LEARNING PROGRAMME

Prison Education: Theory and Practice Between Realism and Idealism

5-DAY COURSE

25 learning hours | Course programme

Prison Education: Theory and Practice Between Realism and Idealism – 5-Day Course

Introduction and Description

This course provides a comprehensive and critically informed examination of prison education as a pedagogical, social and ethical endeavour situated at the intersection of criminology, educational theory, human rights discourse and public policy. Prison education occupies a paradoxical position: it unfolds within institutions historically associated with punishment, control and exclusion, yet aspires to promote personal development, social reintegration, civic participation and desistance from crime. The programme therefore engages participants in interrogating the tensions between realism—embodied in institutional constraints, security protocols, structural inequalities and limited autonomy—and idealism—expressed through humanistic, rehabilitative and transformative aims.

Drawing on contemporary research and comparative international perspectives, the course analyses the historical evolution and socio-political functions of incarceration, the dynamics of recidivism, and the role of education in shaping identity reconstruction, agency and pathways out of offending. Attention is given to the complex profiles of incarcerated learners, many of whom experience overlapping vulnerabilities such as low literacy, disrupted schooling, socio-economic marginalisation, migration histories, trauma exposure and neurodiversity. Participants explore how such factors interact with institutional cultures to influence learning motivation, engagement and behavioural regulation.

Pedagogically, the course foregrounds evidence-informed approaches—trauma-responsive, strengths-based, restorative, inclusive and dialogic—capable of fostering trust, dignity and meaningful participation within restrictive settings. It examines the dilemmas educators face when balancing pedagogical integrity with procedural constraints, navigating power dynamics, and sustaining professional wellbeing in high-stress environments. Through case studies, international models, and field-based learning opportunities, participants evaluate both the enabling conditions and inherent limitations of correctional education systems.

A significant emphasis is placed on reintegration and desistance-oriented strategies, highlighting the importance of educational continuity, community partnerships, and inter-agency collaboration between teachers, psychologists, social workers and correctional staff. Participants develop practical competencies in designing adaptable curricula, implementing accessible learning experiences, and supporting adult and young offenders in pathways toward autonomy, employability and social inclusion. Ultimately, the course equips educators to critically reflect on their professional role, apply insights from prison education to mainstream contexts, and contribute to

broader preventive and inclusive educational ecosystems that address the structural factors leading to marginalisation, exclusion and contact with the criminal justice system.

Methodology and Assessment

The course employs an integrated methodology combining theoretical input, experiential learning, educational visits, collaborative workshops and structured reflection. Participants engage with academic literature, analyse case studies, and observe real-world practices to develop a multidimensional understanding of prison education. Practical sessions emphasise micro-teaching, adaptive lesson design and ethical decision-making in constrained environments. Learning is supported through peer dialogue, individual coaching and reflective journaling. Assessment is continuous and formative, based on participants' engagement in discussions, collaborative project design, and final presentations demonstrating the integration of theoretical knowledge with pedagogical application.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

Understanding Prison Education & Its Contexts

• Critically analyse the purposes, functions and contradictions of modern penitentiary systems and their implications for educational practice.
• Explain key concepts—including incarceration, rehabilitation, recidivism and desistance—and evaluate how they shape learners' trajectories and institutional cultures.
• Examine how structural inequalities, trauma histories and marginalisation patterns influence incarcerated learners' identities, needs and educational engagement.

Pedagogy, Learning Design & Ethical Praxis

• Apply evidence-based pedagogical approaches suited to correctional environments, including trauma-informed, restorative, inclusive and culturally responsive methods.
• Design accessible, meaningful and adaptable learning activities that account for restricted resources, diverse competencies and the socio-emotional conditions of prison education.
• Reflect critically on ethical dilemmas, power dynamics and professional boundaries inherent in teaching within closed institutions.

Collaboration, Reintegration & Transferability

• Evaluate models of inter-agency collaboration between educators, social workers, psychologists and correctional staff, identifying enablers and barriers to effective practice.
• Assess reintegration and desistance-focused educational strategies and propose pathways that support learners' transition back into society.
• Translate insights from correctional settings into prevention-oriented, inclusive approaches applicable in mainstream schools, particularly for students at risk of exclusion.

Preparation

After registration participants will receive pre-course questionnaire which will be used by the trainer to learn about participants' teaching backgrounds and to assess their exact needs. Before the beginning of the course a basic reading list will be suggested to participants to prepare for the training. Participants will also be asked to prepare a presentation about themselves, their professional context and their culture. The presentation will be presented on the first day of the course to facilitate networking opportunities. Participants will receive information about the country they are going to visit in order to prepare them for their cultural experience.

Follow up

After the course participants will be asked to share what they have learned with the rest of the staff in their schools. Further books and articles to deepen the topic and contacts with some other practitioners all over Europe and in the world will be suggested by the trainer. The methods shared and explored and the bibliography given will allow the participants to complete and improve their educational path.

Certificate

Certificate complies with the guidelines of the Erasmus+ programme and includes the topic, number of didactic hours, dates and location of the course. We can list the record of learning outcomes on the Europass Mobility Document on request of participants. In case a participant requires a specific format of certificate we can accommodate that if requested at least one week before the start of the course. It is necessary to attend at least 80% of the hours in order to receive the certificate.

Accommodation

We do not directly offer accommodation and subsistence and participants are responsible for organizing it by themselves.

Paperwork

We also provide all the support with paperwork you might need for your Erasmus+ project documentation such as mobility agreement and registration letter.

Fee: 400 €

Cancelation policy

We have a flexible cancellation policy in force at the moment and you can cancel your registration up to 30 days before the course and receive a full refund. In case you don't cancel the registration more than 30 days before you will not receive any refunds, but you will be able to choose to attend any other confirmed course session later (within 6 months) without any additional costs. In case you are not able to travel, your school can send someone else to take instead of you and you can change the details of the participant any time before the start of the course at no additional cost.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME (25 didactic hours - 5*45min per day) Monday to Friday	
Day 1	Foundations of Prison Education: Concepts, Contexts & Ethical Frames
09.00 - 09.45	Introductions & Icebreakers
09.45 - 10.30	Course Overview & Learning Agreement
10.30 - 11.15	Understanding the institutional landscape
11.15 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.15	Vulnerable populations and educational disparities
12.15 - 13.00	Ethical considerations and educator positioning
Day 2	Pedagogies, Didactics & Learning Design for Correctional Settings

09.00 - 09.45	Evidence-based teaching practices suitable for prison education
09.45 - 10.30	Designing meaningful learning experiences
10.30 - 11.15	Inclusive and accessible teaching
11.15 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.15	Micro-teaching
12.15 - 13.00	Peer feedback and reflection circle
Day 3	Education in Practice: Cross-Sector Collaboration & Institutional Realities
09.00 - 09.45	The multi-professional ecosystem
09.45 - 10.30	Working within constraints of infrastructure and security
10.30 - 11.15	Classroom management in high-risk settings
11.15 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.15	Navigating restricted access to resources, technology, and learning materials
12.15 - 13.00	Developing low-tech and no-tech learning solutions
Day 4	Case Studies, Best Practices & Applied Project Work
09.00 - 09.45	International case studies
09.45 - 10.30	Barriers, failures, and unintended consequences
10.30 - 11.15	Navigating institutional resistance, burnout, and systemic inequalities
11.15 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.15	Designing a mini-programme for an imaginary correctional facility
12.15 - 13.00	Facilitated peer critique focused on ethics, feasibility, and learner-centredness
Day 5	Reintegration, Desistance & the Educator's Transformative Role
09.00 - 09.45	Reintegration and desistance-focused education
09.45 - 10.30	Preparing the final presentations and individual support
10.30 - 11.15	Final presentations and feedback
11.15 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.15	Evaluation & Reflection
12.15 - 13.00	Validation of learning outcomes and certification

*This is only a tentative timetable. The exact hours or the course might differ and will be announced for each session 2 weeks before the start. However, there will always be a total of 5 didactic hours per day and all will be in line with the Erasmus+ quality standards. The trainer might slightly modify the content in response to the needs of the group.
**Cultural and social programmes will be organized in addition to the academic programme. The exact cultural and social programme depends on the location, season, weather, etc.