Partnerships in Prison Education: Learning in Networked Environments - PIPELINE

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Case Study Submitted by:

The County Governor of Hordaland, Norway

The use of information and communication technologies in education at a high security prison for women

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Summary

This case study describes a three year project at a Norwegian high security prison for females. It was initiated by the County Governor of Hordaland, Norway, who is responsible for prison education in this country.

The aim was to introduce Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into prison education in order to prevent a divide between education inside and outside prisons and to prepare learners for the networked and digital world upon release. This included instrumental mastery of some applications, exploiting ICT in school subjects, and using ICT for personal development.

Technologies included standard software, educational software, and restricted Internet access. PC projector, digital camera and scanner were also available.

Achievements include a series of ICT-produced materials, a portfolio system that tracked the accumulated material for each learner, a notable rise in self-esteem among prisoners who took part, and changed roles for learners as well as teachers. Perhaps most important is that school has sustained the new practices beyond the project period, indicating that the impact of the technologies is lasting.

1	## Aims/Objectives Overall aim: to make sure that education within prisons keeps track with education on the outside. Digital technologies are increasingly used in all types of education, and it was considered necessary to prevent a possible digital divide between learners in and outside of prisons. Above all, ICT competence is needed in order to qualify for further education and working life in the information and knowledge society. Secondary aims: - Instrumental mastery of digital and networked technologies - Utilize the potential of digital and networked technologies in a series of school subjects Explore the potential of ICT mastery for resocializing prisoners and prevent recidivism
2	## Context In Norway, schools in prison employ teachers who for the most part work in a school outside prison and where this school has administrative and educational responsibilities for the affiliated branch within the prison. Bredtvedt prison is a high security prison for women. It has up to 45 inmates, of whom about a handful is of a foreign nationality. They serve fairly long sentences, from 3 to 9 years. The most common offences are drug related but also grand theft and violence are common causes. Many of the inmates have little schooling. The school in Bredtvedt prisonis one of four that took part in a pilot project from 1 January 2000 and until 31 December 2002. This pilot project aimed to examine to what extent information and communication technologies could engage offenders in educational activities.
3	## Pedagogical approaches The overall approach can be described as **participation in new learning practices.** Central to this approach is fostering and sustaining communities of practice where learners are jointly

constructing knowledge by engaging in a broad array of activities and practices. This approach makes use of social and material resources (peers, teachers, cultural tools such as technologies) in order for learners to develop beyond what currently can do. In the learning sciences it is referred to as a sociocultural perspective on learning.

A sociocultural approach is problems solving-oriented, but places great importance on guidance by more knowledgeable persons. Hence, the role of the teacher is very important. The teacher designed tasks, often together with the learners, and took active part in the activities that related to the task. Also, several modes of learning were practiced, e.g. direct instruction (also by learners), group work, and project work. There was little emphasis on basic ICT skills, rather these were developed working with the diverse tasks.

In particular, three types of activities ought to be mentioned: the use of powerpoint animations, the use of spreadsheets to make “magic quadrants”, and the use of internet to prepare plenary presentations.

Powerpoint animations. Inmates learned how to make powerpoint presentations and include small sequences of animations. This is a fairly easy technique but one that the inmates found yielded quick results that were fun to watch. They animated a series of small poems and comic tales. Several of these were uploaded on the project website for others to watch.

Magic quadrants. The mathematics teacher developed a method for making matrices in the form of quadrants. For each cell there was a task in the form of matching content to a list with alternatives. When all answers were correct, the lines across and down would all display the same “magic” number. This method was used in all sorts of subjects, Norwegian literature, English, history, geometry and even arithmetic with digital numbers. Learners enjoyed this and some also contributed with their own designs.

Presentations. Learners put together text files, pictures and Powerpoint slides to make plenary presentations. This relied on the use of the internet to provide updated material and suitable images. This is a most important activity considering the fact that many of the learners had very low self-esteem and were shy in public spaces. The community character of the learning environment and the technologies that added a professional quality to the illustrations were very important in overcoming these factors. The presentations also included learners with a non-Norwegian background.

Subjects included the traditional school subjects that constitute the Norwegian curriculum, but there were also special interest courses in e.g. image processing. This led to a combination of image processing and image analysis.

	Finally, the pedagogical approach also included portfolios. Each learners had a folder where the teachers would place material produced. This material could be burned onto a CD-ROM so learners could bring them along upon release.
4	## Technologies involved At the time, the school had 20 medium powerful PCs and assorted equipment such as scanners, digital camera, projectors as well as assorted software for most school subjects. In addition, a technical solution for the use of Internet activity was developed. This included a "reverse firewall" that made it possible to access only websites that had been checked for communication possibilities. Prisoners were at the time allowed to use the internet more freely if a teacher monitored the learner's moves. The Internet was also exploited for presentation purposes. Learners presented a topic (see above) using PowerPoint but with material such as statistics and images imported from updated net sources. Presentations were plenary and often included staff and guests in the audience. Another typical use of internet surfing was for the teacher to function as a "secretary" using the technology to answer requests from the learners. This practice combined the use of a projector and a big screen with open, teacher-controlled access to the net. Finally, the internet was used to display products that the inmates had made. Animated poems and presentations were uploaded to the project website (by the project coordinator). Another practice was the use of spreadsheets to make "magic quadrants" (see above). By combining clues, information, and knowledge from a subject the added sums across and down a matrix would amount to the same number. These tasks were collective and usually solved jointly around a table. The teacher would typically design new activities and make sure that learners were given the opportunity to take part according to their own capacities. The idea was to increase their capacity by means of social (peer learners, teacher) as well as material (technologies) support. An array of standard and educational software was used in several subjects, particularly in foreign language learning and social studies, but also in mathematics. In conclusion, the technologies typically served as scaffolding and support for educational activities and were not the focus in themselves. They proved to be conducive to educational

	development by being increasingly integrated in daily practices until they became more or less “invisible”. It should also be mentioned that the teacher successfully used a PC and a projector when addressing groups of learners. The large screen served as a common frame of reference and served as a source of motivation as well as a reference when discussing a point. It provided flexibility and structure at the same time, and served to kee learners on track when disruption or distraction threatened.
5	## Achievements The most striking achievement is the increased self-confidence among the female offenders. Even a simple thing like being able to design birthday cards for their children demonstrated that this effort could not be distinguished form work by a parent outside prison. The same effect could be observed when animated poems in the form of Powerpoint presentations were put online on the project website so family and friends could see them. Another indicator of increased self-esteem could be seen in increasing role shifts where learners also served as co-teachers and presenters. Some of the teachers in the prison school developed significant technical competence along with the pedagogical use of ICT. They also said that their teacher roles changed. There is still a need for a strong teacher presence, but the technologies provided structure and focus for the activities so that the teacher’s role also included “orchestration” of resources. Still, difficulties emerged. There was no satisfactory solution to the use of the Internet. Technical as well as institutional routines were at the time not good enough to accommodate both security and educational issues. Hence, additional work on a satisfactory model ensued. It also proved difficult to include all inmates in the activities. Some of the inmates who did not take part in educational activities were offered to make clothes by the help of software that supported design. This proved to be too demanding, partly because of the somewhat complicated software, partly because some of these offenders had suffered from long time drug use and had more than enough with simple daily routines. Finally, it should be mentioned that one particularly important achievement is that the school has continued its innovative approaches beyond the project period. Often, change is temporary and institutions relapse to tradition when project means and focus end. This is not the case at Bredtvedt.

6	Analysis

The pedagogical approach is very much different from more traditional, teacher-led instruction. However, this more authoritative role is also very much needed when managing learners with often low motivation, short attention spans and low self-esteem. There is a risk that what is ideally productive participation can deteriorate to aimless activities. Thus, there is a need for a clear teacher profile. On the other hand, there are strong indicators that the cultural tools that were so crucial to the project played a very supporting and structuring role. The challenge for the teacher is to develop a sense of what these tools can do pedagogically, not necessarily master all their technical potential.

Education in prison is a sensitive affair. It relies upon mutual trust and respect between educators, prison staff and prisoners. It is easy for outsiders to the educational activities to become suspicious and worried about security hazards related to communicative technologies. At Bredtvedt, this situation was avoided by informing staff about what was going on. In other prisons, however, there were tensions related to such issues. Introducing ICT very much challenges the historically established organization of prison life. Thus, it would be very wise to see pedagogy, technology, and prison organization as a unit, not as separate entities. Change in one element has consequences for the other(s).

As for technologies, the most pressing concern is internet access. At Bredtvedt, this was very much left to the teacher to operate, since there was not yet a technically secure solution to learners surfing without entering websites with communicative opportunities. However, the project instigated further work along these lines. It is important to register that no breach of security was observed during the three years the project lasted. Still, with technologies becoming increasingly more powerful, smaller, ubiquitous and with online access it is a challenge to design sociotechnical systems that combine technical and human monitoring of digitally based activities as well as preventing participants from using technologies with criminal intent. As inmates, like the rest of the population, become increasingly ICT proficient, this must also be taken into account. The ultimate challenge, then, is to develop such systems without turning education in prisons into second-rate variants.

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8	Relevant Documents **Education and Training in the Correctional Services – "Another Spring"** This is the short version of Report No. 27 to the Norwegian Parliament (2004-2005). Available from: http://odin.dep.no/kd/english/doc/white_paper/045051-040003/dok-bn.html **Compendium of EU-sponsored Projects Relevant to Prison Education 1995-2004** Compiled by the Society for European Educational Cooperation (SEEC), the Irish Prison Education Association (IPEA), Norway's Association of Prison Educators (FOKO).

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