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EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Prison education in Norway – The importance for work and life after release

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Abstract: Introduction: Rehabilitation through formal education has been a long-term priority in the Norwegian criminal service. The rehabilitative effect of education is meant to result in employment and thereby ensure a successful return to society. Furthermore, education is considered as one of the most important ways to master life after ending incarceration and is an important crime prevention measure. In Norway, formal education in prison includes primary and secondary school, work qualifying courses, vocational training, and tertiary studies. **Transformative learning theory argues for learning that leads to transformation and change in the learner. Method:** Through Interviews with former prisoners and the bureaucrats who work closely with them, we have studied how prison formal education has affected ex-prisoners after release. **Results and conclusion:** The study has demonstrated that education in prison has contributed to social benefits, self-determination, and accountability by enabling the ex-prisoners to improve their mastery and self-esteem. These benefits **transformation and change in the learner** that have opened new doors. The study shows that formal **learning can be something else or something more than the acquisition of pure knowledge or skills.** More research on rehabilitation potential in different learning contexts is needed in order to improve sustainable trajectories into the society.

Subjects: Development Studies, Environment, Social Work, Urban Studies; Social Sciences; Education

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This is a study investigating the wider outcomes and benefits of prison Education in Norway. By interviewing prisoners and bureaucrats about the outcomes of taking upper secondary education in prison, we find that the outcomes are remarkable wide and encompassing. Our findings support the Norwegian Criminal Services purpose of change and rehabilitation among the prisoners and the transformative learning approach emphasising transformation and personal change as learning outcomes.

| **Keywords:** Prisoners, transformation, inclusive Education, rehabilitation

1. Introduction

The Norwegian Correctional Service focuses on the rehabilitation of prisoners (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008). All activities within the correctional service are based on five pillars: (i) humanistic perception of human rights, (ii) legal certainty and equal treatment, (iii) released prisoners have made up for their crime, (iv) normality, and (v) the prevention of new criminal acts (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008). Prison sentences are based on European rules for imprisonment, which suggest that no one should be deprived of liberty except as a last resort. These rules are underscored by the principle that no one should be under stricter conditions than necessary (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008, p. 105). In this context, the principle of normality is the basis of the treatment of prisoners. This principle implies that the execution of the prison sentence must be as “normal” as possible within a secure framework. This means that the prisoners shall have equal rights and obligations to the rest of the population when they serve their sentence. The normality principle ensures that all prisoners are entitled to participate in education. In addition, a positive criminology is the fundamental perspective in the Norwegian correctional service that argues for the cultivation of the positive aspects of prisoner rehabilitation. This understanding implies incentives in the criminal care service that focus on rehabilitation through positive experiences (Ronel & Segev, 2014). The provision of prison education is central to this perspective, that gives hope that change and another future can be achieved (Schinkel, 2014, p. 60).

In Norway, rehabilitation through formal education has been a long-term priority in the criminal service. The rehabilitative benefits of education should assist with employment and thereby ensure a successful return to society (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008, pp. 110–114). Furthermore, education is considered as one of the most important ways to master life after ending incarceration and is an important crime prevention measure (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008, p. 111). Further, education in prison aims to increase the prisoner's competence. Education can increase employment prospects and thereby, living conditions upon release, which will prevent recidivism. Education will help prisoners to be able to take advantage of their abilities and realise their goals (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008, p. 111). In addition, prison education is meant to improve social competence by conveying and changing values so that the individual can take responsibility for himself and others (St. meld. no. 37, 2007–2008). Although major investment has been dedicated to the Norwegian correctional service for a long time, we know relatively little about the benefits of prison education outcomes in Norway. We do not know how the prisoners manage the competence they from education in prison, or if education matters at all. Against this background, the research question of this paper is as follows: How has prison formal education impacted ex-prisoners after release? Our intention is to capture the informants' reflections about what the different consequences of education in prison have been for them and what changes they have experienced results of their participation in prison education. The introduction and study background sections that serve as the first part of this study presents a brief overview of Norwegian prisoners and prison education. We proceed to discuss transformative learning as the theoretical foundation of our study and then followed by methodological consideration and research design. The final part of the study presents the results and a discussion of the results by way of five categories that provide insight into the transformation and rehabilitation of prisoners in Norway.

2. The study background

Norwegian prisoners have less education than the average population. A report by Eikeland, Manger and Asbjørnsen (2016) has stated that the highest education level of half of the prisoners in Norway is primary education, compared to 26.9% of the average population. Statistics Norway's Living Conditions Survey from 2014 has also described other social problems within this less-educated group. According to the 2014 survey, 30% of prisoners reported that they had reading and writing difficulties (Revolv, 2015, p. 23). Many prisoners have experienced a difficult upbringing, a weak connection to working life, poor finances, homelessness, substance problems, and poorer health than the rest of the population (Revolv, 2015). This survey indicates that prisoners are a complex group that is characterized by an accumulation of social problems. One goal of education in prison is to do something about these problems.

Statistics Norway has measured the 5-year recidivism rate and found the greatest recidivism rate among persons charged with drug crimes (68.1%), theft (55.8%), and violence (57.3%). The statistics do not capture potential improvements in terms of less severe criminal activity (Revold, 2015) but nonetheless indicate that the recidivism is high.

In terms of prisoners' participation in education, about 6,000 prisoners, or 51.3%, took part in some form of education in prison in 2016. Ninety-two percent of all prisoners that participated in education in 2016 were men; only 8% were women.

Formal education in prison includes primary and secondary school, work qualifying courses, vocational training, and tertiary studies (Eikeland, Manger & Asbjørnsen, 2016). While the correctional service is supervised by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and Research has the professional and financial responsibility for prison education. Education in Norwegian prisons is thus administered by two ministries. Previously, school activities were administered by the criminal service but are now a part of the Education Act. This occurred when the "import model" was implemented in 1969. This model envisioned all social services such as health, school, culture, employment, and priesthood as being part of the prison experience (Langelid, 2015). As an imported service, prison education is based on the same guidelines that apply to ordinary education, which hold the county municipality as the responsible actor. The county authorities are responsible for the administrative and academic aspects of prison, and local schools are responsible for the practical and pedagogical aspects of education. The county governor in Hordaland has national responsibility for all education in prison. In addition to teaching, there are follow-up classes in 10 locations in Norway. The classes enable the prisoners able to complete their education if the prisoners are released before education is completed. The follow-up class is also on offer to those who have open zoning or community penalties. These follow-up classes are also subject to the same administrative system as education in prison. Follow-up classes administer regular teaching programs, professional examinations, and practice tests (Manger & Langelid, 2005).

Although education has always played a major role in the Norwegian criminal service, Norwegian prisons only offered education after 2008. Today, prison education is an earmarked state measure (Langelid, 2015, p. 24). Education in prison is meant to be equivalent to education outside of prison. Because prisoners have equal rights to education as the rest of the population, teaching competence should also be equivalent to ordinary education. Anyone who has not completed or has a legal right to upper secondary education can attend.

Although prison education follows the principle of normality, there are some conditions that differentiate prison teaching as qualitatively different from regular school. For example, there are fewer pupils in the classes due to safety considerations. The classes have a maximum of eight students. This ensures greater teacher density, which may benefit the prisoners. There may be turmoil in the study environment due to security delays, which can negatively affect teaching (Langelid, 2015, p. 191). Some prisoners must interrupt their education when they are released, but it is possible to attend follow-up classes upon release (Manger & Langelid, 2005).

3. Previous research

Significant research has identified many different elements that are required for successful rehabilitation. Various interventions have been attempted to place prisoners on the right track after release. There is consensus on the importance of employment, getting rid of debt and drug problems, and obtaining assistance with mental and physical health (Petersilia, 2003). Another focus of recidivism research is the importance of education, which may have a positive impact on prisoners. In the United States, major studies have been conducted to demonstrate that prisoners who engage in vocational education, school, or further education have a lower risk of falling back into crime. One reason for this appears to be that education in prison increase employment prospects and makes the rehabilitation process easier (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013; Makarios, Steiner, & Travis, 2010).

The literature on criminology research can be divided into two main categories: the focus on the negative impact of the punishment, and the focus on rehabilitation and the perspective of positive criminology (Ronel & Elisha, 2011; Ronel & Segev, 2014). Criminology literature has attempted to indicate the factors that lead prisoners to fall back into crime and the measures that can counter recidivism. Various studies have discussed the correlation between different rehabilitative interventions and the measures that effectively reduce relapse. There are multiple studies that have examined whether job training has reduced the number of relapses (Smith, Bechtel, Patrick, & Smith, 2006; Uggen, 2000). The overall conclusion from these studies is that job training leads to a closer connection to society and thus reduces relapse. Gallagher, Wilson, Hirschfield, Coggeshall, and MacKenzie (1999) study has found that therapeutic treatment, especially cognitive therapy, reduces relapses. Furthermore, there are studies that have focused on the importance of comprehensive cooperation between different agencies to enable a successful return to society. Some of the factors that are particularly important for living a life without crime after release include a place to live, being close to relationships, control of substance abuse, and employment or education (Gunnison, Helfgott, & Wilhelm, 2015; Heinrich, 2000; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Petersilia, 2003).

Davis et al. (2013) have conducted a meta-analysis of published and unpublished literature in the USA between 1980 and 2011 about the impact of education on the recovery rate and the improved chance of employment. This meta-analysis indicates that education has a positive impact on prisoners and reduces the risk of relapse after release. The results confirm that all forms of education have a significant impact, whether it is primary and lower secondary education, vocational education, or tertiary studies. It is clear that completing vocational training is key to obtaining employment after release (Davis et al., 2013).

Another study has been conducted by Makarios et al. (2010) and was based on 2,000 respondents who have all been in prisons in Ohio. This study examined the impact of rehabilitative measures that pertain to education, work, and the household. The study had a pre- and post-time design, which involved questioning the respondents before and after the implementation of the measure to see if the measure had an effect. Education helps to remove some of the barriers, including stigmatisation and insufficient knowledge. This makes it easier to seek employment, which makes education a contributor to better integration into society (Makarios et al., 2010).

In Norway, studies have been carried out on the prisoners' preparation for release and the follow-up of transitional prison and trial sentences. These studies examined the benefit of education during the prison stay (Pettersen, Finbak, & Skaalvik, 2003; Skaalvik, Finbak, & Pettersen, 2003). The motivation for prisoners to participate in education has also been studied (Manger, Eikeland, & Asbjørnsen, 2016; Manger, Eikeland, Diseth, & Hetland, 2006). Other subjects for inquiry have included the obstacles to education in prison (Eikeland, Manger & Asbjørnsen, 2016) and the positive outcomes of prison education on self-efficacy and self-regulated learning (Roth, Asbjørnsen, & Manger, 2016). Pettersen et al. (2003) have categorised education outcomes into the acquisition of knowledge and skills, formal competence, easier implementation of the penalty, emotional gain, and strengthened self-perception. In the study, the researchers (2003, p. 206) argue that education enables emotional gain, strengthened self-perception, and self-understanding or greater appreciation of oneself. Manger and Langelid (2005, p. 57) have suggested that mastery and personal development are other benefits of education (Olsen, 2012, p. 133).

Our study has a broader focus than the work of Davis et al. (2013). We examine the social benefits of education in terms of increased self-esteem and well-being. This study has a qualitative approach that will illuminate the meaning of formal education in prison.

4. Transformative learning

Transformative learning is about learning that involves transformation or change in the learner. Within the concept lies an acknowledgement that learning can be something else or something more than the acquisition of pure knowledge or skills (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow articulated the learning outcomes

he was describing carefully. He used the terms transformative learning and transformation to refer to the process of “becoming aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (Mezirow, 2000, p.4). Further clarifying, he said: “transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 5). Its focus is on how to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers (p. 7–8).

Meaning perspectives is a general frame of reference involving “a collection of meaning schemes made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 2) and “they provide us criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 44). Our frame of reference is composed of two dimensions, habits of mind and a point of view. “Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a se” of cultural, political, social educational, and economic codes (Mezirow, 1997, pp. 5–6). The habits of mind are expressed in a particular point of view: “the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation” (p. 6).

Mezirow (2000) limited transformation to those learning experiences whereby one’s preconscious mental schemas are laid bare and scrutinized through the process of critical self-reflection: “Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference in order to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more truth or justified to guide action” (2000, p. 7–8)

The core elements of the transformative learning process are critical reflections on the individual experiences. This can give new ideas and new understanding of oneself and the outside world. Promoting critical reflection is thus the second core element in transformative learning. It is about reflection in relation to content (meaning perspectives), the process (how the content is received and processed), and the foundation (attention in relation to the underlying conditions that govern the content and the way it is treated). Conversation or dialogue is also a core element—a dialogue with oneself and others. It is in the dialogue that the experiences and the critical reflection unfolds. In order to make the learning transformative, the dialogue must include direct attention to learners attitudes, feelings, personality and values of the participants.

Interviews are frequently used for evaluating transformative learning. Interviews can focus on learners’ story of a particular experience to gain insight into the processes or outcomes of learning, as well as to track learners’ perspective changes.

Often, because of Mezirow’s influence on the theory, scholars described transformational outcomes simply as a change in one’s frame of reference. However, this term seems too broad; it is frequently used to describe multiple ways in which a person makes meaning differently. The “planetary” perspective offered by O’Sullivan, Morrel, and O’Connor (2002) offers the following definition of transformational outcomes: Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with others and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and personal joy (p. xvii). Categories of transitional outcomes are also defined by Hoggan (2015) as:

- shift in basic premises of thought,
- understanding of relations of power,
- shift in feelings,
- shift in actions,
- shift in consciousness,
- altered ways of being in the world,
- shift in understanding of ourselves, shift in self-locations,
- change in relationships with others and the natural world,
- acquisition of new focus of attention (on relations of power in interlocking social structures),
- change in body-awareness,
- becoming open to visions of alternative approaches to living and sense of possibilities.

In light of positive criminology as perspective and basis in Norwegian prison education and transformative learning as a theoretical perspective, we expect the informants to highlight competence-related outcomes, but also transformational outcomes.

5. Methodology

Although education has been a major investment in the correctional service for a long time, little research has been done on the outcomes of prison education in Norway, except some quantitative effect-studies have been done. To get a deeper understanding of the inmates' experienced outcomes, there is a need for a scientific-theoretical perspective that allows us to go deeper into their different experiences and the variations in understandings that can arise. A hermeneutic perspective is seen as useful in a study that seeks to understand different aspects of a phenomenon. The concept of understanding (*verstehen*) by Gadamer (1999) is not only linked to the fact that a person understands something, but that a person comes to an understanding of something together with another. "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding," and the way two people come to an understanding together in a conversation or dialogue, is also central to the hermeneutic understanding of texts (Gadamer, 1999, p. 385). By choosing in-depth interviews as the method, we seek a deeper understanding of the outcomes of prison education by delving into the informants' thoughts and experiences (Thagaard, 2013, p. 11; Tjora, 2013, p. 105).

Interviews have been conducted with former prisoners and the bureaucrats who work closely with them to obtain different perspectives. The goal has been to obtain a deeper understanding of the importance of prison education for life after release. Using a purposive sampling technique, eight respondents: five ex-prisoners and three bureaucrats were interviewed. The ex-prisoners were recruited from a high-security prison with 155 prisoners imprisoned for various offences. They were recruited with assistance from the bureaucrats who have been interviewed in the study. One of the bureaucrats is a teacher in the prison, one is a teacher in a follow-up class, and one Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) employee who tracks prisoners after release. These bureaucrats made the first contact with the informants, provided them with information about the study and asked whether the inmates would like to be interviewed. Then we got the name and number of the informants and made further arrangements with them.

Ellen, the NAV employee, works on returning prisoners to society. Her job is to find work, lodging, treatment facilities, and other such arrangements before the prisoners are released. Rune is the teacher who has worked in prison for around 20 years. Stine works as a teacher and coordinator at a follow-up class and follows the students closely through their education.

The ex-prisoners were incarcerated for 1 to 5 years in the same prison. Several of them were first in a high-security prison and then transferred to a low-security prison. Furthermore, everyone underwent prison education and continued education in a follow-up class after zoning. They were all in

their late 20s or in the early 30s, except John, who is in his mid-40s. The ex-prisoners completed their primary education and participated in higher education in prison in general studies and vocational education. Every respondent was employed except Robert. Several of them have been recurrent in the system with shorter terms, while John and Eric have had longer sentences. Several of the respondents, such as Robert, Eric, Maria and Marcus, had children and relatively stable family relationships. John, Eric, and Maria struggled with major drug problems. The respondents had been out of prison for a few years, except Eric, who had been out for less than 6 months.

The interviews were transcribed and categorized with the HyperRESEARCH program. The focus was on generating textual codes that were developed from the data with a stepwise and deductive-inductive approach (Tjora, 2013, p. 184). In the analysis, we focused on text-related codes developed from data and not from theory, hypotheses, themes or research questions (Tjora, 2013, p. 179). The empirical code is based on what the informant actually says, not on the question we ask and the topic the informant is talking about. In this way, we have worked inductively, from data and towards concepts, and not vice versa. Then the principle from the stepwise, deductive-inductive model is taken into account that the codes should be developed from the empirical (Tjora, 2013, p. 184). After a detailed coding of the data, we ended up with five categories: “knowledge and skills”, “formal qualifications”, “education leading to employment”, “emotional and social benefits” and “support and social relations during education”. The categories are presented under the various headings and topics in the analysis section.

The study is approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). In line with their guidelines, direct personal information, such as names and personal characteristics; and indirect information such as age, gender, place of residence, have been anonymised in the study.

6. Results and discussion

Results and discussion section presents the learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and formal competence. Furthermore, social and emotional outcomes and other factors that the informants have pointed out as meaningful for life after atonement will be presented. These results are then discussed in the light of transformative learning.

6.1. Knowledge and skills

The bureaucrats and the ex-prisoners had slightly different perceptions of the academic outcomes from education in prison. Ellen, the NAV employee, said that “many of the prisoners struggle to read and write properly.” Many prisoners with low levels of education are dependent on others to cope with everyday tasks. Ellen believes that education in prison that raises the level of basic knowledge and skills is important to cope with daily tasks upon release.

Research has indicated that many of prisoners have dropped out of school during youth. This was true of the ex-prisoners in this study (Revolv, 2015). Manger and Langelid (2005, p. 67) have demonstrated the same in their study: many prisoners have had many difficulties early in life and require basic education in reading and writing as well as the skills needed to cope with education and society. Stine described these requirements as follows:

When you drop out of elementary school, you have a low level of knowledge. For many people, it is important to be able to do some math. You must be able to write some applications, make a report of some sort, and you need to be able to speak a bit of English.

Like Ellen, Stine emphasized the need to acquire basic knowledge and skills to live a normal life. Stine reinforced this importance because society requires a higher level of knowledge and skills. If the prisoners do not raise their level of knowledge, they will remain on the sidelines and easily fall back to their patterns of criminality.

Marcus supported these views and emphasised the importance of the knowledge and skills he received through his education. He received a formal diploma, and the knowledge and skills he gained through prison education enabled him to obtain employment. Interestingly, the other informants did not emphasise the knowledge and skills they received through formal education in prison. They placed more emphasis on the emotional and social benefits that they viewed to be important for mastering life after release from prison.

The prisoners and the bureaucrats expressed different views on the importance of education. All the former prisoners in this study were employed after release and viewed this as a significant achievement. The former prisoners viewed it as valuable that knowledge and skills enabled them to obtain a certificate, employment, or begin studying (in Maria's case). Education imparted the knowledge and skills that it is supposed to give, but the prisoners did not view those knowledge and skills as crucial to life after release.

6.2. Formal qualifications

Some of the bureaucrats and ex-prisoners highlighted the achievement of a diploma as important. Stine said that she believes that it is important to complete a formal education because it imparts a feeling of mastery and assists with employment. A "diploma showing that you have done a little math, Norwegian, and English" means that a candidate is better suited to meet the demands of the job market. The former prisoners have received a diploma that they can include in their CV. John explains as follows: "I actually have no holes in my resume. Because you are in prison and you are taking secondary subjects, you are occupied all the time being in the upper secondary school system."

It has been important for several of the prisoners to have something to show beyond "just being in prison". They can tell a potential employer that they have been in education in prison, thereby avoiding stigmatisation. Avoiding stigmatisation is considered by Ronel and Segev (2014) to be important for the re-integration of ex-prisoners. Therefore, openness about the past may be a better choice than keeping it hidden; the situation can be more problematic than John suggests. In any case, the informants believe that they have had an important formal benefit from the education.

Formal competence also enables the former prisoners to participate in further studies. Maria, one of the ex-prisoners, has completed vocational education and received employment. Without the education opportunities in prison, she said that she would not have her accomplishments without the educational opportunities in prison.

6.3. Does education in prison lead to employment?

The bureaucrats claim that education in prison plays an important, but not decisive role in employment. Ellen explains that "A lot of those who get jobs has jobs where they have some work experience from before." Stine says that "It is difficult to get a job with only upper secondary school, and especially if they have a general academic qualification." It seems that prisoners who complete vocational education have a greater chance of getting a job than those with general academic qualifications. This supports the work of Davis et al. (2013) which demonstrates that vocational training is the most important successful form of education for enabling employment after release. You choose to go back to the old life, because it is much easier to get recognition in the old criminal environment. Getting into an ordinary life is so difficult when you come from that environment.

Ellen believes that it is not only formal competence that helps ex-prisoners to be employed. She states, "If you show willingness by attaining different rehabilitation activities, even if you do not become a hairdresser or get a certificate, it is viewed as positive that you are in a process of creating changes in life."

Education creates a change in attitude, which means that even if a candidate does not have the full knowledge required for a job, initiating a process of change can make a candidate ready for a job. The ex-prisoners had varying experiences on whether education in prison was important for

their employment. Marcus stated that the education he received was important: “I started in electro when I started atoning prison and it was somehow a springboard to me.” He was employed at an electrical company where he was given a lot of responsibility and is now thinking about starting something on his own.

Robert says that prison education was not so important in his life: “I went back to the same job I had before my time in prison and did not use the education for anything.” Maria completed her upper secondary education in a follow-up class and eventually received her diploma. Ellen stated that Norway has few job opportunities for people with upper secondary school education only. Maria said that the low remuneration that she would receive due to only having upper secondary education could not have been the only motivator for changing her criminal behaviour. Maria needed something more than the economic gain to motivate her:

Education has made all the difference in my life, because if I had not taken the education, I would have had nothing to go to every day. It has helped me to get a life that I want to live. It is so incredibly important that you live a life you want to live, because if my drug-free life had been about sitting on a chair doing nothing, it would have been unbearable for me.

John also describes the same importance of argued that they did not miss the easy money of crime due to its risk. They liked the new stability and having a normal job. Therefore, economic considerations were not as significant as the other benefits of having a job.

6.4. Emotional and social benefits

Positive criminology is fundamentally about enhancing positive emotions and experiences and can help to inspire positive action as well as motivate prisoners to rehabilitate (Gredecki & Turner, 2009; Lee Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). Earlier research has underlined that education and training are activities that create positive experiences that foster positive emotions (Schinkel, 2014). Stortingsmelding no. 27 has pointed out that education should provide both self-determination and accountability.

The experience of mastering something in an ordinary that is not about crime and substance abuse has been important to Maria:

My first test in history, I got the grade B+ and it was like igniting a spark, experiencing to master new things. I was terrified because I thought that I had missed everything when I was on drugs. It was so great to see that I did not missed so much.

The ex-prisoners also expressed the value of mastery and accomplishment. Eric said, “To me it is a great thing, because I’ve not accomplished so much in life ... the education has meant quite a lot.” Robert had the same experience. Marcus says that “the education has helped me to become more confident and independent.” Furthermore, he said that it was nice to see that he could master something other than crime. Therefore, mastering education or any other area is important.

Ellen said it is key for prisoners to learn to manage something that they can use in their ordinary life. Ellen said that she teaches the prisoners she works with to master their lives so that they will be more independent in everyday life.

Stine stated that many prisoners will have different experiences: “they see more opportunities within the ‘ordinary’ system than they do in the criminal system.” This supports the work of Schinkel (2014, p. 60), which argues that positive experiences create hope to change and shape a different future. Maria’s quote corroborates this because a positive event made her think that she would be able to stay drug-free and quit crime. It is not necessarily the education that created this knowledge; rather, it is the sense of mastering something that triggers the process of realizing that the ex-prisoner can do things other than crime. As Ellen said, “I also think they get acquainted with

new aspects of themselves through education, because they may experience that they master what they previously did not think they could." Schinkel (2014) has pointed out that education can inspire a new future. New impulses have given the former prisoners new opportunities.

Education is important for life after reconciliation because education helps to develop personal strength. Some of the former prisoners expressed the feeling of mastering education. Robert stated, "I'm good at selling drugs, I'm not good at so much else." Even though he felt that he had mastered education, he still felt that he had a long way to go even though there were many positive experiences that could outweigh a life of crime.

Another perspective that the former prisoners highlighted was that education contributed to increased recognition and status. Ronel and Segev (2014, p. 1401) have indicated that previous prisoners face major challenges in returning to society after incarceration, including difficulties with education and occupational training as well as stigmatisation. The stigmatisation of incarceration has been of importance to many of the ex-prisoners. They have experienced stigmatisation and identified themselves as losers, drug addicts, incarcerated persons, and experienced to be stigmatised. Stigmatisation has also been pointed out by Makarios et al. (2010) as one of the barriers to seeking employment after release.

Eric stated that when his child asked what he was doing, he replied, "I will not call myself an incarcerated person, so luckily I now can call myself a plumber." To be able to identify with an occupation, has been pointed out by many ex-prisoners as an important source of pride. The feeling of meaning is also important in this context. John, who has been a recurrent prisoner, says it is difficult to change behaviour after moving from an environment in which he was of high status to a normal environment where he was at the bottom of social stratification. Having a valuable identity in society is also important in managing a new life outside prison.

6.5. Importance of support and social relations during education

Rune said, "Most of the prisoners do not have any education from before. It is nice to see that they are getting better and better, and then they continue changing on the outside as well." This supports the work of Manger and Langelid (2005, p. 57), who have indicated that it is important to work on social competence and building up positives, because this can enhance the students' expectations and bring greater benefits. The fact that the prisoners have had negative prior experiences with education makes the job slightly more difficult. There are many barriers that they must overcome, and Rune says that much of her job involves overcoming these mental barriers: "We are more on the social arena than the theoretic and professional, the theory and professionalism then becomes a bonus." The professional perspective is not the focus of his teaching, because he finds that significant social upbringing and mastery are prerequisites for education and professional training. Rune explained, "If we do not get rid of things that hinder their thoughts, they have a problem. The focus is not there, and they do not manage to learn anything."

Some of the informants said that the education played a major role in their life change because their teacher was special and caring. They described persons who had done much for them and managed to change their view of themselves. Marcus told of a teacher who was slightly unorthodox and gave them greater freedom: "When you get that little extra trust, you will not want to disappoint them".

As Maria said, "I was looking forward to seeing the teacher every day. Because he saw me, he just saw what I needed in order to understand. He was a very good teacher, he also had time to sit down with me and show me stuff properly." Eric spoke of a person who meant a lot to him: "It helps to have a person on your team who fought for me and made me go a little extra." Some of these unique individuals were their teachers. In Eric's case, the special person was a therapist who helped him get rid of his addiction. Mary's special person was a girlfriend gave her shelter, fought for her, and met with her. Mary said that this built up a positive perspective that helped to bring out the positive in her. Schinkel (2014) has stated that having individuals demonstrate trust, respect, and understanding is of

great importance. Maria said, “I think everything is about having good people around. And having people motivating me, and when I went in the follow-up class, I knew that they were staying behind me.” This can also be linked to emotional and social benefits, in light of positive criminology.

7. Conclusion

The interviews have given us deeper insight into the extensive importance of prison education. Related to transformative learning, we see that learning has involved much more than formal qualifications and competence. Participating in education has led the former prisoners to reflect on their own lives, to make new choices and they have gained greater control over their lives as “socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers” (Mezirow, 1991). This study has demonstrated that education in prison has contributed to social benefits, self-determination, and accountability by enabling the ex-prisoners to improve their mastery and self-esteem. Many of the respondents cited the education as significant, but they also highlighted other elements that were even more important. They emphasized the feeling of mastering something, avoiding stigmatization, getting motivation for further studies, showing willingness to do something with their lives, got into a process of change, change in attitude, a belief in getting a new life, to be valuable for others, do something for others, personal strength, recognition and pride. Many of these elements are the same as the categories of transitional outcomes defined by Hoggan (2015). This has happened through conversations, reflections, support and help from the environment. Wider benefits undermine the potential of formal education directed towards shaping formal competence and qualifications. The findings reveal that transformative learning can take place as a process after the formal education is completed, by experiencing and reflecting on what is happening and slowly change and create new directions in life.

Prisoners are a special group of adults, because a change in thought and behaviour is desired and the purpose of being imprisoned. Criminal careers and prisoners patterns of thought and action differ from what is required in the society. Successful rehabilitation and return require changes in thought and behaviour. Prisoners motivated for change will acquire wider benefits that are compatible with the benefit of transformative learning. We see a change in action, ways of being in the world, a vision of self, change of relationship with others, new attention, open to new life. All the informants have undergone some kind of a transformative process.

The wider benefits from formal education in prison that were expressed by the respondents indicate that learning in prison has great potential for transformation, change and rehabilitation. There are different contexts for learning in prison such as informal learning and everyday learning. These contexts can be utilised in different ways in the rehabilitation process. More research on rehabilitation potential in different learning contexts could help to improve sustainable trajectories in wider society.

We lack knowledge about how to avoid crucial difficulties when following and supporting prisoners after release. In particular, we lack knowledge about which rehabilitative factors are important after release. A broad research approach is needed to gain more knowledge about how different rehabilitation processes can work together to prevent relapse into crime and create positive change in the lives of former prisoners. The transformative learning perspective can be a fruitful starting point in such research.

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Conflicts of interest statement

This research is in compliance with Ethical Standards and approved by NSD Norwegian centre for Research Data. The informants in this study have given their informed consent.

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