

## INTRODUCTION

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More than a century ago Victor Hugo was famously quoted saying: «He who opens a school door, closes a prison». If this idea was true in the social conditions of the late 19th century it is very much alive and relevant in the wake of the 21st century. This idea is behind the research presented in this book, the product of a collaborative work between four educational institutions in four European countries and four penitentiary institutions in the same countries. All aspiring to the same notion: that education can act as a preventing mechanism against deviant behaviour. Indeed, education has the potential to strengthen individuals who have committed crimes in such a way so as to act as a shield against re-offending.

As indicated in the subsequent chapter the provision of some forms of education for prisoners is a basic feature of most penitentiary systems offering a great variety of skills and training in order to facilitate re-integration into society and to compensate for the social costs of deviant behaviour. The same chapter provides an overview of the current situation regarding prison education in Europe, and the rationale upon which the Pebble research project was based.

Chapter 2 presents the common feature of the educational profile of prisoners and discusses the challenges when planning training opportunities in prisons. This inmate profile is often a decisive factor that is linked with crime and recidivism.

The next chapter (Ch. 3) reports the relevant literature concerning the Training Needs Analysis and discusses the way with which the macro level (mission of the prison administration) and micro (individual prisoners who express it in respect to their path of re-education to support and drive) may be combined and applied in view of context constraints. The chapter concludes with a case study of Pescara prison (the *Casa Circondariale* in Pescara) where this approach was implemented and empirical data on training demand management process (2013-2015) are presented.

Chapter 4 presents the framework for learning a foreign language together with the need for inmates to learn both the language of the hosting country and other foreign languages while Chapter 5 discusses

the pedagogical methodology chosen to deliver a basic skills curriculum content for inmates. A blended learning approach was thought to be the best model for delivering an educational programme in the penitentiary system. After presenting the basic characteristics of a blended learning for facilitating a strong instructor-learner interaction in the learning process it suggests why blended learning, is ideal for prison education and specifically for a basic skills curriculum. This addresses the reality, as suggested in Chapter 6, of the fact that low levels of basic skills among the adult population in global scale. In fact as the chapter reveals, in Europe, this phenomenon involves at least 80 million citizens.

The book moves then to Chapter 7 with a presentation of how the Pebble programme was evaluated in order to provide partners with the kind of feedback that would make it applicable in a wider context. As suggested in that Chapter the evaluation process which was followed throughout the two years of the project (2013-2015) concluded with valuable findings and recommendations for future development, optimisation and improvement. The book concludes with a chapter on how International networks may support education in prison.

As a final comment in this introduction we may argue that such initiatives should be considered as a major social investment whose returns, even though not immediate, could have a lasting effect in most societies. Thus, policy makers and people with authority to implement penitentiary policies should consider the findings very seriously when planning educational programmes and setting up institutional frameworks for implementing them.