

The Prison Education Project in Scotland

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Abstract: *The Prison Education Project (PEP) is the largest prison education program of its kind in the United States. With the assistance of 2,400 university student and faculty volunteers, PEP has served approximately 7,000 inmates in 14 correctional facilities in California since 2011. By providing academic, life skills, and career development programming, PEP aims to educate, empower, and transform the lives of incarcerated individuals. Since 2014, this program has taken a group of veteran volunteers to an international destination to teach courses in prisons in Uganda, England, and Scotland. This article will focus on the PEP-Scotland experience. Eleven PEP instructors traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland to teach courses in HMP Addiewell. There were 10 African American and one Asian American instructors on the PEP team. Nearly 100% of the inmates in their classes were white. This added an interesting dynamic to the experience. There were eleven 105-minute courses taught over a five-day period. This article will briefly discuss the genesis of this project, the content of the courses that were taught, the international prison education movement, the spirit of volunteerism, and the post-course outcome data. At the end of the courses, the in-custody students were given a survey, which contained three closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The in-custody students' responses to the open-ended survey question describe this experience in ways in which this author could not—with vivid clarity, depth, and breadth.*

Keywords: *Prison Education Project, Scottish Prison Service, HMP Addiewell*

Introduction

The Prison Education Project (PEP) was founded in 2011. With the assistance of 2,400 university student and faculty volunteers, PEP has served approximately 7,000 incarcerated individuals in 14 correctional facilities in California. PEP has become the largest prison education program of its kind in the United States. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and PEP have embraced a progressive and innovative approach to supplementing and expanding educational opportunities for in-custody students. By providing academic, life skills, and career development programming, PEP aims to educate, empower, and transform the lives of incarcerated individuals. The goal of PEP is to create a “Prison-to-School Pipeline” and provide in-custody students with the cognitive tools necessary to function as productive citizens. Our multi-layered approach enhances human development, reduces recidivism, saves resources, and allows participants to ultimately contribute to the economic and civic life of California.

Since 2014, each summer PEP takes a group of veteran volunteers to an international destination to volunteer in a prison: Uganda, England, and Scotland. Each of these international experiences has given PEP volunteers a chance to increase the breadth and depth of their knowledge on the dynamics of prison education from a comparative perspective. In order to be eligible to participate in the international prison education program, volunteers must have committed to at least two PEP semesters. The international excursion is a reward for this com-

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mitment to the prison education cause.

During May of 2019, I took a group of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, students to London on a study abroad trip, during which they volunteered for London-based non-profit organizations for one week. During this time, I was invited by L.J. Flanders, the formerly incarcerated author of the book *Cell Workout*, to visit Her Majesty's Prison Addiewell. I met him at the Brixton facility on our visit there the year before. I visited the Addiewell facility with Flanders to watch him demonstrate his *Cell Workout* routines. I saw this as an opportunity to engage the Addiewell staff about bringing a group of PEP volunteers to the facility to teach later that summer. I asked, and their education staff enthusiastically said, "Yes." However, months before our scheduled visit, there was mayhem at Addiewell. The prison had garnered the attention of the BBC and other news outlets for violent attacks on staff, drug raids on warders' homes, the attempted murder of a senior officer, as well as tensions between prisoners (McKay, 2019).

This chaos took place on the non-education wings of the facility, and I decided to take my volunteers to the Addiewell facility and focus strictly on educating, empowering, and inspiring the in-custody students. Three of the volunteers were previously incarcerated in some of the most violent prisons in America. The others had volunteered in some of the most chaotic prisons in California. Given the recent mayhem in Addiewell, the eleven volunteers that traveled there to teach were the ideal instructors, because their previous experiences in these settings made them fearless. The Addiewell education staff placed some of their incarcerated students with the most intransigent behavior in the PEP classes, and even this population was moved and transformed by our instructors.

One of the most interesting dynamics of this experience was the racial dynamics. There were ten African Americans and one Asian American instructor. Almost 100% of the in-custody students in Addiewell were white. There seemed to be a bond with the in-custody students and the instructors around the theme of oppression. Being incarcerated, they are oppressed and they seemed to be keenly aware of the historic oppression of African Americans in the U.S. In fact, there was a poster display in one of the Addiewell classrooms that meticulously explained the triangular slave trade. In their gym and art classroom hung paintings of black icons such as Muhammad Ali, Tupac Shakur, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Nelson Mandela, and Usain Bolt. I had the opportunity to sit in all of the classes and the in-custody students displayed no resistance to being taught by this group. The in-custody students actually signed up for the "Hip-Hop Culture" course because they were intrigued by this musical art form, which was created by young blacks from the inner-cities of the United States.

The Scottish Prison Service and HMP Addiewell

The motto of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is "Unlocking Potential Transforming Lives." SPS was established in 1993 by the Scottish government. An SPS Framework Document was written by Scottish Ministers, which outlines the objectives and the resources of Scottish prisons. The SPS is legally required to deliver custodial and rehabilitative services to their incarcerated population. The principal objective of SPS is to:

Contribute to making Scotland Safer by Protecting the Public and Reducing Reoffending. The SPS aims to achieve this by ensuring delivery of secure custody, safe and ordered prisons, decent standards of care and opportunities for prisoners to develop in a way that help them reintegrate into the community on release. (Scottish Prison Service, 2019)

Prison education in Scottish prisons is contracted by SPS to external providers. In the context of post-secondary education, contracts are given to Colleges of Further Education, which specialize in vocational education. New College Lanarkshire and Fife College hold the contracts to provide post-compulsory education in the prison for SPS. The contracts mandate

that these colleges provide literacy and mathematics, health and wellbeing, expressive arts and social studies, and information communication technology courses (Galloway, 2016).

There are 13 publicly managed prisons and two privately managed prisons in Scotland. HMP Addiewell is one of the privately managed prisons. It is managed by Sodexo under the authority of the Scottish Prison Service. The facility was built in 2008 and houses all levels of incarcerated individuals. Addiewell houses 700 adult males. It is located between the country's two biggest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh. When it was built, Addiewell was the only correctional facility in Scotland that was dedicated to education. Sodexo is mandated by the SPS to offer 40 hours "purposeful activity" courses per week. These courses are divided into three main categories: Learning and Skills, Jobs, and Programmed Interventions. In-custody students receive a modest payment for attending classes. According to the prison's homepage:

Addiewell is designed as a 'learning' prison, where offenders can address their offending behaviour and the circumstances which led to their imprisonment.

The learning aspect aims to improve their employability prospects, their well-being, and community support networks, leading to a reduction in reoffending. (Scottish Prison Service, Addiewell, 2019)

In January 2019, the Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, found the relationship between the staff to be "positive and respectful," and she stated that the prison is "well poised for its next era." Her major criticism of Addiewell was the shortage in staffing. It is challenging to retain staff at Addiewell (BBC News, 2019).

We found the Addiewell education staff to be the consummate professionals. They had established respectful relations with the in-custody population and created a wholesome learning environment for them to transform themselves.

In terms of the logistics of the PEP-Scotland initiative, I emailed a group of PEP veterans inviting them to sign up for PEP-Scotland. There were eleven veterans who signed up. These individuals were instructed on the dates of the trip and of the mandatory orientation in Edinburgh. They each secured their own lodging. The Addiewell education staff wanted the PEP team to teach 105-minute courses in the facility twice per day for five days. We agreed that the most useful and exciting courses would be: "Introduction to Soft Skills," "Self-Empowerment," "Creative Expression," and "Hip-Hop Culture." Flyers containing an outline of the different courses were given to the in-custody population in Addiewell so that they could sign up. The following is an overview of the things that were taught in the facility:

Introduction to Soft Skills: Communication Skills, Nonverbal Communication, Conflict Resolution, Emotional Intelligence, Adaptability, Problem-Solving, Critical Observation

Self-Empowerment: Self-Care, Reading, Writing, Journaling, Soft Skills, Forgiveness of Others and Self, Introspection, Reflection, Meditation, Positivity

Creative Expression: Self-Expression, Creativity, Artistic Practice, Expressing Impulsive Thoughts Through Art, Brainstorming, Imagination, Giving Shape to Ideas

Hip-Hop Culture: The History of Hip-Hop, The Art of Storytelling, Spoken Word, Lyrics & Politics, Battle Rapping, Conscious Rap, Metaphors, Simile, Hyperbole

The instructors taught six courses from 10:00-11:45 a.m. and five courses from 13:20-14:45. There were three Soft Skills courses, a Hip-Hop course, a Creative Expression, and a Self-Empowerment course taught in the morning. For the later session, there were two Soft Skills courses, a Self-Empowerment, a Creative Expression, and a Hip-Hop course taught.

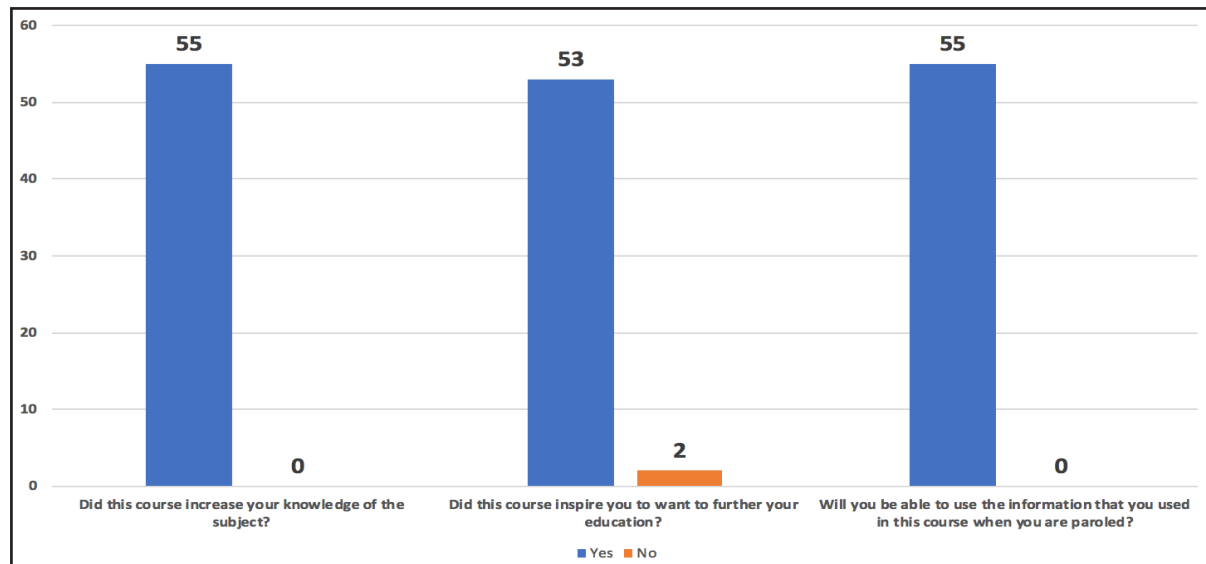
At the end of the courses, the in-custody students were given a survey, which contained three closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The in-custody students' responses to the open-ended survey question describe this experience with vivid clarity, depth, and breadth.

Outcomes

The “Introduction to Soft Skills” data are the aggregate responses of five courses taught. The Self-Empowerment, Creative Expression, and Hip-Hop course data are the aggregate responses of two courses taught. There as an open-ended response from each person that completed the survey. The author included a selection of responses – per course¹ –.

Figure 1

PEP-Scotland: Introduction to Soft Skills, HMP Addiewell, Summer 2019



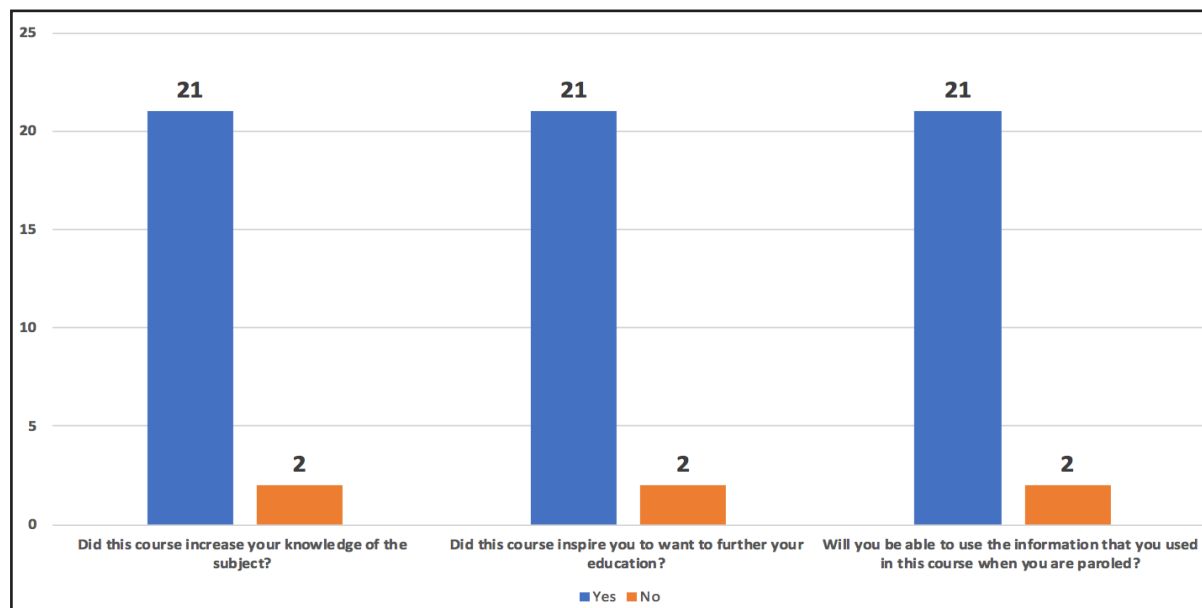
Introduction to Soft Skills Post-Course Comments

- "I really enjoyed this course. The instructors were really inspiring. They taught things that will help me move forward and better my life. Thank you."
- "Yes, I really liked this course, and I think it will help other prisoners as it has helped me."
- "I thought this course was really good. It opened my mind to how I am as a person. It was good to look at my strengths and weaknesses. Great Course, Great Teachers, Much Respect!"
- "I will take a lot away from this experience and use it to my benefit when I am released into the community. Thanks for the help."
- "I think it was great and I think prisons should do more of these types of classes in the future because I learned more about myself doing the color chart thing and I was amazed my personality was all the colors: blue, green, orange, gold—unbelievable."

¹ View the full survey results.

Figure 2

PEP-Scotland: Self-Empowerment, HMP Addiewell, Summer 2019

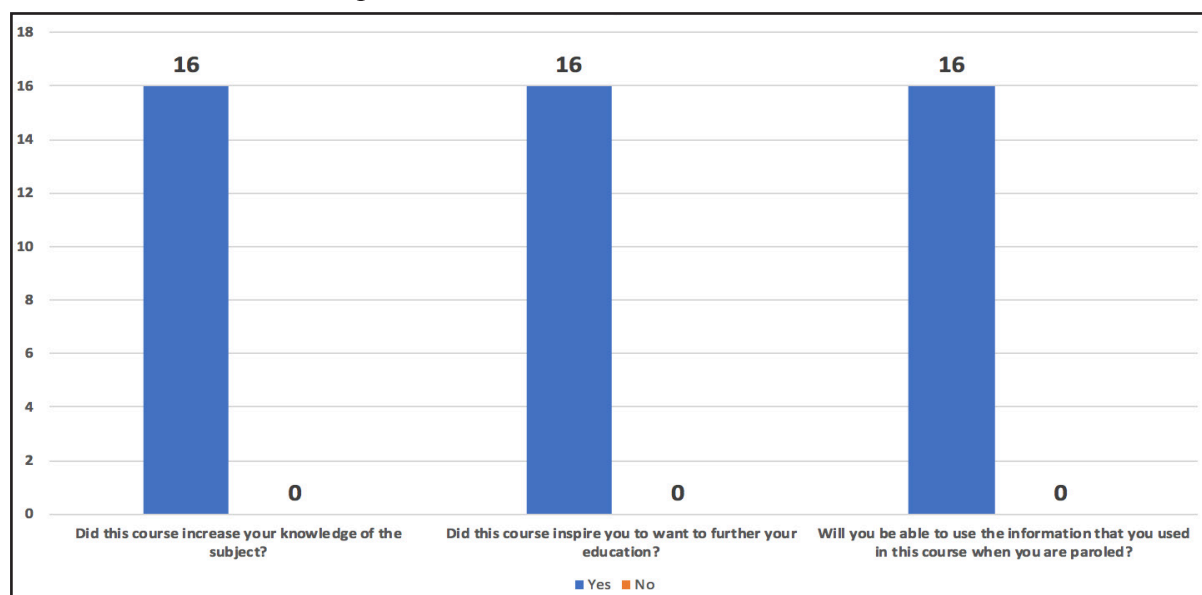


Self-Empowerment Post-Course Comments

- "This course is very interesting. It has helped me to be a little more selfish of me. It has taught me to love myself and those around me, and to have more confidence in myself. Also, to believe in myself more and it's going to help me grow. Believe in my dreams. To help me change and grow as a person."
- "I think this class encourages self-reflection, self-evaluation, in a non-biased manner with necessary and essential life skills to help further individual development in areas we all need to be more self-conscious of...inducing self-empowerment."
- "Too short; more interaction. Also, the programme seems reactive so on that basis what plans (if any) does the programme have in public awareness, education, and policy development with governments?"
- "This week has been so good e.g. communication, problem-solving, team work, and information to help with the future."

Figure 3

PEP-Scotland: Creative Expression, HMP Addiewell, Summer 2019

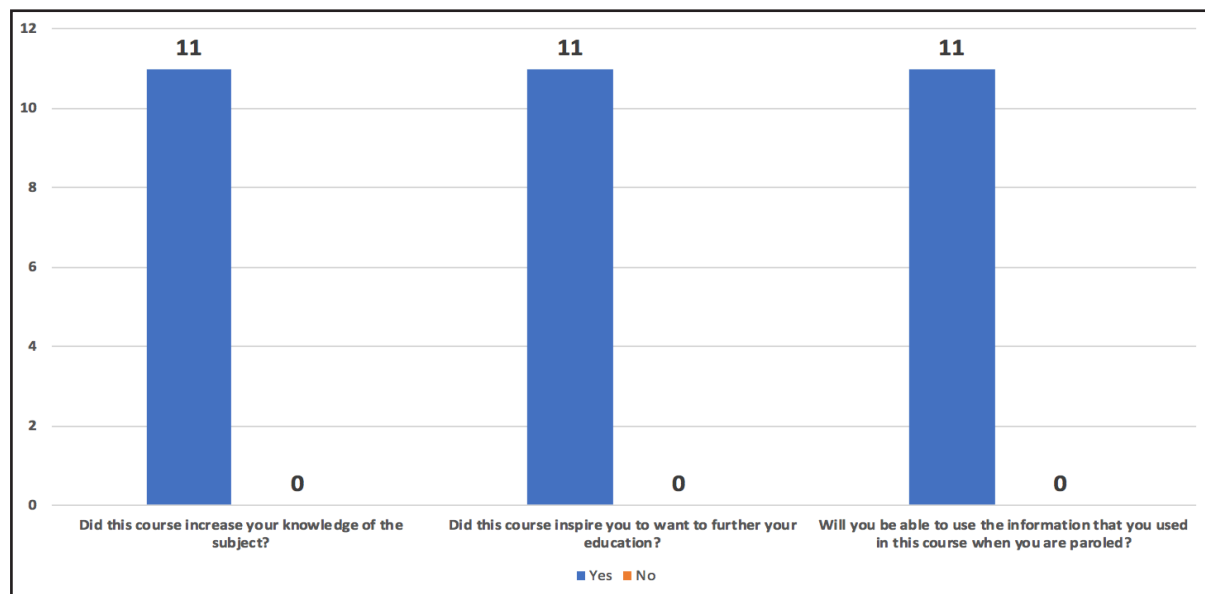


Creative Expression Post-Course Comments

- "I think this course was good, as I am not all that good at expressing my feelings and talking about them and putting my feelings on paper. Thanks."
- "I found this course to be inspirational. I learned a lot about myself."
- "Very interesting and inspiring. People like you guys are the best in society simply for caring and giving inmates both a chance and the benefit of the doubt."
- "I think this was a very friendly and heartfelt course. It showed that the people cared and they inspired me to care more. Thank you to you and all of your team."
- "I learned so much about myself and where my strengths lay and how to improve my weaknesses. The teachers were first class and I hope they return soon."

Figure 4

PEP-Scotland: Hip-Hop Culture, HMP Addiewell, Summer 2019



Hip-Hop Culture Post-Course Comments

- "The class was brilliant and the teachers were inspirational and a pleasure to work with."
- "I really enjoyed this course. I feel this is something that should be done in jails across Scotland. Very good—10/10."
- "Fantastic. Your energy is awesome. I enjoyed your style of teaching and you taught me much. I know we'll cross paths again! Kindest Regards."
- "It was really good. Good fun and interesting."
- "The course was positive, good, and relaxing."

Conclusion

The "Reciprocal Reflex" and the "Feedback Loop" are present in the in-custody students' responses to the courses that were taught. A few of our PEP-Scotland instructors cried when they read about the impact that their course had on the in-custody students. The meaningful feedback will surely motivate many of them to return to Addiewell with the next PEP-Scotland team and to focus on having the same deep impact.

PEP volunteers used the power of words to transform. Words are the most powerful way in which we can transform the internal human condition. If we doubt the transformative power of words, we should ask ourselves how we feel when someone compliments, congratulates, or praises us for an accomplishment. Words have the capacity to empower and transform the incarcerated population into being more confident, more inspired, and more hopeful about

their future.

In the prisons such as Addiewell, when volunteers do not have access to an overhead projector, PowerPoint presentations, or the internet, they have their words. And, it is these words that have the extraordinary potential to educate, empower, and enlighten the incarcerated population. Beyond the academic content presented by the volunteers, it is the power of other exchanges that inspire the incarcerated population. The greetings, acknowledgments, and affirmations of a job well done validate the in-custody students and the volunteers in a priceless way. This is an example of how words help to create an exciting and dynamic learning environment that is based on reciprocity.

In thinking about ways to motivate volunteers with limited resources, it is important for leaders to think about the importance of words. If they are used in a careful and thoughtful way, these words can do what money cannot do, which is transform the spirit and soul of people.

PEP-Scotland was an extraordinary experience for the Addiewell staff, PEP instructors, and in-custody students. The experience transcended trivial differences such as race and nationality. It was inspirational to witness how an intense, collective focus on human development could have such phenomenal impact on everyone involved.

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