Education in Nordic prisons

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A Baltic-Nordic seminar on education in prison

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Thanks to

• Inmates and staff in the Nordic countries
• The Nordic network of prison education
• The Nordic Council of Ministers
The report

Background

- A fundamental principle of the Nordic prison systems is that prisoners should have the same access to social services as other citizens

- What kind of education do prison inmates have?

- What kind of education do they want to participate in?
What do we know about the prison population?

- When did their problems start?
- Are they males or females?
- What are their educational background like?
Has the prison population’s educational background changed?

- The traditional educational non-participants (e.g. Forster, 1990; Costello 2003)

- The previously well-qualified (e.g. Forster, 1990; Swedish Prison Board, 1998)
Antisocial pathways

- Childhood-onset offenders (Life-course-persistent offenders)

- Adolescent-onset offenders

(e.g., Farrington et al., 1990; Ferguson, Horwood, & Nagin, 2000; Kratzer & Hodgins, 1999; Moffitt & Caspi, 2001; Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002; Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998)
Males on the early-onset pathway: Follow-up at 26 years.

- The life-course-persistent group (LCP): Most violent and least likely to reform (more than half of the early-onset group)

- The “internalizing” problems group: Misnamed earlier as a recovery group (about one third of the early-onset group)

- Truly “recovered” (15% of the early-onset group)

(Moffitt et al., 2002)
Type of offence at age 26

Life-course-persistent males
- Specialize in serious offenses, such as carrying a hidden weapon, assault, robbery, violating court orders

Adolescence-limited males
- Specialize in more non serious offenses, such as theft less than 5 dollars, public drunkenness, giving false information on application forms.

(Moffitt et al., 2002)
Highest completed education: Can it indicate subtype of delinquency?

Childhood-onset
• Life-course-persistent
• Childhood-limited

Adolescence-limited
Studies in the Nordic countries

2004
- Norway (3 to 10 February)

2006
- Norway (2 to 9 February)
- Sweden (week 46)
- Iceland (20 October to 7 November)
- Finland (week 50)

2007
- Denmark (9 to 12 January)

Method 2006/2007
- A questionnaire to all inmates (Eikeland, Manger & Diseth, 2006, adapted to other countries)
The Norwegian study in 2004

Subjects

• Target group: 2,946 inmates over 18 years of age in Norwegian prisons between February 3 and February 10 in 2004 (8 inmates were under 18 years of age). Of several reasons 169 inmates were not included.
• 1,937 inmates, or 69.8 percent of those who received the survey participated.
• 93.4 percent were males; 6.6 percent were females.
• 16.9 percent were foreign citizens (19.8 percent had spent most of their childhood and teenage years in another country than Norway).

Instrument

• A Questionnaire to all inmates
Background for the Norwegian study in 2006

• White paper no. 27, 2004-2005 on correctional education ("an other spring...")

• States there is a need for further studies of prisoners’ educational background and their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics,
The Norwegian study in 2006

• Target group: All 3289 inmates over 18 years of age in Norwegian prisons between February 2 and February 9 in 2006
  • 71.1% of those who received the survey participated
  • 94% males; 6% females
  • 85.7% Norwegian citizens
## The Nordic studies of prison education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>3 461*</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>5.5 millions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>3 432*</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>5.2 millions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>119*</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>0.3 millions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3 289*</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>4.8 millions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4 360*</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>9.0 millions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Prison population in that country

**Selected inmates
Respondent characteristics

Mean age

- From 31 years (Iceland) to 36 years (Sweden and Finland)

Gender

- Between 94 and 95 percent were men
Citizenship

Per cent who were citizens of the nation they were incarcerated in

- Denmark: 84.3%
- Finland: 92.6%
- Iceland: 90.0%
- Norway: 85.6%
- Sweden: 74.6% (62.5% had Swedish as their native language)
## The Nordic countries: Inmates’ highest completed education (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Total unweighted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Primary school/lower secondary school</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Vocational training*, vocational education/upper secondary education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 University or other higher education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>7422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Per cent of inmates who do not attend schools or educational programs while in prison

- Denmark: 63
- Finland: 67
- Iceland: 55
- Norway: 67
- Sweden: 62
Reasons for *not* taking an education in prison

The four most important reasons
1. I don’t receive any information about educational possibilities
2. The prison does not offer any educational program suitable for me
3. The prison does not offer any educational program
4. I am not interested in getting an education in prison

Other important reasons?
Per cent inmates who *do not* take an education in prison by period of time incarcerated
## Self-reported reading and writing difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No problems</strong></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some problems</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serious problems</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>1,516</td>
<td>1,447</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>548</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Per cent inmates who *do not* take an education in prison by reading or writing problems

![Bar chart showing percentage of inmates by education level and reading or writing problems.](image)
Other learning problems

- Mathematics problems
- ICT problems
Per cent inmates who do not take an education in prison by ICT skills

[Diagram showing percentage of inmates not taking education by ICT skills in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden across different skill levels: Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor.]
The four most important reasons for starting an educational program in prison (from a list of 15 reasons). Ranged for each country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To spend my time doing something sensible and useful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about a subject</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make it easier to get a job after release</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be better able to cope with life after release</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To satisfy my desire to learn</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make the educational program a bridge to more education after release</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make serving time easier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pass an exam or improve a previous grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>580</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Nordic countries: Educational wishes (per cent*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Wish</th>
<th>Total***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do not want to start an education</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Preparatory Adult Education/General Adult Education**, primary or lower secondary school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Vocational training**, vocational education/subjects</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Upper secondary education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 University or other higher education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The sum is not 100 due to exclusion of some educational wishes and due to that the respondents could also tick more than one box; **Denmark; *** Unweighted
Educational motives: Why do prisoners start an educational program in prison?

• Are they pushed or are they pulled?  
  (Gambetta, 1987)

• Are they motivated by a need to get away from mind-numbing prison life (push factors), or alternatively to prepare for life on release (pull factors)?  
  (Costelloe, 2003)
Prisoners’ educational motives

1. To prepare for life on release
2. Social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context
3. To acquire knowledge and skills
Per cent inmates who do not wish to take more education by period of time incarcerated

-3 months
4 - 12 m
13 - 60 m
61+ m

Denmark
Finland
Iceland
Norway
Sweden
The four most important factors that create problems for the inmates who are involved in programs of education. Ranged for each country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to ICT-equipment and facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The security routines in the prison</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer while serving the sentence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to literature</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbances in prison</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inmate will have finished his/her sentence before the education is finished</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inmates’ learning problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teachers (only asked in Sweden)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inmates’ evaluation of the prison education.
1=“completely disagree”; 5=“completely agree”. The letters indicate the country that agreed least and most (each statement). Other countries scored between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the teaching</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The requirements are too tough</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The prison makes it possible to take an education</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of work is just right</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The requirements are not tough enough</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the subjects are too hard</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are too many lectures</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching is suited to my needs</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is too much group work</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is not adequate access to ICT-equipment and facilities</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers have good computer skills</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am pleased with the educational programs</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A brief summary

- There is a gap between those who have and those who do not have an education.
- The educational gap between inmates and the general population is too deep.
- The educational level is lower among the youngest age group, compared to equivalent age groups in the general population.
- Two thirds of the inmates do not attend an educational program while in prison.
- Too many features of the prison system interfere with education.
- Inmates who take an education in prison are highly motivated by future concerns.
- The inmates evaluation of the prison education is relatively good.
- Generally learning problems and ICT competence do not affect the tendency to take an education in prison.
- A majority of the inmates want to start a school or educational program.
Why is prison education important?

More specifically
• Improving the employability of offenders
• Reducing the risk of re-offending

In broader terms
• The importance of delivering education in a civilised society
• Education has a value in itself and it is important to develop the person as a whole

(House of Commons – Education and Skills Committee, 2005)
Practical implications: The right to education must be made clear

- The European Convention on Human Rights: "No person shall be denied the right to education"
- The UN Convention of Children’s Rights
- The UNESCO Recommendations for adult education
- The Council of Europe
Practical implications: Course variation

• A number of more varied courses should be offered in prison, including the expansion of vocational training and more emphasis on practical/aesthetic subjects

• The opportunities to study at universities or other higher education must be improved!
Practical implications: The reduction of hindrances

• Features of the prison system that interfere with education must be reduced to a minimum

• ICT with internet access must be a natural part of all learning
Practical implications: Inmates who have learning problems must receive help

• Disabilities must be diagnosed, registered and dealt with
• Time spent in prison can be used to improve reading, writing and mathematics skills
• While reading disabilities are often primarily environmental and experienced based good library services and access to literature are important
Practical implications: Help upon release

• The planning and monitoring of educational services after release must be more systematic and structured
Practical implications: The problem with short sentences

• Many young prisoners serve short sentences
• Short sentences becomes an hindrance for participating in education
• A short sentence easily becomes a stepping stone to further crime

Implications: *It is particularly important to see to it that short sentence does not imply a disruption of young prisoners’ education*