



UNESCO Chair of applied Research  
for Education in Prison



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Chair

**CÉGEP  
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# Newsletter

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# A Word From the Editorial Desk

## Marc-André Lacelle

Development and Research Advisor, UNESCO  
Chair in Applied Research for Prison Education

As we head into winter, against a backdrop of increasing incarceration for war-related conflicts around the world, we'd like to take you on a journey through the activities surrounding prison education. In addition to a review of scientific publications and news from Uganda and the United States, we're adding a new section to our newsletter on an ongoing research project by Luc Beauchesne, a prison education practitioner from Trois-Rivières, Quebec.

Our portrait of a researcher focuses on criminologist Marion Vacheret (Université de Montréal), for whom prison is a focal point of attention in her sociological practice of the justice system in Canada, sharing her experiences in the field. The dissonance of her approach sheds a personal light on the prison conditions of marginalized populations (**École de criminologie, Université de Montréal**). Prison is a focal point of her research on the justice system in Canada. We discussed her experiences in the field and her thoughts on penology. We have also met with Louise Henry, a former chartered accountant who spent time in prison and is now an author and community worker. Through her writing, she gives **a voice to the inmates of Leclerc Institution**. Her approach sheds a personal light on the prison conditions of marginalized populations.

We are taking this opportunity to highlight a few activities of interest to the Chair in 2024. An important aspect of our mission is to contribute to the establishment of forums for reflection for those involved in prison education, in order to facilitate the development of policies, programs and pedagogical practices in the prison environment. In December, we will be launching a call for papers for the Rencontres internationales de Montréal sur l'éducation en prison, scheduled for October 16-18, 2024. Over the past year, we have taken a special interest in non-formal education practices in prisons, in line with the principles of lifelong learning and adult education, with a view to social reintegration. Community (**Elizabeth Fry Society**) and institutional (ComPaS) players are developing, often behind the scenes, educational activities along the prison continuum towards community reintegration, in the form of art and knowledge-sharing in the fields of reading (**SIPAR**), identity, health and spirituality. These activities offer a variation of support and empowerment programs for vulnerable prison populations. Our aim is to raise awareness and promote these practices among incarcerated communities, both internationally (Youth for Peace DRC) and nationally. Whether it's initiatives to support mothers (**CFAD**), indigenous cultural training (**Pathways**), or alternative activities to normalize prison conditions through artistic expression or discussion during a cultural activity (**RIDM**). The Rencontres event will provide a forum for sharing and discussing ways of providing education in prisons today, beyond the simple principle of the right to education in a secure context.

# A Word From the Editorial Desk



In February, we'll be bringing you a webinar on emerging practices in prison education in Australia and New Zealand. Finally, over the course of the year, we'll be modifying our online presence with a new website linked to our home institution (Cégep Marie-Victorin), which will facilitate communication and the dissemination of initiatives in the field of prison education.

Enjoy your reading!

# Community of Interests

## Chair Activities

### Conferences – Round Tables – Workshops

Frédérick Armstrong, co-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Prison Education, and Lyne Bisson, professor of social work and Associate Researcher with the Chair, took part in the **40th annual meeting of the Société de Criminologie du Québec**, held at the Victoriaville Convention Center on October 6. The team presented the preliminary results of the research entitled *Le sens et les effets de l'éducation en prison : perspectives d'apprenants incarcérés dans les prisons provinciales du Québec*. This qualitative study on the meaning and effects of prison education was carried out with 41 incarcerated people (13 women and 28 men) in five provincial detention facilities in Quebec and five people working in prison education between November 2021 and May 2022.

Our co-holder was also able to present the project at his conference, *An international outlook on some of the challenges and good practices in education in carceral settings*, which takes a comprehensive look at prison education practices and challenges around the world. The keynote lecture was given at the **UNED Foundation (Spain) International Congress** - *La Educación Social Penitenciaria: derecho, profesionalización y reinserción*, on November 16, 2023. This international conference analyzes and reflects on the content of education in the penitentiary sector at both the international and national levels, focusing on the practice and profession of prison social education.

➔ **To view the Congress**





# Community of Interests

## Event – Le cabaret de la seconde chance

Marc-André Lacelle and Camille Trembley attended the **Cabaret de la seconde chance** during **Social Rehabilitation Week**, held this year from October 9 to 13, 2023. Le Cabaret de la seconde chance is an artistic project aimed at the general public, featuring recognized professional artists, speakers and talented individuals who have, at one time or another, been in trouble with the law. This event is intended as an awareness-raising activity, aimed at reducing prejudice and reaffirming the importance of social and community reintegration for offenders, as well as community involvement in the process. The Cabaret showcases quality entertainment in a professional venue where audiences can discover multidisciplinary talent. The Cabaret is preceded by an exhibition of works by visual artists (painting, sculpture, collage, performance, etc.). The acts can also take many forms (music, poetry, slam, humour, etc.). This event is an initiative of the Association des services de réhabilitation sociale du Québec. Le Cabaret will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2024!

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Photo credits : Francis Dufour



## Announcement – Elizabeth Fry Society of Québec

The **Art Entr’Elles** collective launches its latest collaborative work, **Inconditionnelles**, in digital format. The project features the words of seven women: Marie-Lise L., Mélanie H., Mélanie G., Lyne T., Yuzi, Kali Chamanes and Sabz et Al, depicting their prison experience. The Chair team attended the unveiling of the physical work at the Maison de la culture Notre-Dame-de-Grâce last April.

To see the digital version of Inconditionnelles by the Art Entr’Elles collective:  
<http://www.inconditionnelles.com/>

## Research Report

Report on the doctoral project submitted by Luc Beauchesne, a PhD student in education at the Université du Québec in Trois-Rivières, who with his team was awarded the 2023 Chair Prize.

### A PhD project born in prison

Seven years ago, I chose to teach at the Trois-Rivières detention centre. It was through contact with these students that I was inspired to deepen my scientific knowledge of prison education. The first steps in identifying a research problem led me to question the value of schooling in prison. My observations in the environment cast doubt on the attainment of success objectives as generally evaluated in regular schools. Thus, taking into account a success rate, a number of credits obtained or a perseverance rate in an educational pathway seemed disconnected from prison reality.

The correctional population can read, write and count. A minority (23%) persevered to the end of high school, while 12.9% went on to post-secondary education. Nearly 10% had only primary education, while over 60% said they had dropped out before graduating from high school. (Lalande et al., 2014). According to the 2021-2022 Correctional Population Profile, the average length of provincial sentences is 374 days for long sentences (between 6 months and 2 years minus 1 day), 47 days for short sentences (less than 6 months) and 62 days for discontinuous sentences (known as “weekend” sentences). The average length of these sentences is 34 days for short sentences and 205 days for long sentences. It should also be noted that 59% of people in provincial prisons are remand prisoners awaiting trial (MSP 2023).

There are many studies on prison education. For example, the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research on Prison Education maintains a literature watch of 761 documents on the subject. However, it is rarer to find studies on schooling in Quebec’s detention facilities, and even rarer by educational researchers. It’s possible that the paucity of research specific to provincial detention can be explained by a learning context less conducive to achieving concrete, measurable results, such as graduation. According to Lamoureux (2010), transforming a person or increasing their employability requires a minimum amount of time. The longest sentences in penitentiaries are, according to him, a privileged field in this respect.

# Community of Interests



That said, international studies tend to demonstrate the positive impact of school-based activities in reducing recidivism (by 30 to 40%) and increasing the chances of finding a job (by over 12%) after completing a sentence. (Bozick et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2013, 2014; Duwe & Clark, 2014; Ellison et al., 2017; Hall, 2015; Vacca, 2004; Wilson et al., 2000.)

It therefore seems likely that education plays a role in reducing recidivism among incarcerated people, and further studies of the Quebec prison population are imperative. In fact, the above statistics do not tell us anything about the educational success of people who attend school in prison. The programs taught in provincial prisons - basic training and social integration - appear to be instruments that help with reintegration, in a broader sense that goes beyond graduation. Evaluation of educational success in provincial prisons should therefore focus on the school experience rather than on quantifiable results.

My PhD project was born in a classroom and hopes to live on in classrooms across Quebec. To avoid a crimino-centric approach and to enable these people to truly express their training needs, it seemed essential to hear their voices. In light of these observations, we opted for participatory research, not aiming to carry out research on detained students, but with them. The research question is thus as follows: How can we optimize the school experience in a provincial detention facility, according to student inmates?

The research project is intended to be empowering for student inmates. The proposed data collection activities will ask participants to tell their school life stories. Then, as a group, they will be able to give their opinion on what would be the best school for them. The identity and epistemic dimensions of the school experience, according to Gauthier (2007), will enable a thematic analysis of the results. This will allow us to identify the contributions, limits and obstacles of training in provincial detention facilities, and to identify ways of improving education programs in detention from the perspective of student inmates. This study addresses a real need to understand this educational universe. It seeks to open the way for the authorities of the two master institutions — school and prison, MSP and MEQ — to work together to better serve the population.

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# Community of Interests

## News

### In the United States

#### In Oregon



Oregon State Penitentiary officer Dave (right) talks with a Norwegian Correctional Service trainer during a 2019 training session. Photo from University of California, (September 5, 2023), *How Norway is helping to restore humanity inside US prisons*. In UCSF courtesy of Amend staff.

A community garden in a prison? It's been possible in Oregon State Prison since 2015. This project is inspired by the effectiveness of the humanist prison reform approach developed in Norway since 1990. This approach, based on trust and valuing interpersonal relationships between the various protagonists in the prison environment, aims to improve living conditions for staff and inmates alike: humanizing the denomination (patients instead of inmates), creating a positive bond and empathetic perceptions of conflict situations to avoid an escalation of violence. A study carried out between 2016 and 2021 showed that increasing the amount of time spent outdoors (in the garden) reduced inmate violence (e.g., assaults) by 74% and the use of force in psychiatric units by 84%. These measures also reduce the number of placements in solitary confinement. These figures speak volumes for the prison's former warden, Tobey Tooley, who implemented this method in 2015 after training in Norway, and who has been able to observe its positive effects for several years.

University of California, (August 30 2023), *How Norway is helping to restore humanity inside US prisons*. Dans Phys.Org. Downloaded September 5, 2023: **towards the article**

To view the study: David H. Cloud et al, *The resource team: A case study of a solitary confinement reform in Oregon*, PLOS ONE (2023) : **towards the article**

# Community of Interests

## In Massachusetts

A new partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Corrections and APDS (a company that promotes access to technology in education) means that all 6,070 inmates at the state prison will receive a free tablet providing access to educational materials and tools. This initiative promotes educational programs by facilitating access to these services, and enables better social and professional reintegration by avoiding the “digital” divide for people deprived of their freedom, and avoids accessibility issues (restriction due to number of places for in-person courses). Partnerships such as the one in Massachusetts are opening up new prospects by making this content available to all those incarcerated in state prisons.

Moser. M.R., (August 30 2023). *Free Classes Offered to All Residents of Massachusetts Prisons*, In *News: Prison Journalism Project*. Downloaded October 11, 2023 : **towards the article**

## In Uganda



Photo credit :  
Peter Stanford, August 29, 2023,  
Uganda

This article recounts the experiences of a fellow of The Longford Trust who travelled to Uganda to spend a month working with the non-profit organization Justice Defenders in the country's prisons. This diary highlights the importance of education and its transformative potential in legal education and education for social rehabilitation. The thirst for knowledge and the promotion of the principles of justice are positive effects highlighted by the grant holder.

LongfordBlog, (August 29, 2023). *Going into Uganda's prisons: a journey in two parts*. Dans *The Longford Truist* blog, downloaded September 14, 2023: **towards the article**

# Portrait of a Researcher

## Marion Vacheret



Marion Vacheret, Professor at the Université de Montréal School of Criminology (UdeM) and President of the Société de criminologie du Québec

Interview with Marion Vacheret, Professor at the École de criminologie de l'Université de Montréal (UdeM) and President of the Société de criminologie du Québec, on Wednesday, June 21, 2023, by Marc-André Lacelle and Camille Trembley. It should be noted that the team edited the original interview in collaboration with social science student Elizabeth Lacelle.

**Camille Trembley :** First of all, thank you for contributing to our newsletter. We wanted to talk about your background and current research. What led you to work on the subject of prisons specifically?

**Marion Vacheret:** I'd say there were two reasons that brought me there. The first is that my grandfather was a prisoner of war throughout the Second World War as an army officer in the debacle at Dunkirk. Every time we visited my grandparents, this experience was mentioned. He never recounted it in detail, but it was a traumatic experience for him. I'd say there's an interest in this experience of confinement, solitude and isolation. And then, the other reason brings me to my personal path. I came to criminology through law, without really having a legal mind. However, I was fascinated by questions of criminal law. During my training, I observed people who were preparing to become lawyers or judges and were completely unaware of what happens after sentencing. We learned how to apply the law, but the consequences were not taught, at least at the time. During my internship for the Certificate in Criminal Sciences at the Fleury-Mérogis remand prison, in the section where women were incarcerated with their children, I was determined to continue working in this field I was traumatized by my introduction to this institution. I first went into prison in 1991 or 1992. still remember the hallways, the noises, the smells, the screams and the suffering that went on in those institutions. By chance, one of my teachers told me about the criminology program at the Université de Montréal. I went there to do my master's degree in criminology, where I met Guy Lemire, a professor at the School of I went there

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to do my master's degree in criminology, and a penitentiary warden for seventeen years. There was an intellectual and human connection with Guy. He introduced me to the prison world, about which I knew very little.

My research focuses on two angles. Since my master's studies, I've been questioning the implementation of the actuarial justice model, centred on risk management and the search for efficiency, in the Canadian and Quebec prison management process. The fact that we're in an extremely formatted, standardized model, where we don't so much evaluate a person, but rather his or her membership of a category in terms of risks and probabilities of recidivism. I've done a lot of work on this. The second is the prison experience. Both from the point of view of those incarcerated and those who work in prisons. Thanks to Guy Lemire, I was able to do my fieldwork in penitentiaries. I spent about six months in two Quebec penitentiaries for my thesis. It was quite an experience. I had an extraordinary opportunity. I went there every day, including Saturdays and Sundays. I would spend whole days walking around, chatting, meeting inmates and staff. I don't know if we could do it today under these conditions. This enabled me to write my thesis and to reflect on this institution, the relationships between inmates, inmate-staff relations, etc.

My inquiries continued on the subject of the prison itself. I continued to question interventions in this risk management model, as well as violence and feelings of insecurity in the prison environment. My work is therefore purely qualitative, focusing on representations, perceptions and experiences from a phenomenological perspective. I also worked on pre-trial detention and the reality for someone who, from one day to the next, finds themselves in prison. I've also worked on mental health in detention, parole, and the social and community reintegration processes of First Nations and Inuit in Quebec. Each time, I take a critical approach that questions the prison, this institution, this organization. What's the point? Why are individuals placed in this context? What kind of relational dynamics or personal development does it generate for an incarcerated person? And what does it mean for someone to work in this environment? We're in an environment where we do things that no other workplace would ask us to do. For me, prison shouldn't exist, except for an exceptional minority where we're really talking about people for whom we have no other option, or where stopping an action is necessary, but which should always be short-lived. I think prison generates more suffering than social utility. I'm not a complete abolitionist, but I am 80% abolitionist.

**Marc-André Lacelle: What should the public know about prison that they don't already know, in order to improve the way it is used?**

**M.V.:** There's a lack of understanding of what it means to be "deprived of freedom", even for a short time, to find oneself between four walls, faced with uncertainty and unpredictability: an incarcerated person, especially when they've just been arrested, doesn't know what's going to happen to them, or to their loved ones outside. This is exacerbated when the waiting period gets longer.

We also have to realize that it's an environment of fear, and think beyond the material comforts that actually don't exist. Prisons aren't comfortable; at best, they're acceptable.

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I'm not criticizing all policies. There are approaches and establishments that are perfectly fine. The idea isn't to say that what organizations are doing in the prison environment isn't good. Rather, it's about realizing that even if you're in a decent institution where you're warm, have your own cell, an acceptable bed, food, etc., you're still deprived of your freedom. You're in an environment where you're confronted with tension, promiscuity and no privacy. You're constantly afraid of what's going to happen.

**C.T.:** Are models that are currently highly valued, such as the Nordic model of open prisons, ultimately the same kind of situation?

**M.V.:** That's interesting. I'd say that the more coercive the prison, the worse it is. Nordic prisons are a lesser evil because the living conditions and activities are constructive. But you're still deprived of your freedom, of your loved ones. A person detained on the island of Bastøy, on a farm where they can ride a bike and live in a room, is still deprived of something fundamental. The person is punished and has lost all freedom, decision-making power and autonomy. Unfortunately, the public is in a vengeful relationship with the criminal act, out of fear of becoming victims themselves, or out of identification with the suffering experienced by the person who has been subjected to the act. Even though they only have an incomplete and often distorted image of the crime in the media. Some criminal acts are abominable and unacceptable. The idea is not to let things happen. It's about realizing that locking someone up deprives them of something important, and that that in itself is enough. This is the heart of punishment. Prison is meant to be constructive, especially in Quebec and Canada. It's positive to think that we're going to use this time of isolation to help a person move forward. But it's also paradoxical, because prison has a dispiriting effect on social integration. We take action far too late in the delinquency process. It's upstream that we need to invest in schools, social activities and networks, when people are young. But we invest when people are twenty, thirty years old, because we didn't know how to help or support them properly beforehand, when it would have cost less in every sense of the word. But that being said, I believe that if prisons are to exist, they must be constructive. It has to have activities, programs, interventions, because the worst thing about prison is inactivity. Confinement is awful, but inactive confinement, where you have nothing to do all day, is the worst. Inactivity, boredom, the empty time spent waiting for the end of the sentence, generates tension and conflict, causing inmates to become stressed, anxious, angry and eventually react violently to the slightest tense situation. It should be noted that, over the last fifteen years or so at the federal level, there has been a lot of tightening and budget cuts, particularly in services for prisoners. The Harper government prioritized not only security measures, but also the lowest possible cost. Some institutions have been expanded in order to close others. While international rules recognize the principle of single-cell occupancy, the expansions are organized around double cells, i.e., 2 people sharing the slightest privacy in an extremely small space. In an institution originally designed for 400 people, there are now 600 or 700 without any change in the number of possible activities. Then, we're surprised that there's a lot of violence and solitary confinement. We should be asking ourselves what we're doing with these people to make them become violent. It is because they can no longer stand detention, which has become too coercive, useless too difficult a place to live.



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**M.A.L.: During your observations in secure environments, did you discuss the process of reintegration and social rehabilitation?**

**M.V.:** I've done a lot of work on the risk management model. With colleagues, we carried out international research on intervention. We compared the Canadian model and its corrective-behavioural programs with other forms of intervention. We have a model where everyone goes through the same process down to the last comma, compared with French, Swiss and Belgian models, which offer more individualized interventions. It's quite fascinating. By way of comparison, it's a contrast between a big, well-oiled, well structured, standardized, heavy, gigantic machine and a craft industry, where each institution, or even each player, knits in their own way. Craftsmanship is extraordinary, but it takes longer, is less homogeneous, and depends more on the individuals involved. I believe in supporting people in prison, but I'm rather skeptical about standardized programs, because everyone has a different background, a different way of understanding and evolving. But it's the lesser evil, because at least we're offering them something. For some it works, but I prefer craftsmanship to factories. At the federal level, programs are developed, designed and conceptualized in Ottawa, and a program officer applies the predetermined program. As a matter of principle, everyone must be treated the same, so there are no inequalities. What's more, these programs have been designed by researchers, based on best practices, evidence-based data and so on. So there's real thought behind them. The problem is that this leaves no room for individuality: whether that of the program officer or the person following the program.

**M.A.L.: If we're talking about descriptions and intervention mechanisms, where does education fit in? What role does both formal and non-formal education play in the development of social and professional reintegration processes?**

**M.V.:** I'm not a specialist in education. I encountered it in parallel with what I was doing. What I was able to observe during my fieldwork was a rather interesting double phenomenon. On the one hand, school was not valued at all. Incarcerated people go to school because it's part of their correctional plan, since they have academic deficits. It's mandatory, but it's never their first choice. On the other hand, within the school itself, we found ourselves in a sort of protective bubble, in other words, a teacher-learner relationship where the inmate is no longer an inmate, but a student. There's a learning relationship that's often interesting, because learning leads to achievements and thus to a certain form of appreciation and recognition of efforts, but also to difficulties. I remember students who had to redo their secondary 3 or 2 mathematics, but there was a sense of pride in doing it: "Well, I've done it, I'm making progress." School is therefore not valued by the general prison population. However, those who do attend generally appreciate the atmosphere, which is often quite friendly, where discussions and learning take place, and where there is less of a power struggle with the teacher and, above all, between inmates. In a way, it breaks the rhythm of prison. These are positive places for prisoners precisely because they take them out of the prison environment, which is marked by fear of others, the tough persona that has to be put forward, and the principle of opposition to those involved. School can become a kind of space of freedom in a world where people are deprived of it.



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**C.T.:** As a matter of fact, I really liked your description of prison temporality in the book *La pénologie: Réflexions juridiques et criminologiques autour de la peine*<sup>1</sup>, as a time-out from suffering, but a time of productivity within the establishment. How do you see the role of education in this particular temporality?

**M.V.:** Prison is a very trying place, physically, mentally and emotionally. You're always being watched, directly or indirectly. You're always in an oppressive environment. The fact that you can circulate, move around, go into another physical space, even if it's a space that remains inside the prison, changes the dynamic a little. It's rarely the chairman of the inmate committee who goes to school, it's rarely the top guy in the place. What you'll find are ordinary inmates who are under more pressure from their fellow inmates than someone higher up in the hierarchy. So, when they go to school, they find themselves with people "like them". And since they're not looking for power or recognition among themselves, there's a little less pressure from fellow inmates. I'm talking about men's prisons, because that's what I know. With women, it may be different. There are certainly converging points, but with men, image is fundamental. You can't afford to look weak in prison. At the slightest sign of weakness, someone will swoop in and you'll find yourself in very difficult living conditions. So you're always on your guard. For example, one of my students worked on intimacy in prison and she said that inmates decorate their cells with photos of their loved ones, but they don't want others to see them. So, if they have bunk beds, they'll stick it to the ceiling of the top bunk, so that only they can see it, and eventually, if it makes them cry, this image of their former life will be under their blanket, where no one can see them. We can't afford to show that we're grieving. Image is fundamental, and that's why school is less valued. We're dealing with people who didn't like school, many of whom have had a lot of failures. As I said, when they're in this environment, one of them doesn't have more power than the other, so it also eases tensions. There's also the relationship with the teacher, which is a really constructive one. A teacher is a teacher, not a corrections officer. Of course, they represent authority, but not the same authority. On the whole, we're in a different relationship, a learning relationship. Nobody's going to laugh at me if I don't succeed, because anyway, the guy sitting next to me doesn't succeed either. Then I'm less afraid of feeling threatened. I'd say it breaks this prison temporality on a psychological and emotional level.

**M.A.L.:** I don't know to what extent you've observed it, but does this kind of freedom exist in social rehabilitation programs targeting anger, drug addiction or gender relations?

**M.V.:** I Haven't directly observed the programs, but you have to realize that the programs are taught by program officers. Program officers are correctional services employees who have individual reports to make on how the program is progressing, and this will form part of the file that will lead to a recommendation or not, a parole or a transfer. In other words, power is exercised over the individual. Even though program coaching can be very positive and constructive, I think that the program officer's relationship is more formal, because it's part of the so-called risk management model.

<sup>1</sup> Estibaliz, J., Vacheret, M., (dir.) (Septembre 2023). *La pénologie : Réflexions juridiques et criminologiques autour de la peine*. Les Presses Universitaires de Montréal. Paramètres. 150 pp

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As for the teacher, yes, they too are going to make a report, but which, in my opinion, is different, because it's from an academic point of view. Has this person evolved? Has this person succeeded in certain areas of learning? We're less in a formal assessment framework than we are with a correctional program. For program officers, the question is: if the inmate had a problem considered criminogenic, did he or she solve it? A teacher doesn't ask the same questions. What's more, a teacher is someone who, yes, is affiliated with the correctional service, but is not a correctional services employee. They're really outsiders who come in. De facto, the relationship is necessarily different.

**M.A.L.: For anyone interested in prison issues or the development of prison education, what are some interesting things to keep an eye on, or things that are currently cropping up?**

**M.V.:** I'd say there are a lot of studies on prison, quite a lot. One type of study that I find extremely interesting, because it leads to a reflection on practices in detention and on the prison institution, are all the studies that are increasingly interested in fields such as meditation, yoga, and the impact of spirituality in prison. These are approaches that are increasingly being developed. In other words, we're moving away from an intervention practice that targets a single dimension, a single aspect - the one identified as the root cause of crime - to promote a more comprehensive approach. Studies show that these forms of intervention enable inmates and staff to have a less difficult time in prison, to get through the ordeal and to be supported in a different way. I think these are aspects that we need to explore, question and develop further, because we need to stop seeing prison only as a tool, or focusing only on the negative and problematic aspects of the person. It's very restrictive and ultimately not very constructive. With our cognitive-behavioural programs, we're working on a utilitarian concept or the development of specific tools. If we want to think of prison, let's try to think of it as a set of dynamics. What's interesting is that more and more activities, such as meditation, are being offered to inmates and/or staff, and we're realizing that this helps everyone. Staff members are experiencing their work better and developing better contacts with inmates. Up to now, we've talked a lot about people in prison, but working in a prison environment is terrible for the staff. It's extremely trying. They experience confinement too. Of course, they go home in the evening, but spending eight hours a day in such an environment for twenty, thirty or forty years is destructive. So I find this aspect interesting, because it opens the door to saying that we could work differently or have another approach, a better understanding of these dynamics and of this environment as a living or working environment.

**M.A.L.: From a point of view like that of Michel Foucault and his analyses of the bio-power of prisons, could these practices of meditation, of self-reflection, be seen as techniques for managing bodies at a distance, through a control of inmates' modes of consciousness?**

**M.V.:** It's interesting to see it that way. But then you'd have to abolish all prisons. There's no way out. So, if we tell ourselves that we have to live with this organization, I think these approaches are more relevant. They include everyone in a collective approach. If I'm meditating, I don't see why the staff shouldn't be there too while

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I'm meditating. Let's allow these practices to create links and get out of this divide where there are the guards, and the guarded, who don't talk to each other.

**C.T.:** It's a bit like what we observed during the Chair's training sessions in Senegalese prisons, where everyone eats together. It's not that the prisons are good and that things are going well, but there's something more collective, an ecosystem where relationships are different, perhaps a little less violent.

**M.V.:** Right. This divide which is at the heart of prison as we know it in the West, between those who are guarded and those who guard, is a source of enormous hardships. From the moment we live together, but the other always looks at us with suspicion, either because they consider us a criminal, or because they see us as a screw or a simple key holder, I think this creates even more difficulties. We become a label. You're either an inmate or a guard. And then you can't get out. You're stuck in a role. Inmates have to play their role as inmates, so they're not going to talk to staff members. Or they're going to act tough, or act as if they were. And then, the guards won't have any empathy towards the inmates. You get bogged down in a bad dynamic, which tends to be less present in the context of school in prison.



# Education and Raising Awareness

## Portrait of a Learner: Louise Henry



Interview with Louise Henry on Wednesday, May 31, 2023, by Marc-André Lacelle and Camille Trembley via Zoom. Some editing was done on the original transcript with the help of Elisa Turcotte-Joyal, Master's student in Literature at UQAM.

**Marc-André Lacelle :** We're glad that you agreed to talk to us, because we think it's important to give voice to the prison experience in the context of education in prison, which is what you did in your book *Délivrez-nous de la prison Leclerc* !<sup>2</sup>

**L.H.:** L'Education in prison is very broad, but it certainly allows them to... I don't like to say, reintegrate them, because you don't reintegrate them, but rather rehabilitate them.

[Louise Henry's phone rings]

**L.H.:** Sorry. It could be an emergency at the prison. I always answer! Some women call to say "so there's a girl that was sent to the hole" ... so I'm always there!

**C.T.:** Tell us about your involvement, your activism and your role in the context of incarceration at Leclerc.

**L.H.:** My name is Louise Henry. I'm a former accountant. I laundered money, not to eat, but for profit. 90% of people who end up in prison have committed a crime because of financial need. I don't currently have a regular job. Since I've been to prison, I decided that I would dedicate the rest of my life to getting women out of there, and I wrote a book about the Leclerc prison. And I'm writing a second book that should be released in February 2024. Since I turned 60, getting my Quebec pension allowed me to help women and those around

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them more. For instance, yesterday, during a telephone consultation, I spoke with a man whose wife had just gone to therapy. I just talk to him, I don't offer advice, but I tell him how it is. I think I'm doing some good, I know that. I used to deal in numbers. Numbers don't have feelings. It's  $2+2=4$ . That's it. When I was in a halfway house, I enrolled in a social work course at the *Centre de formation professionnelle in Montréal*, even though it is not recognized by the Ministry of Education. This course allowed me to get in touch with these people; because it really affects me, not just the women in prison, but their loved ones as well.

**C.T.: Would you say you have a therapeutic function for the inmates' loved ones? Do you offer them resources?**

**L.H.:** Resources, experience and help, too. I'm the kind of person who says an alcoholic will help an alcoholic. A guy who does masonry has to go out in the field, and then there has to be a mason who will show him the real work. As far as I'm concerned, knowledge is not enough. You have to have knowledge in the field. So I'm fully involved and I've seen so much suffering. It's appalling what they're going through, and then they come out of there so battered, when they could come out of there standing tall. This deeply affects me.

**M.A.L.: Before going to prison, what was your perception of this environment?**

**L.H.:** In my book, this is how I start: I was Mr. and Mrs. Joe Average. When I got to prison, my first thought was: "This is disgusting." I had to take off my false eyelashes, my fake nails and my boots, because they had high heels; I was wearing something like a Chanel shirt. I looked at the women around me and I thought "Where have I ended up?" These weren't people like me. I thought "They're poor people who want nothing to do with the system." Barely 3-4 days go by before you realize we're all the same. I still have a hard time speaking about them as "They, those women". I'm still there in my head, because it could be anyone. So absolutely, at first, I had big prejudices.

**M.A.L.: As an accountant, does your conviction cause problems when it comes to signing or certifying documents?**

**L.H.:** I'm definitely struck off. I can no longer be a chartered accountant. The judge told me, as my case is a bit special, that he would not take away my right to work in accounting. But since I got fined, I have to pay it within 10 years; otherwise I'll go back to prison for three years. It's a triple conviction. Justice gives sentences that only lead us astray. It's like when an alcoholic, which is a case we see a lot, goes back to jail for drinking, thereby breaking their terms of release. About 65% of the clientele at Leclerc has this type of breach of conditions. It's easy to say, "She'll go back." She knows she has to quit drinking, but she can't!

**C.T.: What motivated you to write about your experience? Why turn to writing?**

**L.H.:** I didn't start out writing a book. I wrote down what wasn't working because I couldn't get over it. The first week I didn't have access to my medication. I was in a daze. I spent a lot of time in court trying to get parole, but it didn't work because it was all over the media! The second week, Sister Marguerite, who has been volunteering at the prison since 2017, came to see me. She spent 20 years in Tanguay and Leclerc prisons. She said, "I finally found you! We need you!" That's when she told me about the CASIFQ (Coalition d'action et de

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surveillance sur l'incarcération des femmes au Québec). This recently created organization brought together associations and women's centres to denounce what was happening at Leclerc. "Oh my God, yes, I want to join!" As I went along, I saw things and wrote them down. I realized that you really have to be "inside" to see, to understand. Later, when I was released, I met with the Quebec ombudsman, women's associations, the sisters and their communities to denounce what was happening. It was the brutality that shocked me the most.

## **C.T: What did you think of the programs and classes?**

**L.H.:** I'll give you an example: women were given \$5 a day if they went to the classes offered. It was an incentive; otherwise the girls wouldn't have gone! I went, in fact, just to see. It was so disastrous. They told us, "We'll show you how to make a budget." They handed out flyers, to be cut out and then calculated: "Cabbage is \$0.99, broccoli is \$2. Your budget is \$15, what are you going to buy for yourself?" You do that in kindergarten! I thought to myself, "Going through old flyers is infantilizing and humiliating." It didn't make sense to me. It's very different from what's offered by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Quebec in the halfway house. For example, there was a course on how gambling works, for those who play the machines (casino). The counsellor had statistics. She didn't just tell you, "No, it's not right to put money in." She explained how the machine works, how the system is made, how the casino works. At the end of, say a 10-hour course, you get a little Meritas<sup>3</sup> to show the release agent that you've done your hours. That's the way to do it, not just give you \$5. The big difference was that, since the Elizabeth Fry Society of Quebec was giving the course, it wasn't part of the program offered by the prison. It's because they have a certain amount of money, a budget, that has to be spent, that they're going to make programs and not the other way around. They draw up programs, but they're not very well thought-out, more on a case-by-case basis depending on the budget. It's not thought-out, it's not structured. It proves that the prison shouldn't be in charge of programs. It has to come from outside, like a school service provider. At the federal level, it's better organized. Officers used to tell us, "Yes, but at Leclerc [a provincial institution], we can't do that, because the sentences aren't as long." I was there for 11 months at Leclerc and 7 months at the federal level. The women at Leclerc go to work, because they can earn money. They're there for about 4 to 6 months, they get half their pay for the canteen<sup>4</sup>, the other half is in a savings account.

<sup>3</sup> Méritas (Quebecism) «Name given to a reward or prize awarded to individuals, private or public organizations, companies or corporations in recognition of the quality of their work, their spirit of initiative, or some other distinction or public organizations, companies or corporations for the quality of their work, their spirit of initiative, or in general, their merit in their sphere of activity. their merit in their sphere of activity. Office québécois de la langue française

<sup>4</sup> Canteen: A cooperative depository for inmates of a Canadian prison that administers a consolidated fund financed by inmates from wages systematically paid according to their participation in prison activities (school, work, specific roles, etc.). It also sells consumer goods that complement the items to the products distributed by the establishment (food, personal hygiene products, everyday consumer goods, etc.). Its use is strategic in the informal economic life of inmates, as certain products are used as resources for accumulating capital that can be exchanged for goods and services. Once the prison stay is over individual balances are paid into the prisoners' savings accounts.



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No one helps them [manage their money], even though psychologically, in the rehabilitation process, they'll get tips on how to get by. On the other hand, when they get out of prison with savings in their pockets, it's party time and all their consumption problems start all over again.

**M.A.L.: How do women in prison perceive the difference between provincial and federal educational courses or programs?**

**L.H.:** Most of the girls at the Leclerc don't believe in it, they just go for the \$5. If they aren't given the help they need, they behave in the same way as when they were on the street. They need a social worker or a psychologist, someone who will be able to see what's going on in their lives. Most women in prison were victims before they victimized others, so you really need to fix that before you start teaching them to figure out how to calculate using flyers. Instead, they should undergo personal development or therapeutic programs that will help them work on themselves. Before, until 2017, Alcoholics Anonymous had AA<sup>5</sup> evenings. It's essential to have AA evenings or courses for Cocaine Anonymous, so that women realize that they're not all alone, so that there's sharing. Since the pandemic, they've been short-staffed. There were no more AA classes, and there are none today!

**C.T.: Sounds to me like there's a certain lack of social and psychological support for the rest of the training to work well.**

**L.H.:** That's for sure. These people have deep-seated difficulties. We need to reach out to them. They're already doing it at the federal level! I spent 3 days crying and screaming with a parole officer who discusses all the details of your life with you and tries to find out where things are going wrong. The moment you know where it's stuck, she tells you: "We'll work on that, my girl." A lot of girls say to me: "No, everything's fine, there's no problem. I was just selling drugs because I didn't really know what else to do." "Why aren't you in school? Why didn't you finish school? What happened, why did you drop out?" "I wanted to be a flight attendant, what did you want to be?" So there's some questioning going on. But first, the person has to open up. It's true that not everyone wants to open up, but then again, why? Some people say: "She's been here 15 times." If she's been here 15 times, there's something wrong. You have to change your methods! If 60% of your clientele is reincarcerated, there's something wrong with your method!

**M.A.L.: In community circles that deal with education in prison, some people make distinctions between reintegration and rehabilitation. From your perspective, what should be put forward?**

**L.H.:** I've always had trouble with the word "reintegrate". When people talk about reintegration, it's as if "I'm going to reintegrate you into society." I don't want to be reintegrated, I want to be rehabilitated. Rehabilitating is more like giving me the ability to do it, the tools to do it. You can't give tools to someone you want to reintegrate!

<sup>5</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous: NPOs of American origin, widespread in North America, which offer programs for the gradual elimination of alcohol and drug dependence by mobilizing principles of behavioral regulation and community integration inspired by Western religious traditions individualized and paradoxically secularized

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Reintegrating is like forcing someone. In my work accompanying women leaving provincial prisons, I don't offer them programs, but rather regular follow-up, keeping in touch. I encourage them and mother them a little. Many of them haven't really been mothered in their lives. In short, I'm interested in them. Because prison is such a taboo subject. When people see me and say: "Hey, you've been to prison?" They're always a bit surprised. Women in prison are very marginalized. Their parents are rarely doctors or lawyers. Most of them come from underprivileged backgrounds, and this is passed down from generation to generation. And that creates big disparities between them when it comes to getting out for good. With my book, I've tried to build a bridge between society and the people in prison, so that we can get away from prejudice and improve conditions of incarceration, to offer rehabilitation that works, so that they can rebuild their lives without going back.

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# Research and Practices Overview

## Monographies

### → **De Vos, H. (2023). *Beyond Scandinavian Exceptionalism : Normalization, Imprisonment and Society*. Springer International Publishing**

Helen De Vos, a criminologist at the Institute of Criminology in Leuven (Belgium), takes a fresh, critical look at the idea that the Scandinavian prison world is exceptional, with its low incarceration rate, humane prison conditions and use of the principle of normalization. Linked to the Scandinavian exception by New Zealand criminologist John Pratt, the principle of “normalization” stipulates that prison is in itself the punishment for crimes and that, consequently, prison conditions should reproduce normal life as closely as possible, rather than being degrading and punitive. Based on a comparative analysis of policies, laws and practices in Belgium and Norway, as well as fieldwork in four prisons - two in Belgium and two in Norway, one open and one closed prison per country - De Vos challenges the idea that Scandinavian prisons are exceptional simply because they respect the principle of normalization, which is also at the heart of Belgian policies and laws. Yet, even if both prison systems recognize the principle of normalization, there are differences between what constitutes a “normal” life in the two countries, and between the resources available to reproduce a normal life - differences that partly explain the reported differences between Belgian and Norwegian prisons. In other words, De Vos shows that the direct association between the humanity of Scandinavian prisons and the principle of normalization is a little short-sighted.

### → **Garner, J. & Krolak, L. (eds.). (2023). *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners (4e éd.)*. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions**

In February 2023, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions published the 4th edition of its *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*. These guidelines are designed to be applicable in most countries that support the existence of libraries in the various environments of confinement, and also offer minimum standards for countries that cannot afford to follow all the recommendations. Maintaining quality library services in prisons is a sine qua non for respecting the right of incarcerated people to education. The IFLA guidelines enable library staff, prison administrations, legislative and executive authorities to plan the provision of services, whether to meet minimum standards or to implement best practice. They are therefore useful for anyone interested in the rights of incarcerated people, wherever they may be.

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## Specialized Publication on Prison Education

- **Allred, S. L., Boyd, C., & Perry, P. (2023). *Participant Concerns with Cocurricular Programs in Prison : Insights from Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program Think Tanks*. Journal of Correctional Education, 74(2), 25 55**

The study by Sarah Allred, Charles Boyd and Paul Perry focuses on the concerns of people who participate in inside-out think tanks in prisons in the USA. These think tanks are groups made up of former participants in inside-out programs where incarcerated and outside students are brought together to take post-secondary courses. These think tanks develop their own initiatives at the local level, enabling participants to develop their knowledge and skills. Following nine focus groups conducted in six U.S. cities with members of these think tanks, Allred, Boyd and Perry note that participants' concerns can be grouped into four main themes. First, they worried about their ability to hold meetings, since such meetings are only possible if the prison administration agrees. Secondly, they are concerned about the potential impact of alleged misconduct by a member of the think tank, an individual act that could affect the group as a whole. Thirdly, the lack of resources is often cited as a source of concern. Finally, participants worry about the impact of adding new members to the group. In short, even if participants appreciate their participation, and even if we can think that their participation brings similar benefits to participation in more formal programs, we have to admit that participants are worried about the precariousness of these programs.

## Scientific Articles

- **Jossie, M. L., Lane, J. & Cook, C. L. (2023). *Attitudes about Rehabilitation among Jail Correctional Officers. Victims & Offenders, 1-21***

In this study, the authors note that little research starts from the point of view of correctional officers and incorporates their opinions into their evidence. The authors therefore decided to interview officers from 13 prisons in Florida to measure the impact that personal characteristics (such as race, gender, religion, political opinion and degree of satisfaction with their activity) might have on their vision of rehabilitation and their involvement in the reintegration process within the same penal institution, and also between institutions. The survey results show that female, non-white, more religious, less conservative and more job-satisfied officers are more likely to support the reintegration process, in contrast to correctional officers who prioritize greater social distance, for example. They also reveal significant differences in reintegration support between prisons depending on the profile of correctional officers.

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→ **Barros Filho, A. D. de, Leite, C., & Monteiro, A. M. R. (2023). *Education policies in prisons : An analysis focused on the 10 largest prison populations*. Revista Brasileira de Educação, 28**

The article analyzes the prison education policies, within the framework of the right to education, of the world's 10 largest prison populations identified in the World Prison Brief database of the Institute for Criminal Policy Research at the University of London, which centralizes global data on the prison system. The authors also drew on articles published in indexed journals such as SCOPUS and EBSCOhost between 2015 and 2021, and official documents on educational and penal policies relating to each country. The study showed that, despite international legal and regulatory advances, the right to education in prison is still not guaranteed in some countries. The underlying notions of education oscillate between: education as training (emancipation); education as correctional training (indoctrination); and education as legal-normative discourse (theoretical adherence to international covenants). With regard to the last two concepts, the authors demonstrate the urgency of opening the discussion on the vision and use of education in prison not as repressive tools, but as emancipatory means. The right to education as a fundamental human right must return to the heart of debates and to the United Nations' 2030 agenda.



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