



# Education Inquiry

ISSN: (Print) 2000-4508 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/zedu20>

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To cite this article: Katariina Mertanen & Kristiina Brunila (2017): Prison Break. Education of young adults in closed prisons—building a bridge from prison to civil society?, Education Inquiry, DOI: [10.1080/20004508.2017.1380478](https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2017.1380478)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2017.1380478>



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Published online: 27 Sep 2017.



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## Prison Break. Education of young adults in closed prisons—building a bridge from prison to civil society?

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### ABSTRACT

Prison education is seen in both criminal and education policies as a way of assimilating inmates ‘back into society’. In spite of the policy emphasis on education, the practices in prison education vary from prison to prison. The stated aim of prison education in EU and in Finnish national level policies is to teach inmates the skills and knowledge that they can use in life after release and thus reduce recidivism. In this paper, we analyse policies and practices related to education programmes in closed prisons in Finland with discourses of employability and therapisation of education. International and national policy documents and ethnographic data and interviews with young people and teachers have been use as data sources. Our aim is to draw a picture of multiple and complex power relations that shape the young adults in prison as flexible subjects that are able to make the transition from prison ‘back’ to civil society.

### KEYWORDS

prison education; young adults; employability; therapisation; discourses; power

## Introduction

Michel Foucault (1977) states in his famous book “Discipline and Punish” that prison as an institution has managed to build both itself and its inhabitants to be something outside society. With that in mind, strong emphasis is placed on prison education in criminal policies and where education is seen as the way to bring inmates ‘back’ to society (see Maculan, Ronco & Vianello 2013). Both EU and national level policies have emphasised prison education as a way to enhance employability and to build up knowledge and skills for continued education or work during and after incarceration (Costelloe & Langelid 2011; Koski & Miettinen 2007; Maculan et. al 2013; Prison education in Finland 2011). The official targets of prison education are especially for those young adults/people considered to be vulnerable and at risk of high recidivism (see for Alós, Esteban, Jódar & Miguélez 2015; Aebi, Tiago & Burkhardt 2016; Strategy for Prison Education 2008-2016). In criminal policies, education tends to be waved like a magic wand – something that has the ability to fix broken self-esteem, tackle Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia, teach inmates valuable learning and life skills and provide the tools for a crime-free life (see for Strategy of Prison Education 2008-2016).

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This article was originally published with errors. This version has been corrected. Please see Corrigendum (<https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2017.1414427>).

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In this article, we bring together data which we have produced both individually and jointly in an on-going *Youth on the Move* -research project led by Associate professor Kristiina Brunila. By doing so, we are able to draw a picture of multiple and complex power relations that shape the prisoner-students as flexible subjects that are able to make the transition from prison 'back' to civil society. We have chosen to focus particularly on the alliance of employability and therapisation in prison education and look at how they work together as an alliance and how these discourses are adopted by the young adults themselves participating in education as part of their subjectivities.

## Cartography of prison education in Finland

In Finland, the education offered in prisons is mainly contextualised as adult, vocational and general education – typically half of the forms of education offered in prisons are courses that aim to enable prisoners to finish mandatory education or various kinds of vocational education programmes (e.g. metalwork, carpentry, etc.) that lead to a professional qualification (Koski & Miettinen 2007). Only education prisons are required to provide inmates with is the possibility to finish mandatory education (Strategy for Prison Education 2008-2016). Surprisingly, in some prison reports, prison work (e.g. maintenance duties) is considered to be education or at least is believed to bestow some educational benefit (Hawley, Murphy and Souto-Otero 2013; Prison education in Finland 2011; Alós et al. 2015).

In addition to the adult and vocational education in Finland, so-called preparatory education and action programmes are arranged. These programmes focus on building up both knowledge and skills to enable recipients to be able to undertake vocational education at some point in the future. In Finland, the responsibility for arranging education is not assigned to any specific organisation, but instead depends on local educational establishments. Thus, the local differences between different parts of the country are quite notable (Prison education in Finland 2011; Statistics of the Criminal Sanctions Agency 2015, Koski & Miettinen 2007).

Although the role of education related to young adults living in prison is emphasised in policies, the total percentage of prisoners in education has stabilised at around 10% for the last ten years. Most inmates in Finland (32%) attend to different working activities, such as maintenance and production (Statistics of the Criminal Sanctions Agency 2015). These percentages follow the European figures, both in attending to education and work in prisons (Maculan et al. 2013). The typical explanations for the low education rates in prisons are related to several learning disabilities and problems with drugs and mental health and thus the need for small groups, specialised teachers and the extra cost of arranging education compared to schooling outside prisons (Costelloe & Langelid 2011; Koski & Miettinen 2007).

In light of rather the high reoffending rates especially of young prisoners, it is reasonable to describe the transition from prison to life 'outside' as being difficult (Wartna & Nijlssen 2006; Statistics of the Criminal Sanctions Agency 2015; Koski & Miettinen 2007; Prison Education in Finland 2011; Brunila 2011, 2012). Lack of adequate national statistics about employment rates after incarceration makes it hard to state how incarceration affects future chances for individuals. There are some European indications suggesting that employment rates after incarceration are quite

low, and are lowest among former inmates that have no official educational qualification (Alós et al. 2015; Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero 2013; Prison Education in Finland 2011).

In both EU and Finnish level policies, the economic crisis has already had an effect on resources and the ways in which prison education is arranged (Maculan et al. 2013). Like most governmental organisations, prisons are facing major cuts and organisational changes and there is pressure of to reduce costs at every level. Although prisons themselves do not organise education, but offer classrooms to local education institutions, these institutions are under similar pressure to reduce costs. In Finland, this has led to a situation in which non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector actors have been introduced into the field of prison education and in which education consisted mainly of multiple and scattered short-term programs (Brunila 2011, 2012; Rantala 2006).

In Europe, programmes such as Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, and Lifelong Learning have funded over 100 programmes aimed at developing and arranging prison education between 2001 and 2011 (Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero 2013; Costelloe & Langelid 2011). Funding for these short-term projects comes from both private and public resources (Rantala & Sulkunen 2006). From a wider perspective, a prominent feature of these kinds of projects is that they also permit more competition between vested interest groups who seek to promote concepts and related ‘products’ in the form of teaching materials and guidance for teachers and other education-related professionals (Ball 2013; Brunila & Rynänen 2016).

Therefore, it is no surprise that prison education in Finland is also commonly conducted by publicly funded short-term projects (see Brunila, 2011, 2012). Because of this shift, the public sector has started to function in a similar way to the private sector – using market-oriented techniques such as accountability, performance evaluation and competition and with an emphasis on rationality, consumerism and freedom of choice as the leading properties of the individual (see e.g. Youdell 2011; Ball 2007, 2013). Accordingly, students are seen as rational individuals who consume education in order to improve their employability and their chances in labour markets (Fejes 2010). In accordance with Stephen Ball’s thinking, this turn could be considered to be part of a general shift of emphasis towards a ‘knowledge-based economy’ and to develop strategies to increase the production of workers (Ball 2013, 44).

## **The alliance between employability and therapisation in education**

*Employability* is a political concept that nowadays is used as almost a one-size-fits-all solution to a range of political problems, especially ones concerning marginalization, unemployment and social exclusion (McQuaid & Lindsay 2005). In this paper, we use the ‘narrow’ definition of employability, since it is the one that is used and is most influential in education policies and practices (e.g. McQuaid & Lindsay 2005; Fejes & Nicoll 2014; Belt & Richardson 2005; Barrow, Hesketh & Williams 2013; Brunila & Siivonen 2014). In this definition employability is defined as an individual responsibility, as a character or quality of being employable, or as different skills, characteristics and qualifications that enable moving to and within the labour markets. The skills needed in today’s knowledge-based or post-industrial societies include flexibility,

adaptability, willingness to develop and educate oneself constantly, and to participate actively in lifelong learning (Fejes 2010; Dahlstedt, Fejes & Schonning 2011; Brown, Hesketh & Williams 2003; McQuaid & Lindsey 2005; Worth 2003).

There is a vast amount of research related to education programmes and employability. In terms of this paper, one of the most interesting pieces of research conducted by Belt & Richardson (2005) focused on pre-employment training for long term unemployed people to enable them to apply for call centre work. In this training, main focus was on communication, literacy, IT skills and self-management and confidence. The conclusion was that the mismatch between employability skills training and requirements from the employer's side was profound, and as a consequence, trainees' success in gaining steady and long term employment was not common. In addition, Crisp and Powell (2013) argue that the concept of employability has been colonised "as a form of discursive legitimisation for neoliberal policies [..]" (p.2). They continue their argument that this form of discursive governance stigmatizes and marginalizes young people especially those living in urban settlements in the United Kingdom (see also Wacquant 2008).

Kristiina Brunila and colleagues have written about young adults, adult education and employability in terms of the demand for individual responsibility in education for economic survival. Regarding young adults, the demand for individual responsibility tends to go hand in hand with a notion of employability understood as a set of 'correct' skills and characteristics that guarantee entry to the current highly competitive labour market (Brunila & Siivonen 2014; Brunila & Rynänen 2016). This kind of "individual-focused, supply-side orthodoxy" (Worth 2003, 619; Brunila et al. 2016), permeated by the ethic of adaptability and self-management is particularly well expressed in a range of unemployment projects for young adults.

We follow the analysis done by Andreas Fejes (2010) about discourses of employability and lifelong learning in which employability can be seen as a political discourse that focuses on the skills and abilities of individuals. Informed by Michel Foucault, Nikolas Rose and Mitchel Dean, he asks how employability works as a form of governmentality that makes people not just regulate and put themselves under self-surveillance but to strive, want, and desire places and positions discourses point to them. He also notes that in discourses of employability, the notions of individuality, and freedom are at the centre.

The reason why we are inspired by these views is that in prison education, ideas of freedom and entering society tend to follow employability discourses of entering and functioning in labour and education markets as a free, individual agent. Education and training in prison aim to enhance an individual's skills for these essential abilities (Mertanen, 2013; Alós et al. 2015; Koski & Miettinen 2007). Governing through discourses of employability are in line with Rose's (1999) claim that modern state governs not through sovereign use of violence and power, but by enabling its subjects to be free to work towards their own goals and desires.

In addition to the emphasis of employability in education, there is another interesting shift taking place in education. A number of sociologists and educationalists have argued that a *therapeutic ethos/therapeutic* culture has emerged within many Western education systems (see Ecclestone & Brunila 2015; Wright 2011; Wright & McLeod 2015; Furedi 2004; Aldenmyr & Olsen, 2016). This discourse that in this article we have

called ‘therapisation’ (see Brunila 2014) draws on an eclectic range of psychological ideas and techniques that aim largely to enhance social and emotional learning and self-esteem. In their previous study, Kathryn Ecclestone and Kristiina Brunila (2015) have described the therapeutic discourse in terms of two inextricably linked cultural characteristics that now permeate social policy: public discourses, and private life. The first combines the significant growth of targeted or specialist interventions within social policy settings in many countries and the rise of universal approaches derived from these. In this article, with therapisation we refer to a multifaceted spectrum of social practices deriving from happiness studies, cognitive behavioural therapy, and positive psychology while others draw on different strands of counselling, self-help, psychotherapy, and psychology, sometimes embellished by neuroscience that discursively and institutionally pervade prison education.

Therefore, it is no surprise that government responses to youth unemployment in several European countries have started to focus on building individualistic competence related to emotional well-being and mental health. In the project in which both authors work, it has been shown how this type of therapeutic education in educational programmes targeted to young people is working towards individualising education, and this in turn has required a certain kind of subjectivity as a target in order to legitimate itself (Brunila & Siivonen, 2014; Ecclestone et al., 2015; Brunila et al. 2016, 2017). According to previous research, therapeutic education is also a central part of prison education; there are various educational programmes that aim at behaviour alteration, rehabilitation, cognitive processing and self-esteem improvement.

In this paper, we argue that the alliance of employability and therapisation works together because they both place the responsibility for the individual’s success or failure in labour markets on the shoulders of the young people themselves. In other words, the vocabulary of employability and therapisation links political rhetoric and regulatory programmes to the ‘self-steering’ capacities of subjects themselves. The ideal self is autonomous, self-responsible, flexible and self-centred. As an alliance, they both share an emphasis on resilience, self-discipline, emotional control and individual development, which from a wider perspective, are considered to be a way to help young adults enter labour markets in an economic situation where uncertainty and fragmentation are distinctive features in labour markets and employment (Bottrell 2009; see also Standing 2011).

In order to understand why the alliance between employability and therapisation works, we have utilized the concept of subjectification. According to Davies and colleagues (2001), subjectification involves processes through which we are subjected to, and actively take up as our own, the terms of our subjection. In this article, subjectification involves taking up the discourses involved in prison education, and through these discourses, young people become speaking subjects at the same time as they are subjected to the constitutive force of the discourses (see also Brunila 2012).

## Data and analysis

This research was conducted as a part of an on-going research project *Youth on the Move* led by Kristiina Brunila and through which Katariina Mertanen is conducting her PhD research. In the project, with 8 other researchers we have asked how policies and practices shape the interests of children and young people, including those who are

outside formal education and work. Since 2014, the researchers in the project have both individually and jointly analysed cross-sectoral policies and educational practices regarding school-to-work transitions by exploring how they influence those individuals who are considered as vulnerable or at risk.

For this article, in order to trace discourses of employability and therapisation in prison education, we analysed policy documents, project reports, and ethnographic and interview data from different prison education programmes. For our joint ethnographic and interview data, we visited educational and rehabilitation programmes for inmates for preparatory vocational education in Southern Finland during 2013-2014. The programmes we visited were contextualised in vocational and adult education, and we followed both female and male study groups. During these visits, we followed the lessons, and interviewed teachers, staff, and students. We also took part in free time activities offered to inmates. The interviews were mainly group interviews, and we interviewed 18 young people. In addition to joint ethnographic and interview data, we utilised Kristiina Brunila's interviews with young people living in prison conducted between 2010-2014 in three prisons. For policy analysis, we mainly rely on Katariina Mertanen's analysis of prison education policies both in the EU and in Finland. For this article, we have chosen to look more into the Mandela rules (UN 2006) and Council of Europe (2006) in addition to national documents such as the Finnish Criminal Act, the government proposal for the Criminal Act, prison education reports and surveys, the Criminal Sanctions Agency's education strategies, education programmes materials, and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2006 for its relevant sections.

We have adapted a discursive approach that emphasises the analysis of power relations inherent in prison education. We have scrutinised the education policies and practises in terms of prisons with the help of theorisations from Michel Foucault (1987/2010; 1982; 1977) and Nikolas Rose (1998; 1999) together with feminist researchers Bronwyn Davies and Elisabeth St. Pierre Adams (St. Pierre 2000; Davies & al. 2001; Davies 2005). We understand discourses in relation to prison education constructed through language (Foucault 1982). In the light of Stephen Ball's claim, we do not just speak a discourse, it speaks us (Ball 2013). Our aim is to draw a picture of multiple and complex power relations that shape young adults in prison as subjects that are able to make the transition from prison 'back' to civil society. We understand power in terms of discourse as something that is exercised not by individuals who have power as a material possession but as something that moulds the ways in which some things are considered true and others are not (Foucault, 1987/2010). Yet power is not totalising in the sense that it restricts freedom or disables forms of resistance—quite the contrary. Foucault (1987/2010) notes that resistance and power cannot work without each other.

We argue that applying a discursive approach in analysis of everyday speech, interviews and documentary data about prison education provides illumination about the subtle ways in which discourses of employability and therapisation in education speak through language and social relations. It also allows us to think about how young adults are 'reformed' by them, how they learn to act in the power relations that educational programmes targeted at them offer, as well as how they utilise them. We argue that by making visible the ways in which discourses regarding policies and educational programmes are constructed, it is possible to show the multiple ways in which subjects in prison education are constructed.



## Employability—Building skills for employment?

In order to understand discursive boundaries in which prison education practices and national policies operate, we first look at global policy and its ongoing discourses about employability and prison education. In the global policy context, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, or the Mandela Rules as they are more widely known, the purpose of imprisonment is stated as follows:

### *Rule 4*

1. *The purposes of a sentence of imprisonment or similar measures deprivative of a person's liberty are primarily to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. Those purposes can be achieved only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life.*
2. *To this end, prison administrations and other competent authorities should offer education, vocational training and work, as well as other forms of assistance that are appropriate and available, including those of a remedial, moral, spiritual, social and health-and sports-based nature. All such programmes, activities and services should be delivered in line with the individual treatment needs of prisoners. (UN 2006, 9)*

Later in the Mandela rules, in a section specifically about prison education, vocational education aimed especially at young prisoners is emphasised:

### *Rule 98*

2. *Vocational training in useful trades shall be provided for prisoners able to profit thereby and especially for young prisoners (ibid. 32)*

The European Prison rules follow the Mandela rules closely in regard to education and in both, it is suggested that the education in prisons should be arranged in cooperation with or preferably by local education institutions. Priority is given to providing basic numeracy and literary skills, in addition to stressing the role of vocational education and education targeted especially at young inmates. (Council of Europe 2006, 15; Nelson Mandela Rules 2006, 33). Accordingly, the Finnish Prison Act (2005) defines all activities offered in prison in the following way:

*The meaning of activities arranged and approved by the prison is to enhance prisoners' re-integration back into civil society:*

1. *by enforcing prisoners' readiness for a crime-free lifestyle;*
2. *by maintaining and enhancing prisoners' professional knowledge and skills with working abilities; and*
3. *by supporting prisoners in an illegal substance-free lifestyle.*

*Activities include work and education in other programmes which increase prisoners abilities (Prison Act 2005; 8th chapter, 1§)*

As can be seen in previous extracts, in general the emphasis of the legislation and policies concerning prison education is based on inmates' abilities and skills to acquire education or to work after incarceration. Emphasis on the basic skills needed in order to be part of workforce, such as literacy and numeric skills and skills learned through



prison work and vocational education and training, are seen as essential. Stress on a more therapeutic set of employability skills, such as self-awareness, self-esteem, emotional and social skills and information about different education and working opportunities in addition to the skills previously mentioned, are built into education curriculums and strategies (see for example, Curriculum for preparatory vocational education for students with special needs 2010). In addition, prison education is expected and required to produce abilities and skills that provide answers to working life's demands while it increases the students' employability.

*The goal of prison education is to help prisoners' employment after incarceration. Inmate's weakened working abilities; lack of employment skills and lack of personal working experience are challenges for arranging working-based education. (Strategy for Prison Education 2008-2012, 10)*

Accordingly, the goal of education is to produce skills that aim strictly to help integration from prison to working life. Within this discourse, related to emphasising employability the notion of young people in prison as people, who are 'naturally' the ones lacking these skills is also carried out. In the discourse, skills and properties attached to employability work as a crucial part of being able to become a part of civil society (Helne 2004; Kurki & Brunila 2014; see also Fejes 2010).

In the interviews with both prison staff and young people, prison education seemed to rely on ideals of self-responsibility and freedom of choice. Both participants and teachers stressed the importance of different life skills, goal-setting, life-management, social skills, and skills for applying for further education or employment. In the next extract, the classroom participants discuss prison education and what they saw as important for their situation:

*Young adult: If you go through the basic education [mandatory education at school], that doesn't help that much.*

*Young adult: Like this programme, everyone can set their own goals. [...] Everyone can do their own stuff, everyone has their personal goals they're trying to reach and plan. And like, [here in this programme it is asked] do you have a method to do that plan?*

*Young adult: Here (in the project) it's really all up to you. If you try really hard and work with yourself you can make it.*

*Young adult (when asked what kind of education they'd like to have if sufficient resources provided): There would be different education programmes and then there would be apprenticeship contract training for different professions, entrepreneurship, home economics, goals for life after prison and how to make it happen, physical education.*

In the discussion, traditional schooling provided by mandatory education tended to be dismissed as something irrelevant and futile for participants' situation. Instead the participants stressed individual-based orientation such as the importance of goal setting, self-responsibility, autonomy and hard work. By emphasising individual orientation and that they are able to set their own goals and follow them, young people made a distinction between 'traditional schooling' through which opportunities to affect the contents and goals of education were seen limited compared to the on-going prison education programme.

In many of the interviews conducted with participants and in the extracts above, the views of young adults were linked to the ideas of freedom and autonomy. Although goal

setting and individual choices were an important part in discussions, a prevalent insecurity was expressed about the situation, especially after the release.

*Young adult: Yeah and like that you could think, like how if you have been in prison how that affects the kind of jobs you can get for example. So, you could choose the ones for which the fact that you've been in prison doesn't affect the time you've been there. And I don't know if it does affect [the situation] that much in Finland but maybe it does.*

*Young adult: I don't think about the situation after release. Too difficult.*

In terms of subjectification, the ideal route in order to 'get back' to society seems to be one where young adults submit and master to the ideals of employability, where the chances for success in future life depend on individual effort and making the right choices on education pathways.

While visiting programmes and interviewing youth workers and teachers, it was noticeable that wider societal matters were constantly neglected or maybe they were just too hard or difficult to acknowledge. This rather obvious and expected tension relating to the individual plans and ambitions and the demands of society and working life was (too) easily regarded as a difficulty one would be able overcome. However, questions about whether the prison sentence affected working opportunities were prevalent in the discussion, often more explicitly than implicitly:

*Researcher: Have these subjects [in the education programme] been interesting then?*

*Student 1: Yeah, to some extent.*

*Student 2: They have been ok, that hygiene pass — working safety card, first aid card [...] Some of those cards will be useful in the future.*

*Student 3: At least we hope so.*

We noticed how various credentials and working-life qualification passes (such as a hygiene pass, a first aid pass, a working security pass) were given an important role in order to get specific skills that would facilitate securing employment after completion of the prison sentence. In the extract above, the discourse of a smooth transition from prison to working life with the help of education is nevertheless questioned with the comment "At least we hope so". We heard this and other similar comments while taking part in programmes, raising a question about the ideals of individuality and rational choice constructed when young adults negotiated with the discourse of employability (e.g Brunila et al. 2014; Fejes 2010).

Alongside the goals of striving towards freedom of choice and autonomy there was a rather implicit reminder of realism by 'realistic goals' and 'realistic possibilities' that participants were supposed to accept. In other words, participants were supposed to accept their pre-given position in the programme and in a wider society.

*Young adult: We're happy with the things we have.*

*Young adult: And we are not going to be crybabies.*

As a form of subjectification and in accordance with our previous results (e.g. Brunila 2012), youth workers, teachers and the young adults themselves submit to the activities and at the same time are persuaded to master the 'right' way of speaking. These discussions reminded one about how the act of mastery and submission is performed and the terms of becoming heard in different positions. In these activities, everybody is

trying their best but one operates in different realities and these realities do not necessarily meet.

We argue that this is also related to the constant lack of resources which was raised as a concern in many interviews. The overall educational opportunities in prisons are scarce and in fact access is hard to achieve despite the emphasis on education in criminal policies (Koski & Miettinen 2007; Mertanen 2013; Brunila 2012). Therefore, it might not be a surprise that young adults living in prison become aware that educational opportunities in prison practices cannot be taken for granted because even the opportunity to attend education programmes can be a privilege. By taking the position of being grateful, flexible and enthusiastic and acknowledging the importance of education, young people are taking place in prevailing discourses and therefore getting heard. Being realistic about options, ‘not going to be crybabies’, and accepting the current education programme as the best possible alternative in prison conditions, students face the limits that define their options as autonomous subjects in prison conditions. In order to be recognised, the young person must gain a mastery of the variety and nuances of these discourses and learn how to exist within the boundaries defined by them (Davies & al. 2001; St. Pierre 2000).

## Taking a turn inwards

### *Rule 105*

*Recreational and cultural activities shall be provided in all prisons for the benefit of the mental and physical health of prisoners. (UN, 2006)*

According to the Mandela rules, recreational and cultural activities in prison are a way to insure that the mental health of prisoners is taken care of. It is yet notable that this way of taking care of mental health is limited not only to talk of recreational activities, but also of education activities. Furthermore, in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults, the role of prison education is defined accordingly:

*Prison education may in its part support Prison Acts goals about enhancing inmates life management skills and steer to crime free life. (Ministry of Education 2008, 44.)*

In the same document (ibid, 45) it is stated that inmates often suffer from a range of learning difficulties and mental health issues, that in the document are considered to require specific attention in designing and conducting education. In our data, in both policy documents and in interviews, this consensus that most inmates suffer from some kind of learning disability was constantly present and worked as an unquestioned starting point in planning and conducting educational activities (see also Brunila 2012):

*Different learning difficulties and lack of basic skills hamper the employment of an individual and that is why tackling them, increasing knowledge and skills, strengthening self-esteem and learning how to know one’s own strengths are crucial. (Prisoners in Education – survey report, 60)*

The above report and our findings from other prison documents state that different learning difficulties are considered to have a crucial effect on employment, self-esteem and the possibility of living a crime-free life. In the same report, the connection

between learning difficulties and criminal behaviour is stated as being obvious (see also Brunila 2012):

*Good reading skills are crucial in today's society and difficulties with that have been said to be one possible aspect of development, which leads to criminal behaviour, especially if there are problems with intelligence and other psychosocial problems. [...] motivation towards reading diminishes and [...] make children look for alternative ways for success, which leads to negative attitudes towards school. (Prisoners in Education – survey report, 59)*

In this extract, criminal behaviour is attached to difficulties in reading and learning along with a negative attitude towards school and reading. This, other documents and interviews with youth workers and teachers all suggest constructing the young adult through individual-based problems and deficiencies.

When looking at our data as a whole, we were able to trace how the alliance of employability and therapisation work in creating deficiencies, imperfection, and failure in the young people's sense of self.

*In groups, we practice to recognise and express feelings in an accepting atmosphere. (Youth Project document, 2000).*

*Young adult: I learned to analyse and express my emotions. This is what we mostly did.*

As a consequence, as in the two extracts, it looks as if the role and contents of education seem to be shifting from 'traditional' subject-based education to more vague and hard-to-catch therapeutic education (see also Ecclestone & al. 2015; Furedi 2004; Brunila 2012). This is closely linked to the rise of the therapeutic ethos in society at large – instead of enhancing knowledge and skills, the focus of education seem to be more and more based on emotions, self-improvement and self-esteem.

However, in prison education this tendency is hardly new, but during recent years it has started to be combined with a more market-oriented approach. At first glance, the self-centredness of therapeutic education as a discursive form of power may seem quite far from the employability discourses involving flexibility, competitiveness, performance, efficacy, and the urge to succeed in order to cope with the uncertainty and unpredictability of contemporary life and the market economy (Brunila, Mertanen & Mononen *forthcoming*). However, despite their differences, these discourses strengthen the market-oriented spirit of restructuring education. The concern with people's psychological wellbeing has also been given new credibility by the political demand that education must show measurable benefits (Ecclestone & al. 2005).

Several researchers have previously argued that there is a vast array of literature arguing about the rise of diagnostic practices in society (Brunila et al. 2014; see also Conrad 1992; Furedi 2004; Harwood 2011). In other words, therapisation influences education to interpret problems through the prism of illness.

*Our customers become so relieved and happy when they get these statements saying that they have learning difficulties or ADHD. (Youth worker)*

In our data, as in previous research, diagnoses were described as soothing and relieving by teachers and youth workers while they were subjected to little critical attention. This is how diagnosis itself has the capacity to relieve anxiety (see also Brunila et al. 2014). In addition, therapisation increases the call for therapeutic authority that actively shapes

and transforms subjectivities. In such ways therapisation nurtures and directs these individual strivings, ‘the pedagogies of self-fulfilment’ (Rose 1998, 17). This can easily lead to an idea that young people prove their ability and competence as students and employable subjects through a diagnosis. In accordance with Frank Furedi, this is also the way therapeutic culture works - towards a state where diagnosis itself begins to relieve anxiety and uncertainty on the personal level (see also Furedi 2004).

The activities of the education programmes represented therapeutic and individual-based techniques. They included various therapeutic discussions, surveys, measurements, and tests. One example of the activities used in programmes we followed is the Thinking Skills in the Workplace programme, originally a British cognitive intervention programme that aimed to reduce recidivism and help inmates to enter the labour market. In the curriculum it is stated:

*A lack of cognitive and social skills has been discovered among inmates. [...] Practising and enhancing cognitive skills (critical and logical thinking and perception) help criminals in preparing for a good life alongside employability. (Thinking Skills in the Workplace curriculum)*

By enhancing cognitive skills, the above curriculum suggests that it is possible to be successful in life and increase the criminal’s employability. The programme enhancing cognitive skills is built on six sessions with topics such as ‘thoughts, feelings and behaviour’, ‘changing faulty thinking at the workplace’, and ‘social skills at the workplace’. The working method is based on group exercises, through which students discuss things with their teachers. The programme was quite enthusiastically emphasised:

*Student 1: But there have been some topics where you learned something useful.*

*Researcher: For example?*

*Student 1: Well, thinking skills in the workplace.*

*Researcher: What was that again?*

*Student 1: Well, it’s like... how would I say —*

*Student 2: Thoughts, feelings, fears.*

*Student 1: Like that you think a little before, like, what are you doing.*

*Student 3: And then there has been that one must consider others and...*

*Student 1: Yeah*

*Student 2: and others feelings and thoughts: How to solve a problem and ....like in a really savvy way.*

In this extract, the importance of ‘thinking skills’ was apparent, emphasising not only knowledge skills but also managing emotions and social situations. However, the interviews, interventions, and therapeutic contents were not always accepted without struggle.

*Teacher: And this is experienced as a really challenging as a topic, it’s very exhausting when you have to reflect on yourself and your self-image.*

*Researcher: Do you mean there’s resistance to this kind of stuff?*

*Teacher: Yes, like why this stuff again and I know myself already and I know who I am and I know myself and think like that, but little by little it comes out here and there.*

The extract above reminded us of how the act of mastery and submission is performed and what the terms of becoming heard in different positions are. Possibly because of that, during the interviews and visits to the educational programmes there was hardly any straightforward criticism of the activities that were provided. The tensions between the aims of the programmes and the young adults' own interests were only indirectly evident. There were a couple of occasions when participants challenged the contents of the programme, for example by describing the activities as brainwashing. This could be interpreted as the young person refusing to follow the right kind of script.

Based on our joint analysis, employability and therapisation operate with the help of authorities who help in developing young people into a particular form of personhood by positioning young adults as targets of various kinds of demands and expectations in order to educate them to be more self-responsible and, through this, to become more emotionally skilled or emotionally literate. As an alliance, employability and therapisation complement each other in terms of autonomy and freedom, by enabling young adults to realise what is supposedly good for them. Through a process of subjectification, they actively take up as their own the terms of their subjection. As a consequence, young adults' autonomy is limited to a question of speaking in accordance with what is expected (see also Brunila 2012, 2014). As a form of power, this means addressing young people as if they were selves of a particular type, with similar kinds of thoughts, feelings, and hopes. The biggest problem here seems to be that the language made available by these discourses tends to disguise normative views about desirable attributes, attitudes and dispositions. Furthermore, the alliance significantly changes ideas related to knowledge by reducing it to knowledge about feelings and the coaching of appropriate emotional responses.

## Conclusions

As Ball (2013; see also Youdell 2009) suggests, we should look at the canvas of the whole society by focusing on the people who are pushed to the margins—the ones that are seen as being 'outside' the picture of being a 'normal', productive citizen. As a result, interventions targeted to those on the margins make it possible to see what is desirable on the 'inside' (see also Helne 2004). In this paper, we wanted to highlight the fact that what is shaping education is not just individuality, competitiveness and efficiency, but concerns even more implicit changes in the ways in which we perceive human subjectivities.

Foucault (1977) states in "Discipline and Punish" that prison as an institution has been able to alienate itself partially from the 'rest' of society and can be seen as an ambivalent space where the rights of belonging are always negotiated and assessed time after time. In this article, we have given specific consideration to educational programmes for young people in closed prisons, and how discourses of employability and therapisation of education shapes, forces and seduces them to accept this ambivalence. By combining our joint ethnographic data with a discursive approach, our focus was to find out how politics and practices of prison education operate.

We have shown some of the ways that the discourses of employability and therapisation operate by reproducing the idea of prison and its inhabitants as something outside civil society. These discourses work by positioning young people as targets of various demands and expectations in order to train them to be more self-responsible and,

through this, more emotionally skilled or emotionally literate. However, the problem here is that the alliance of employability and therapisation tends to disguise normative views about desirable being and doing. It also seems to reduce knowledge from basic skills learned in basic and vocational education to knowledge about feelings and education to the coaching of appropriate emotional responses.

In the market-oriented society, the ideal employable self is self-responsible, enterprising, flexible, and self-centred. Based on this article, increasing individuals' employability seems to be the key aspect in education for people thought to be 'at risk' of social exclusion after getting 'back' to society from prison. The educational opportunities, freedom of choice, and acquiring at least some qualifications tend to be a requirement, and without qualifications, individuals' employability is questioned. Obtaining educational qualifications no longer only explains about an individual's ability to learn and process information, but about the ability to be part of working and social life.

In this article, we argue that discourses of employability work with therapisation in building the subjects for labour markets by defining a cultural script about appropriate feelings and responses to events, and a set of associated practices through which inmates make sense of themselves and others (see also Ecclestone et al. 2015). Yet these skills enhancing education never fulfil their promises: continuous striving for self-realisation, self-esteem, and self-fulfilment engenders an ever-present fear of not learning and developing quickly enough.

We connect education and training in prisons to the marketization of education. Ball and Youdell argue that marketization may lead to a further division between socio-economic groups and to a 'spiral of declining' to those who are less fortunate in the competition between schools and students. There is a danger that both the private and the public sectors will neglect the students who for one reason or another cannot participate or survive in the school system (Ball & Youdell 2009; Ball 2013). In addition, therapeutic discourses also enable governments to legitimise the expansion of their activities by sponsoring new privatised forms of therapeutic pedagogy and expertise in the education and training of young people.

In conclusion, the alliance of employability and therapisation in education enables one to look at prisoner-students as citizens in-the-making. Through education, work and training they have to embrace the ideal subject of the 'free' citizen who walks through life with a basket filled with choices made without the annoying inconvenience of everyday material realities, inequalities, and obstacles. But somehow surprisingly the education made possible for them is not about mathematics or literature, but is an ambivalent combination of goal-setting, freedom of choice, and self-responsibility mixed with self-esteem enhancement, and thinking and emotional skills. In practice, the result for an individual seems to be a 'vicious circle' where the young person is constantly obliged to improve their ever-fragile and vulnerable selves in perpetual competition with others and thus the risk of not achieving what is expected is ever present.

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