



Languages behind Bars

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Abstract

The Grundtvig multilateral project LBB – Languages Behind Bars, coordinated by Die Berater from Austria and involving partners in Bulgaria, France, Germany, the Netherlands & the UK, focuses on the communication problems of the growing number of foreign nationals who find themselves incarcerated in a country of whose language they have little knowledge. LBB combines two areas of major concern for education & training in Europe: the need to provide effective language learning skills to disadvantaged groups and the importance of effective interventions in offender learning. Both of these areas have recently been tackled through successful EU-funded projects: Language acquisition through the ILLIAD Network which identified a wide range of theoretical research and practical examples into ways of supporting language learning amongst illiterate adults [1]; and offender learning through a range of initiatives, including PAN European Network, Movable Barres, Art & Culture in Prison and LEAP and currently through the PriMedia Network, promoting ICT & multimedia in offender learning, and CredAbility, developing training courses for artists working in prison [2]. Dr Alan Clarke, with a background both in professional theatre and adult education, played a major role in all these projects and is a key member of the LBB consortium.

The paper will go on to examine LBB's research findings, exploring how the cultural tensions which can arise through an inability to communicate basic needs, rights and obligations within the prison context and the negative effect on offenders' knowledge of legal rights, access to medical and psychiatric care, participation in work, education and training, contact with family and the outside world, and resettlement opportunities. It will also consider the impact of prison authorities not taking into consideration the special communication needs of foreign national prisoners. [3]

To combat this, the project is creating a multi-lingual, inter-cultural learning programme that engages both foreign national offenders and prison staff. This programme - including attractive innovative approaches such as the use of comic-strip scenarios - aims to promote better communication and cultural understanding, help prevent unnecessary psychological and emotional stress, and facilitate more effective rehabilitation. In the long term, this will also set new benchmarks in vocational training for prison staff, whilst equipping offenders with the language skills, cultural empathy and self-reflection which contribute to better integration into society and the work force.

The presentation will also outline the methodology used by the partners to develop the programme, including initial research involving focus groups of prisoners, prison officers, teachers, etc.; developing effective strategies and material; piloting them in prisons, immigration centres and other relevant locations; publishing the programme through its website; and developing a comprehensive dissemination plan to promote LBB outcomes to the widest possible target audience. A further incentive is the possibility of international accreditation of the learning programme through The College of Teachers.

References

[1] www.iliad.eu

[2] See for example www.panproject.org, www.movablebarres.eu, www.artcultureprison.eu

[3] See the EU study 'Foreigners in European Prisons' (Femke Hofstee-van der Meulen, 2008)