking land and I've got nothing ... you've taken my family, you've taken my fucking culture ... And then blamed me, said this is because I'm a lazy black.*

As noted earlier, stories can hold the seeds for positive change and the stories of my participant teachers are no exception. The requests they make of the system fall into categories of the 3R's

and the 5R's. These two categories do not have to be mutually exclusive but could work together if the dominant mainstream culture is open to that level of equality.

Reading, writing, arithmetic – the 3 R's of skilling

Skills, ... basic, basic, English and maths, some real life skills they can actually use when they get out to do something with. Teach 'em how to read and write...basic computer skills you know...things so they don't have to go and mow peoples' lawns and pull down bougainvillea. Do you know what I mean? Something that can actually allow them to move up a bit. Lesley

For those going back to communities... Basic building and maintenance stuff. Maybe teach 'em how to be an Aboriginal Health Worker. They're gunna be there in prison for a year or whatever so make use of it and bring someone in who's actually goin to stand there with a class of ten, hands on and put them through a Cert 2 or 3 cos you can do those certificates without them needing to go and play with patients. Give 'em full time education. Lesley

When people are in prison they need to learn things that help back in communities and the lands. Things like carpentry to renovate houses would be useful. Daisy

Reciprocity, respect, relatedness, rights, responsibilities – the 5R's

I think there needs to be more education around culture. The culture is a living thing, whether you believe it or not. It's living and in here (she gestures to her chest). Vicki

Aboriginal people need to be proud of being Aboriginal. Wadjellas have so much to learn from Aboriginal people and there is so much they can teach Wadjellas. If only Wadjellas would just shut up and listen... will you just bloody shut up and listen?". Kate

Nothin' will change until we listen to things like 2 way learning and Aboriginal learnin. Let's start teaching kids how to be Aboriginal and survive in a white world without losing their Aboriginality. Kate

Conclusions

Many of the writers on prison education, such as Ekstedt, 1987; Forster, 1998; de Maeyer, 2005; O'Brien, 2010; Semmens, 1998 and Warner, 2005, either allude or refer directly to the inherent tensions between the purposes of education and imprisonment. This is described by Ekstedt (1987, 82) when he says, "The education experience proceeds best (particularly for adults) in an atmosphere of free inquiry....It is not possible to imagine an 'atmosphere of free inquiry' being fully realised in a closed institution such as a prison." This sentiment is echoed by de Maeyer, (2005, p 2); "*The context does not free one's mind and does not create an incentive for creativity; it does not encourage the thinking of other ways of living or doing; prison is the place where taking no initiative is considered good behaviour. Even everyday knowledge will be left aside: cooking, organising one's schedule, distinguishing spare-time from mandatory activities.*"

Gary and Glen put it this way, *When they imprison you, they take away all your responsibilities, they take away your identity, you get your clothes washed three times a week, you get ...everything's done for you eh. Then you get out and its like woah....what do I do now? What rehabilitation is there in prison anyway? Nothing man...*

The Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, otherwise known as the Productivity Commission, measures successful outcomes in economic terms. The performance of mainstream services in relation to Indigenous Australians is one of the specific focuses of this committee. There are, however, no targets set for education and training provision in prisons. This is despite the continuing high incarceration rate of Aboriginal people in our

prisons; a rate that has continually risen since the release of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1992.

The three “R”s alone do not meet the productivity needs of the 5 Rs of Respect, Reciprocity, Relatedness, Rights and Responsibilities to family and community Atkinson (2012). Without being cognizant of and committed to the 5R’s Aboriginal prisoner education risks being at best minimal and tokenistic. At worst it could be seen to be negligent and erode the living skills necessary to be a productive member of any community, under any definition.

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