

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Edinburgh Napier University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 English</p>
<p>Title of case study: <i>Promoting Literacy and Creative Writing Skills at HMP Edinburgh</i></p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study describes the impact of research on reading and writing in prisons for prisoners at HMP Edinburgh, through a partnership between the BA (Hons) English Suite at Edinburgh Napier, Fife College (previously ‘Carnegie College’) and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). Dr Anne Schwan’s research into the literary and cultural significance of literacy in prisons has resulted in a partnership that benefits prisoners who receive one-to-one tuition from student volunteers. The students engage in literacy and creative writing exercises at the prison. These activities provide tailored support that could not be offered within the resource constraints of regular educational provision.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning outputs are the work of Dr Anne Schwan (at Edinburgh Napier since 2007 and promoted from Lecturer to Reader during this time). She was Programme Leader for English for several years and is an appointed member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh’s Young Academy of Scotland.</p> <p>Schwan’s research (2009-present) has made original contributions to the interdisciplinary field of prison studies. The overall purpose of the research is to demonstrate the social function of reading and writing in prisons and the importance of cultural platforms for prisoners’ voices. Largely focused on the nineteenth and early twentieth century, her work adds historical dimensions to debates on the significance of prisoners’ voices in criminology, history and literary studies. It provides historical evidence to inform public understanding of offender perspectives in today’s media and the third sector. For the contemporary context, an edited special issue with Introduction [3.2], presents reading and writing in prison as a space for radical pedagogy and transformation, through the multi-disciplinary study of prisoner autobiography, creative writing and reading practices, and partnerships between universities and penal institutions in present-day Britain and North America. Calling for awareness of how prison activism has informed cultural theory, Schwan’s <i>How to Read Foucault’s Discipline and Punish</i> (co-authored with Stephen Shapiro) finds that Foucault’s influential study must be read alongside the Frenchman’s involvement with the <i>Groupe d’Information sur les prisons (GIP)</i>, which created opportunities for prisoners to speak up about prison conditions [3.3].</p> <p>The research for Schwan’s monograph <i>Convict Voices: Women, Class, and Writing About Prison in 19th Century England</i> (contracted and forthcoming 2014 with the University Press of New England), involved textual analysis of historical material, including reformist writings, manuscripts and ephemera (e.g. prison letters and diaries, execution broadsides). Female prisoners’ voices in these accounts are situated as significant precursors of later writings on imprisonment to illuminate historical changes and continuities in educational opportunities for (ex) prisoners and prisoner self-expression. The insights into historical conditions in (women’s) prisons gained through this research were mapped onto the contemporary prison context to enhance prisoners’ experiences through additional support with reading and writing activities.</p> <p>Schwan’s article in <i>Women’s History Review</i> [3.1] on a largely unknown suffragette is based on archival research into the woman’s secret prison diary. The article reveals the constraints on (suffrage) prisoners’ ability to communicate as well as the functions of reading and writing for imprisoned women and communities from different class backgrounds. An extended study of popular fiction writer Robinson’s fictional prison narratives [3.6], published under the anonym of “A Prison Matron,” demonstrates how these texts created unusual platforms for prisoners’ voices when opportunities for actual self-expression were limited. Research into such material has identified a</p>

long-standing literary and cultural tradition of giving voice to prisoners—a tradition which forms the historical basis for contemporary concerns with offender perspectives.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Publications

1. Schwan, Anne, “‘Bless the Gods for My Pencils and Paper’: Katie Gliddon’s Prison Diary, Percy Bysshe Shelley and the Suffragettes at Holloway.” *Women’s History Review*, 22.1 (2013): 148-67. ISSN 0961-2025. DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2012.724917.
2. Schwan, Anne, ed. and introd., “Reading and Writing in Prison,” special issue of *Critical Survey* 23.3 (December 2011). ISSN 0011-1570.
3. Schwan, Anne, and Stephen Shapiro, *How to Read Foucault’s Discipline and Punish* (Pluto Press 2011). ISBN 9780745329802, 192pp.
4. Schwan, Anne, “Crime.” In: *Dickens in Context*, Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 301-309. ISBN: 9780521887007.
5. Schwan, Anne, “‘Dreadful Beyond Description’: Mary Carpenter’s Prison Reform Writings and Female Convicts in Britain and India,” *European Journal of English Studies* 14.2 (2010): 107-120. ISSN 1382-5577. DOI: 10.1080/13825577.2010.481450.
6. Schwan, Anne, “‘From Dry Volumes of Facts and Figures’ to Stories of ‘Flesh and Blood’: The Prison Narratives of Frederick William Robinson.” In: *Stones of Law – Bricks of Shame: Narrating Imprisonment in the Victorian Age*, Jan Alber and Frank Lauterbach (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 191-212. ISBN 9780802098979.

Quality:

Publications No. 1, 4, 5 and 6 are included in REF 2014.

Grants

Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Early Career Fellowship (January – August 2011, £41,551) for completion of Schwan’s monograph *Convict Voices*. The application for this Fellowship included an impact plan detailing ideas for the partnership with a local prison, which have now been implemented successfully.

British Association for Victorian Studies (BAVS) Conference Grant (£200) for organization of Schwan’s conference “Reading and Writing in Prison” in June 2010.

Higher Education Academy Scotland Travel Fund Grant (£178) for Schwan’s attendance at English Subject Centre event “Beyond the Classroom: English in the Community” in London, December 2009.

Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland Grant (£520) for Schwan’s archival research in London on “Imprisonment in British Suffragette Writing,” awarded January 2009.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Schwan’s historical research produced insights into restrictions placed on prisoner communication, access to reading and writing materials. Research on contemporary partnerships between universities and penal institutions revealed a continuing need for literacy education and the benefits of creative activities amongst prisoners. These findings resulted in a volunteering scheme at HMP Edinburgh. Since November 2011, Schwan has been overseeing a project offering placements at the prison’s learning centre. Up until 31 July 2013, ten final-year students on English degrees have

participated in six-week placements, working alongside prison education staff for half a day a week. Activities varied depending on institutional requirements and student expertise, including one-to-one literacy work and creative writing, with male and female prisoners. Typically, a student volunteer was assigned 1-3 prisoners within a larger group; due to turnover in the centre, students sometimes worked with different individuals from week to week. In total, approximately 25 prisoners have benefited. Initially, the scheme was run as a pilot, agreed with local management and Fife College (the contracted learning provider at HMP Edinburgh). After a successful pilot in 2011/2, the project was formally approved by SPS HQ and written into the contract of delivery between Fife College and the SPS.

In the year of its inception, the project was favourably mentioned in the Annual Report of the Edinburgh Prison Visiting Committee for the year ending 31 March 2012 [5.4]. The Report notes that the project “provided some prisoners with individual literacy support,” thus helping to “fill some of the gap in literacy support” after the withdrawal of funding for “Clan Literacy” from April 2011. Detailing the positive effect of individualised support through a particular volunteer, one prison teacher remarked how the student “helped one prisoner who is dyslexic, patiently and the prisoner was delighted with the support” [5.5]. The project’s impact and added value is also demonstrated by another student’s comment that he “was able to offer assistance to one inmate who was attempting a design project that was beyond the computer skill-set of the tutor” [5.5]. This indicates that prisoners and learning centre benefit intellectually and materially through the volunteers’ skill and expertise, which are offered for free.

The Visiting Committee’s Report notes that the scheme also helps create foundations “to educate future professionals about working in prison education” [5.4: 4.5.6, p. 15]. The volunteers therefore act as multipliers benefitting prisoners they are working with, but also in the sense that volunteers may have potential future impact as practitioners in related fields. One student commented that “[t]he placement reinforced interest in adult based work with creative literacy” and that he would “consider the sessional employment in the prison as additional work” [5.5]. Other corroborating statements have been sought, but, due to the rigorous confidentiality issues surrounding Her Majesty’s Prisons, this information is not available for public dissemination.

Additionally the impact can be measured through the ways in which Schwan’s organisation of and appearances at events attended by practitioners and professionals working in the prison system have contributed to raising awareness and understanding of the research’s objectives and the prison project’s practicalities. Schwan’s research and its application to a local prison context were consolidated at the international conference “Reading and Writing in Prison” (Edinburgh Napier June 2010). This event was attended by around 50 participants, including one representative of the Scottish Book Trust; two members of Stirling Council and Stirling Libraries; one representative from SPS HQ and a Prison Governor; the Assistant Head of School for Communities and Learner Development at Fife College [5.2]; ten creative practitioners and educators working in the Scottish or English prison systems; two former prisoners, one of whom is also a *Guardian* journalist; one journalist (Literary Editor of *Scotland on Sunday*). One participant (Readers & Writers in Prisons Programme Officer at English PEN) wrote after the event: “I enjoyed the conference and met and heard some fascinating speakers” [5.6].

In September 2012, Schwan was an invited panellist at the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded symposium on “Prison Reading Groups” (University of Roehampton) to present Edinburgh Napier’s volunteering project. Circa 70 people attended the event, the majority of whom were volunteers facilitating reading groups in English prisons, journalists, publishers, creative practitioners, prison librarians and representatives of charities such as the Prisoners’ Education Trust. The event afforded Schwan with an opportunity to raise awareness of the volunteering scheme amongst a wider community of stakeholders in penal systems beyond Scotland. Schwan’s presentation resulted in an invitation to contribute a piece -- co-authored by prisoners and volunteers -- about the volunteering scheme for the “Learning Matters” Newsletter of the Charity The Prisoners’ Education Trust (awaiting approval by the SPS’s Communications Department).

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As demonstrated, the research and volunteering scheme have already impacted on institutional penal policy at the local level, with the potential to become a model for similar projects elsewhere. Such work is especially urgent given that large numbers of prisoners (e.g. 80% in Scotland) are functionally illiterate, which impedes their chances of securing employment and a life without crime (figures cited on BBC Scotland <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-20852685>).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

The following sources and individuals involved in the formal approval and subsequent organisation of the partnership are able to corroborate the impact:

- 5.1 The Head of Learning & Skills at Scottish Prison Service HQ
- 5.2 The Assistant Head of School in Communities and Learner Development at Fife College (one of the SPS's main learning providers)
- 5.3 The Manager of the Learning Centre at HMP Edinburgh
- 5.4 The Annual Report of the Edinburgh Prison Visiting Committee cited under "4. Details of the Impact":
<http://avc.bpweb.net/images/EdinburghVC12.pdf?zenid=68323fef93ca29684501fdc1b9ffcc9>
- 5.5 Student volunteers and prison teacher cited under "4."
- 5.6 Participants in the "Reading and Writing in Prison" conference cited under "4."