

**The 4<sup>th</sup> NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
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**Education and Training: Creating New Learning Cultures.**

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen. Good morning.

**I** It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be given this opportunity to address this conference, and very exciting for me to visit Australia for the first time.

Not being a teacher myself it may be thought quite presumptuous in me to undertake the task of telling you about education and training and creating new learning cultures. For you are the experts in this field, you are the experienced ones, and you have probably given much thought to the question of how to improve the learning environment in the prisons. Another problem I was facing when considering what I was going to say is that I am not at all familiar with Australian mentality and ways of thinking in this area. I was a little concerned about that until yesterday morning when the captain of my flight made two announcements - one very important one, and one, it seemed to me, just for sake of good order.

The first one was that Australia won the Rugby World Cup! The second was the outcome of the referendum on monarchy vs. Republic. The first announcement was followed by shouting and cheerings in the cabin whilst the other one was hardly noticed by my Australian fellow passengers. I then realized that when Australian priorities between sport and constitutional matters were pretty close to that of the Danes, then maybe our way of thinking in areas covered by this conference were not too far from each other either.

I am a lawyer and my background is that I have spent more than 25 years dealing with penological matters, among them 15 years as a deputy director-general of the Danish Prisons and Probation Administration, the last 2 years as Director-General, and about 10 years attached to the Council of Europe ending up as a Chairman of the Council for Penological Affairs. So it is with this experience in my luggage, I venture to approach the subject

of this morning, mainly from an administrative and crime policy point of view. But let me begin with some reflections concerning education in prison based upon the philosophy, which we (our prison education department consider important in this respect.

- II A. The aim of developing new learning cultures in prison is to develop "the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context"; this appears from the Council of Europe Recommendations on Prison Education from 1989.

The Council of Europe was established right after the end of World War II, during which human rights had been completely disregarded. Out of this situation grew the need for an organisation to protect human rights.

In my opinion, the essential point of these human rights is that the individual has a right to be responsible for him or herself. Obviously, this is not easily compatible with deprivation of liberty - or with prisons. But in their efforts to minimise this conflict, the member states of the Council of Europe draft/adopt recommendations on various human rights issues related to prisoners, among them on prison education. The recommendations are guidelines but member states are committed to working towards them. In this way the re-commendations are perceived by the member states as a kind of common conscience and member states - like all of us - aim at having a good conscience!

- B. It is a fundamental idea in the various European recommendations that inmates must have the same opportunities as other citizens to create their own lives - to be responsible for their own lives.

Therefore, the way in which prison education is planned must respect the inmate's right to choose.

He is not sentenced to education. As a main rule he is not sentenced to treatment either. He has only been deprived of his right to determine the location where he wants to be.

- C. Slightly more in detail, the Council of Europe states that the purpose of prison education is "to provide the fullest possible development of each students talents and potential in order that they might participate more ef-

fectively in the cultural, social, economic and political life of society as responsible and productive citizens”.

You could also say that the object is to develop the inmates’ life competence.

Life competence is our knowledge, skills, experiences and opinions.

Life competence makes us able to manage our lives, to make the right decisions, to cooperate and to acquire new skills.

Life competence is acquired through at least **two** processes, which are very different and yet closely interrelated.

One process is learning about life through the personal acquisition of norms, values and experiences.

The other process is obtaining qualifications – the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

**III** I will use a model<sup>1</sup> that shows different components of life competence. The point of departure is the ”balanced” human being, and the model includes both learning about life and qualifications, further subdivided into *personal qualifications* and *vocational qualifications*.

**Personal** \_\_\_\_\_ **Vocational**

**Personal qualifications cover 4 areas:**

1. Knowledge and skills acquired through the qualification process, that is, basic education skills like mathematics, foreign languages, social relations, environmental and international affairs etc.
2. Social skills such as teamwork and sociability.
3. Physical skills, e.g. endurance, dexterity.
4. Basic moral qualities such as independence, self-reliance and flexibility.

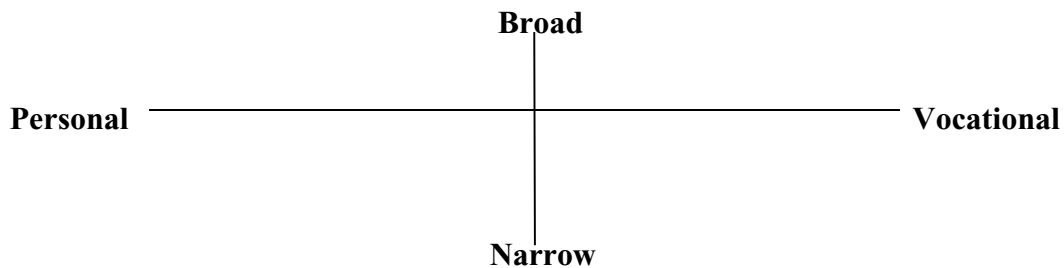
The personal qualifications can be either narrow in that they imply specific knowledge, for example Ohm’s Law<sup>2</sup>, or they can be broad, implying general qualities and attitudes.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by The Danish Research and Development Centre for Adult Education

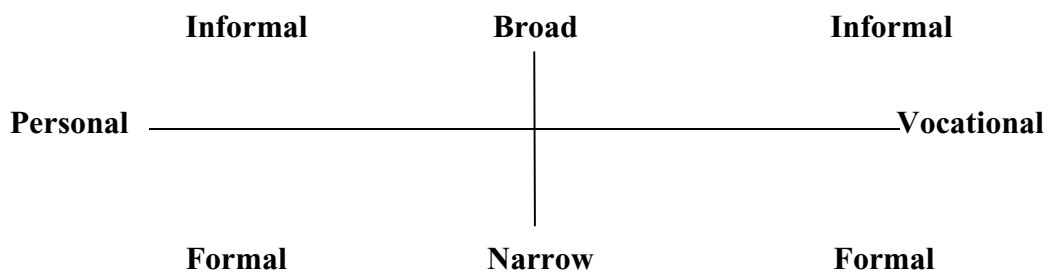
<sup>2</sup> Ohm’s law states that the potential difference between two points of an electric conductor is the product of the current and the resistance of the conductor.

The vocational qualifications are those which are necessary to do a specific job. Some will be narrow, demanding specific technical skills and knowledge, others will be broad, demanding a wide insight into general labour market relations, the environment, and safety requirements and so forth.



It is important to emphasise that there is no sharp division between personal and vocational qualifications. Overlaps will be found in many situations: A foreign language, for example, could be both, depending on the context. An interpreter has French as a vocational qualification, whereas others learn French to be able to manage on a holiday trip.

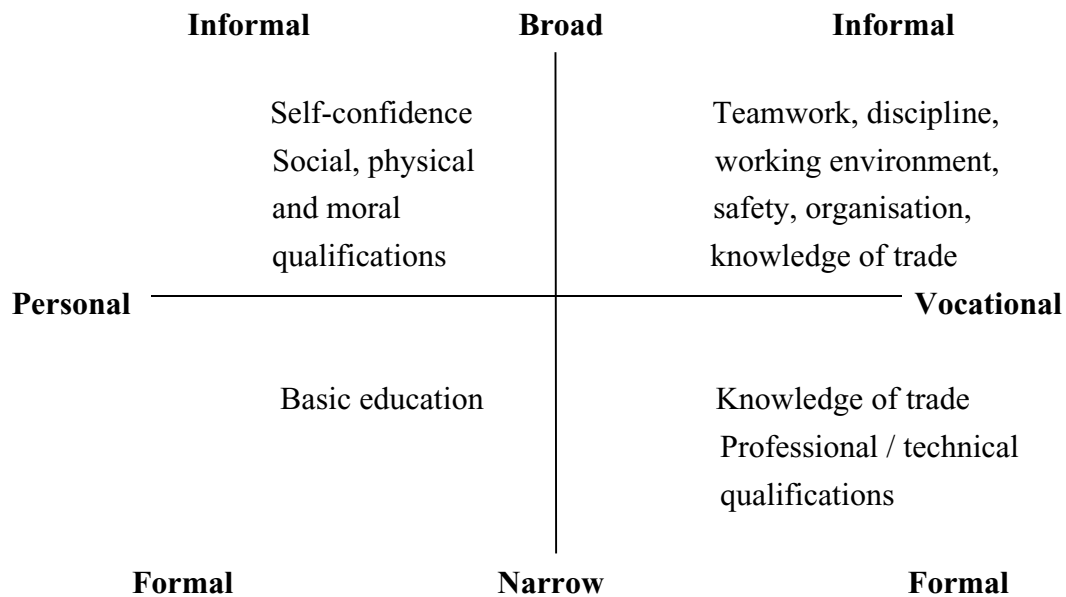
Personal and vocational qualifications can be further subdivided into formal and informal qualifications. Formal qualifications are obtained through established educational processes that provide the person in question with the desired vocational knowledge and skills as well as a certificate.



Informal qualifications are the result of everyday learning or experience during which personal development is the main objective.

Formal and informal qualifications are both ingredients of what we call life competence. But life in itself, social experience, motivation, culture, sentiments, etc. cannot be covered in one process. Limits are inevitable when a specific subject is to be acquired.

The last figure shows the different qualification components of life competence.



What are the needs of the inmates in relation to the overall aim, namely the development of "the whole persons"?

In Denmark – I think – they are in all 4 corners – but not ... the two **ABOVE** the line.

And the traditional prison education? Often it is aimed exclusively at the two **BELOW**.

We have examinations in English, mathematics, in carpentry, in technical drawing and so on.

But what about teamwork, social qualifications, and self-confidence?

My conclusion about this model is that it makes it pretty clear that the broad curriculum is the one that most clearly promotes the overall object: development of the whole person.

I will now turn to the 2. part of my intervention, where the question is: what more is decisive/what more is vital to the effect of prison education - than the broad curriculum concerning the education itself? There is no doubt that the context of the education is decisive - or in other words that the culture of the prison as such is decisive.

An example of what the context means. In Greenland, which is part of the Danish Kingdom, there are many non-graduate teachers – part of them with

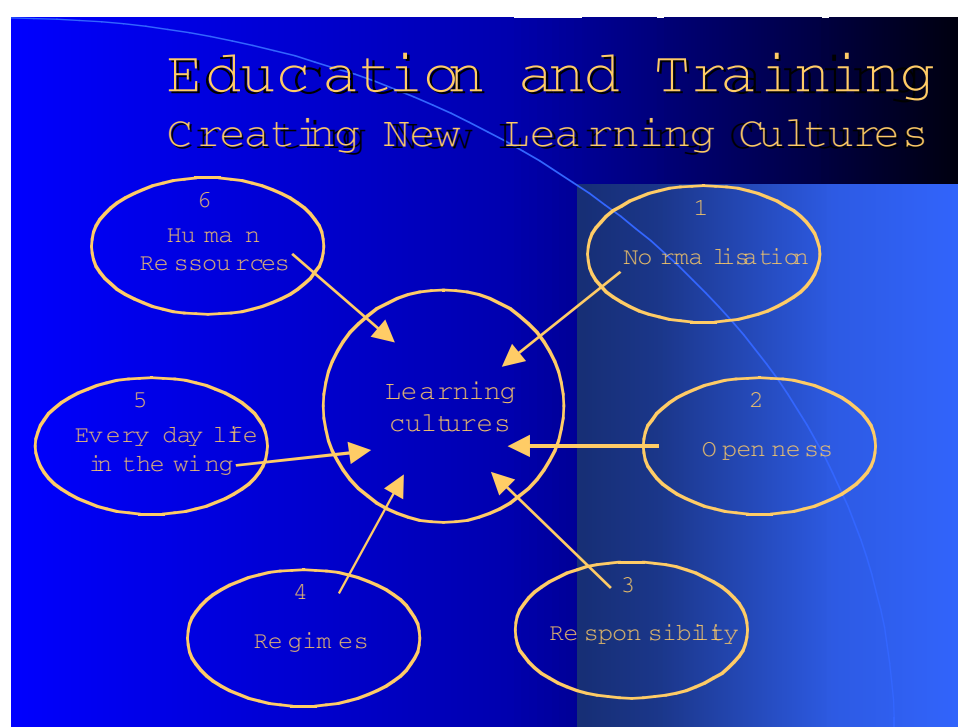
a short (bare-foot) education - and others with a normal degree in teaching. The population is spread across the large country in small remote villages. The Copenhagen University has made a study of the effect of the different qualifications of the teachers. The effect was measured on how well the pupils did after leaving school.

It was a surprise to everybody that there was no correlation between the qualifications of the teacher and how well the pupils did. But there was a significant relation between the integration of the school into society and the pupils' careers. The consequence of this study is not that we should stop qualifying teachers. We should not stop sophisticating "programmes" in the classroom. The conclusion is that the context in which the education takes place is extremely important and consequently that educators should contribute to a change of the prison set-up.

Changes in the prison can improve learning cultures, and educators can and must take part in everyday life to promote this process.

**IV** Of course, many factors have an influence on how learning cultures are best promoted. I have selected 6 factors. I could have selected many more, but I believe that these six will be sufficient to give you an understanding of my views. These factors are interrelated.

The factors that I will refer to appear from this overhead.



Before I look into these factors I would like to mention that the schools of today in society at large are often criticised for restricting the creativity of their students - a criticism recently raised by leading American and Scandinavian scientists.

The American intelligence scientist, Professor Robert L. Sternberg, thus says that "the school is to teach students to test new lively ideas rather than wear both academic belts and braces. The school system of today filters off creativity to much too high a degree, overemphasises factual knowledge and analytical qualifications and puts the lid on the students' creative urges". You will probably realise the links between this statement and the concept and broad qualifications mentioned earlier. The challenge for the creative learning environments of the future, he goes on, is a challenge to educators to generate creativity in all subjects - in all education.

Creativity presupposes willingness to take risks, and one of the fundamental tasks of the school/teacher is to provide the students with creative flexibility and encourage them to run risks so that they are both ready to - and dare - shape their own jobs and their own future when they enter the working world. We have always needed creativity, but the need is greater now for the very reason that knowledge becomes obsolete so rapidly these days. As we all know many criminals are characterised by both enormous creativity and striking willingness to take risks, but these admirable qualities have just taken an inexpedient direction for the community.

The question for us is not how to eliminate them but how to redirect them!

Now back to the 6 factors that have an influence of the promoting of learning cultures.

## **V Normalisation in relation to learning cultures.**

Normalisation is a general principle for the prison systems of Western European countries and is implicit in the recommendations of the Council of Europe.

The concept of normalisation in prisons is may-be a paradox: How can a prison ever become normal?

"You cannot train men for freedom in a condition of captivity!" somebody once said.

But you can try using some of the elements included in a normal life. A core element of normal life is the notion of making choices.

The inmates should have choices in the prison. They should own their own lives. You may recall the model concerning life competence. When I showed you the model, my hypothesis was that self-respect, responsibility, etc. were important qualifications for obtaining life competence. In good teaching, life competence is the goal, no matter what the subject is.

How would a person be able to acquire self-confidence, social and moral qualifications, self-discipline etc., if he had no choice?

In the classroom - during lessons - one can normally make a choice regardless of prison conditions in general. But it is just as important that normalisation aims at the entire situation in a prison - not only at the time in the classroom.

"Normalisation" means that as a general rule, inmates retain their civil rights. This implies 1) The right to vote in elections to political bodies on an equal footing with other citizens; 2) The right to both verbal and written self-expression both in the prison and vis-à-vis the general public etc.

Normalisation also means that staff and inmates communicate as human beings normally do outside the prison, and that the physical surroundings inside prisons resembles the normal outside living standards to the extent possible etc., etc.

## **VI Openness in relation to learning cultures.**

The principle of openness is not quite so generally widespread as the principle of normalisation, and in many countries this principle is not widely applied. Also this principle has an inherent paradox: openness versus prison.

As you know, the main purpose of the openness-principle is to reduce the harmful effects inflicted on inmates through isolation from the surrounding world.

The principle of openness in relation to learning cultures emphasises the need for prison education to be in contact with the educational system outside. Inter alia this can be ensured by importing teachers from outside (from the local educational institutions) or by exporting students (the inmates) to the local educational institutions.

This is indeed what is set down in the Council of Europe Recommendations on Education in Prison:

”Wherever possible, prisoners should be allowed to participate in education outside prison” and

”Where education has to take place within the prison, the outside community should be involved as fully as possible”.

The advantage of importing and/or exporting is that the educational environment in the prison is stimulated - an environment otherwise easily isolated from the rest of the world.

## **VII Responsibility in relation to learning cultures.**

It appears from The United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rules that ”the treatment of inmates shall be such as will encourage their self-respect and develop their sense of responsibility”.

Deep down, the reasoning is based on a belief that inmates react to stimuli like all other people. As a general statement, I believe that this has never been disproved. The idea is here that when you give people responsibility – for themselves or for others – they end up feeling responsible. They grow with the job, so to say. Naturally there will be exceptions, some people will abuse the confidence shown. This is merely a sign that inmates are just as diverse as other people. But if we let such exceptions from the main rule determine what course we choose, we will end up being left with a prison system which closes around itself, a rigid and inhumane system which in the last analysis worsens the problem it sets out to solve.

The principle of responsibility is intimately connected with the principle of normalisation, as it is impossible to be responsible without having influence. In other words, one must have a choice / an option.

The inmates must within certain limits have the choice and thus ownership of their own lives and changes to them. The ownership should not fully lie with the prison, the staff or the educators.

Therefore, education must not be a compulsory system influence, but an offer of change.

Normally, prisons have a lot of what could be called hotel services, the food is cooked and served for the inmates, their laundry is done, cleaning is done for them, etc.

You "de-teach" them to be responsible. Let them instead cook their own food in small kitchens, let them do their own laundry in ordinary washing machines, etc. This is the way forward.

This principle is very well reflected in the old Chinese proverb:

"Give a man a fish and you will feed him for one day. Teach him to fish and you will feed him for the rest of his life."

### **VIII Regimes in relation to learning cultures.**

When talking about prison regimes - rules and regulations governing prison life - it is important to keep the principles of normalisation, openness and responsibility in mind. So what I will mention now is partly a summary of what I mentioned under those factors.

The regime must be as normal as possible, not just in connection with the educational situation, but generally in connection with the entire prison situation. Only this will allow the students to test their skills and give them as many choices as possible, for example through self-administration and self-provisioning.

The better the choices, the better chance for the students to test their skills.

The regime must be as open as possible. It must be possible for the inmates to receive visits and to go on leaves and to maintain contact with the outside community to the greatest extent possible. Moreover, the prison system must allow other external authorities to check the actual conditions in the prisons.

Importing teachers or exporting students greatly enhances learning cultures in the prison.

The regime must give the inmates responsibility so that they feel, as mentioned before, that they own their own lives and thus become owners of their own treatment.

This makes demands on prison authorities when making rules and regulations about prison life. Whenever we do that, our first consideration should be: How would this problem be regulated or resolved in the community at large, and then secondly we should consider whether or not there are specific reasons for another solution based on security and order or other specific prison reasons. Otherwise the prison will be governed by tradition and habits and this will have a negative impact on learning cultures.

## **IX Everyday unit life in relation to learning cultures**

Traditionally, everyday life in a prison is synonymous with boredom and monotony, which is reinforced by the seclusion from the surrounding world. This often makes the inmates become inactive and eventually (mentally) passive. They lose their motivation for change and thus for education.

To counteract this spiral it is necessary to create as much variation as possible in the everyday prison life. As mentioned before, the punishment is only the deprivation of liberty. Not boredom and passivity.

Introducing self-administration with cooking, etc., makes the inmates use their spare time in a more productive way.

An offer of employment - work and education - leisure activities and cultural arrangements creates variation in everyday life and thus commitment, which is essential in creating learning cultures in the prison among the inmates.

## **X Human resources in relation to learning cultures.**

The biggest human resource in a traditional prison is the basic/uniformed staff, the prison officers. Therefore it is utterly important that the basic staff become an active part of everyday life for the inmates.

Often, the attitude of prison officers is very much influenced by their "guardian role".

If the attitudes of prison officers are to be changed for the benefit of learning cultures, their role has to be changed so that they do not only concentrate on work relating to surveillance and security.

The traditional "guardian role" is narrow, and the most important element of the work is to ensure the inmates' presence during their sentences. But a big task and a very important one for a contemporary prison administration is to qualify the basic staff to take on commonplace functions within spheres of the prison that occur every day. That means security functions as well as jobs having to do with treatment. This will give prison officers a more central role to play in everyday prison life. By giving prison officers tasks as caseworkers, as assisting foremen in employment and as initiators and managers of leisure activities, their role changes and they become more like generalists. They are close to the inmates, they can see their

needs and their problems and at the end of the day staff and inmates view each others as human beings and not as stereotypes. Experience shows that the change in role with other tasks than order and security, and a role where they know the inmates, also results in a change in attitude to learning cultures.

The educators it is important to participate in daily prison work and in the process of changing / developing the role of basic staff - in view of learning cultures in the prison.

Educators must not remain in their educational "ivory-tower" and solely think of developing projects in their classrooms. They have to take the context into account to achieve the optimum effect of good projects / programmes.

If you, as educators, are to succeed in responsibility and support the inmates in their development and avoid the emergence of harmful sub-cultures, you have to expend some energy in influencing the "system", alongside with your teaching. Otherwise, education may well become a waste of effort for all parties.

In other words, educators must be in daily dialogue with the system.

## **XI Conclusion**

My conclusion is that when new learning cultures are to be created in a prison, you, as educators, must choose an educational method that promotes normalisation, openness and responsibility as much as possible, and thus contributes to retaining the learning cultures.

A good starting-point for choosing an educational method is to remember the wise words of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard:

"That when in truth one is to succeed in leading a person to a certain place, one must above all take care to find him where he is and start there".

This is the secret of all aid. But this is actually also the secret of how to succeed in giving inmates responsibility for their own lives.

As educators and administrators of prison education you are central persons in the process required to create new learning cultures in the prisons. I wish you all the best of luck.