

## Being an Educator: Norwegian Prison Officers' Conception of their Role Regarding Incarcerated Persons' Education

HELENE MARIE K. EIDE  
University of Bergen, Norway

KARIANE THERESE WESTRHEIM  
University of Bergen, Norway

**Abstract:** *Despite the fact that prison officers are close to the incarcerated persons in everyday life in prison, and therefore will have great impact and influence on the incarcerated persons' understanding of and motivation for education and training in prison, we still know little about prison officers understanding of their professional role regarding incarcerated persons' education. This article will investigate how Norwegian prison officers understand their importance as educational actors through the following research question: How do Norwegian prison officers understand their role as actors in incarcerated persons' education? Building on qualitative interviews with 16 Norwegian prison officers' the article analyses the role of prison officers from a broad educational perspective (Biesta, 2009; 2014; 2015; OECD, 2005; 2019). The analysis reveals that prison officers conduct work that enables incarcerated persons to master their own lives during the execution of and after completing their sentences. Although prison officers play a significant role in incarcerated persons' education in prison, they are partly unaware of this role, and find that their own role is not in a collaborative relationship with other actors who facilitate incarcerated persons' education.*

**Keywords:** *Prison officers, Prison education, Informal learning, Formal learning*

### Introduction

Our understanding of education and teaching in prison is based on studies of educators' professional practices (Lukacova, Lukac, Lukac, Pirohova, & Hartmannova, 2018; Patrie, 2017; Hawley, Murphy, & Souto-Otero, 2012; 2013; Hurkmans & Gillijns, 2012; Eggleston, 1991). One example is the Nordic Council of Ministers (2005, s. 18) which emphasises that an educator is an actor who works with incarcerated persons in practice, and who must therefore be familiar with the incarcerated persons' starting point in order to offer adapted education. In his review of European prison education, King (2019) points out that "Educators should work in collaboration with prison staff and other agencies to support and augment other custodial based learning programmes such as vocational skills and training, life-skills and offence related interventions" (King, 2019, p. 19). This highlights the point that the educator is an important actor when it comes to education, but that there are also other actors around the incarcerated persons who can contribute to education, training and development, such as prison officers. Despite the fact that there is close collaboration in Norway between the Correctional Service, ed-



ucators and authorities to achieve satisfactory educational provision for incarcerated persons, there are few international studies that touch on the role prison officers play in incarcerated persons' education (Author, 2019).

One of the Norwegian Correctional Service's main tasks is to help prevent new crime after sentences are completed, and work and training are among the measures that help prevent incarcerated persons from reoffending (Storvik, 2006; Davis, et al., 2013; Guerrero, 2011; Behan, 2014). This can be understood to mean that the Norwegian Correctional Service's tasks are part of a broader understanding of education and training in prison, and where more actors than just school contribute to the incarcerated persons' learning processes. The actors that are closest to the incarcerated persons in everyday life will have great impact and influence on the incarcerated persons' understanding of and motivation for education and training in prison. However, their understanding of the importance of their professional role regarding incarcerated persons' education and learning processes has hardly been studied. In order to strengthen knowledge in this area, this article will investigate how Norwegian prison officers understand their importance as educational actors through the following research question: How do Norwegian prison officers understand their role as actors in incarcerated persons' education?

### **The Role of Prison Officers and Incarcerated Persons' Education**

International studies on the role of prison officers have only touched on issues regarding incarcerated persons' education to a small degree. Instead, the studies deal with prison officers' experiences of professionalism and career opportunities (Author, 2020), balancing the use of force and care (Tait, 2011; Arnold, Liebling, & Tait, 2007; Bang, 2012; Hjellnes, 2001), relationships between prison officers and incarcerated persons (Hjellnes, 2019; Liebling, Price, & Elliot, 1999) and well-being in the profession (Stern, 2019). In a Nordic context, researchers point to prison officers' dual mandate, in that they must exercise both control and care towards incarcerated persons as part of their work (Bang, 2012; Hjellnes, 2001). In their professional practice, prison officers therefore find themselves at a crossroads between the expectations and needs of society, legislators, the Norwegian Correctional Service and incarcerated persons (Bang, 2012). The different perceptions of the ideal, expectations, needs and realities that prison officers encounter in everyday prison life can be experienced as contradictory and stressful. Stress at work can contribute to lower well-being in the profession and lead to employees voluntarily or involuntarily changing jobs (Stern, 2019). There can be many challenging stressors within the correctional services, and prison officers often choose job-related tasks without taking their own feeling of stress into account. Here, Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gail and Baker (2010) point to the importance of having stress management routines among staff. Not having good stress management routines can affect the prison officers' relationship with the incarcerated persons as a result of their own frustrations (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 249).

The prison officers' self-positioning when faced with conflicting objectives and expectations is key to the performance of the prison officer's duty (Bang, 2012, pp. 119–120). In an American survey of 501 prison officers (Misis, Kim, Cheeseman, Hogan, & Lambert, 2013), researchers found a clear correlation between job-related stress among prison officers and their attitudes towards incarcerated persons. In order for prison staff, in this case the prison officers, to have a good working day that benefits the incarcerated persons, it is important that the organisation and structures around the prison officers function and are perceived as being supportive (Author, 2017). Good institutional structures and objectives will then also have an impact on the education-related activities offered to prison incarcerated persons (Misis et al., 2013).

Studies exist that investigate the role of prison officers and the relationship between prison officers and incarcerated persons (Evensen, 2006; Hjellnes, 2019; Liebling, Price, & Elliot, 1999). Based on fieldwork conducted in two prisons, the first systematic study presents Tait (2011) prison officers' approach (operationalisation and conceptualisation) to care in their professional practice (Tait, 2011). Here, she presents a typology of prison officers' approach to

care in professional practice. In the study, she identifies five different approaches: True carer, limited carer, old school, conflicted and damaged (Tait, 2011, p. 140). Prison officers' approach to care is a product of officers' experience of the working environment, as well as personal qualities (Tait, 2011, p. 151), but as mentioned, their relationship with incarcerated persons will also be influenced by the officers' working environment and well-being in the work situation.

In their investigation of staff-incarcerated person relationships in prison, Liebling, Price, and Elliott (1999) found the following three conclusions: Firstly, the relationship between officers and incarcerated persons is complex. The way in which situations unfold is mediated by the relationships between the officer and the incarcerated person (Liebling et al., 1999, p. 90). As part of their work, prison officers must administer force (Evensen, 2006; Liebling mfl., 1999; Nymo, 2006), but Liebling et al.'s findings show that prison officers are reluctant to use force (Liebling et al., 1999, p. 72). The relationship between incarcerated person and employee is both rule-based and non-rule-based with regard to decision making (Liebling et al., 1999). In other words, prison officers also show discretion when dealing with incarcerated persons.

Another of Liebling et al's findings is about being consistent and applies to both prison officers and incarcerated persons. In places where the incarcerated persons had an absolute perception of continuity, the staff were aware that differences between individuals and context could make this difficult (Liebling et al., 1999, pp. 85, 90). Flexibility in their work led to uncertainty among prison officers about what constituted 'crossing the line'. As a consequence of this, there were different degrees of variation in the prison officers' performance of work (Liebling et al., 1999, p. 85). In their work, they sought to find balance in the field of tension that exists between being friendly and being professional. The officers wanted to be involved, while also attending to security tasks and showing respect to the incarcerated persons (Liebling et al., 1999, p. 87). Finally, the authors point out that the officers engaged in 'peacekeeping work' in their encounters with the incarcerated persons, and the key role of the prison officers is therefore to avoid conflict with the incarcerated persons and instead seek peaceful solutions. This skill was taken for granted and considered common sense (Liebling et al., 1999, pp. 76, 82). 'Peacekeeping' was key in situations where prison officers described the best aspects of their work, such as a good day at work despite problems and challenges (Liebling et al., 1999, p. 82). Within criminology, peacekeeping criminology is a perspective that suggests that alternative methods can be used to create peaceful solutions to crime and conflict in society and to reduce the extent of violence. The implementation of peacekeeping criminology would be a radically different approach compared to current practices and methods of policing and judicial processes (Moloney, 2009, p. 78). This thinking can be transferred to prison and to the incarcerated person-employee relationship. We can assume that this also applies to work that borders on education and training. Where does one draw the line regarding prison officers' involvement in incarcerated persons' educational activities, and is it important that prison officers sometimes cross this line?

Despite the above-mentioned studies, Arnold, Liebling & Tait (2007) argue that research on life in prison tends to neglect prison officers so that the picture becomes misleading. Prison work is complex and varied, and prison officers seem to downplay their authority in favour of more 'peacekeeping tasks'. Conversations are key to everything prison officers do, and prison life and relationships with incarcerated persons are difficult to understand without a clearer understanding of the role prison officers play (Arnold et al., 2007).

When it comes to studies of prison officers' relationship to prison education, research primarily focuses on incarcerated persons (Rose, 2015; Hughes, 2013; Manger, Asbjørnsen, & Eikeland, 2019). In a study of what motivates incarcerated persons to pursue higher education during their time in prison, Emma Hughes (2012) found that the prison environment, and especially the support of prison officers, was an important 'pull effect' regarding motivation to pursue an education. At the same time, a prison environment where incarcerated persons and staff have unfavourable attitudes toward education may prevent an incarcerated person from

seeking to complete education while incarcerated (Rose, 2015; Manger, Asbjørnsen, & Eike-land, 2019).

Based on the research review, we see that the role of prison officers is complex, and that in performing the role, the individual officer's self-understanding and perception of the role is crucial. However, we still know little about how the role of prison officers is designed with regard to incarcerated persons' education. The intention of this article is not to place the role of prison officers in the field of education, but rather to examine how individual prison officers understand and exercise their role in relation to this field when we ask How do Norwegian prison officers understand their role as actors in incarcerated persons' education?

### **Analytical Framework**

Prison officers in Norway are responsible for following up, guiding and motivating people serving a prison sentence regardless of the cause and length of their sentence. As a result, prison officers are constantly in close contact with incarcerated persons and involved in many of the processes associated with the execution of sentences (Author, 2019). They are a group of correctional staff who know the incarcerated persons well, who have contact with them over long periods of time, and who are in a position to provide incarcerated persons with facilitation and motivation regarding education and training. They experience incarcerated persons in different situations and conditions than, for example, teachers do, who have their workplace at educational departments in prison.

In the analysis, we use the term 'role understanding' to explain the individual prison officer's understanding of the content and framework conditions of their professional role. If we are to understand the duties of prison officers, the role perspective is appropriate because it makes it possible to see their person, position, and situation in context (Nygård, 2000). For the prison officers, every task is performed in a situation that has its specific situational conditions. In addition, the role of a prison officer can be understood as a position in a structure. In this context, this structure includes both the framework associated with the practice of correctional services, and also the structures associated with education from a societal perspective. Each individual prison officer must then interpret the conditions associated with both correctional services and education, and then complement this role with their own values, norms and attitudes. In other words, they must find their own place in the area that exists between correctional services and the field of education. In the following section, structures found in education's social mandate are elaborated upon.

### **Education's Social Mandate**

Prison education in Norway takes place through the so-called import model, which simply means that educational activities are imported from the regular school system to prison. The import model implies that teachers who teach within the Norwegian Correctional Service have their position placed in schools outside prison but have their workplace in an educational department in a prison (Langelid & Fridhov, 2019; Snertingdal, 2019). Prison teaching and education in prison are therefore based on the same educational mandate as regular education in Norway, and incarcerated persons have the same rights in the education system as other citizens. By participating in education in prison, incarcerated persons should be able to qualify for working life or further education after completing their sentence in the same way as persons outside the correctional service.

In a broad sense, education encompasses all learning of skills and knowledge, and is considered a human right in many parts of the world (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 26). Education is therefore not only about qualifying for specific professions and areas of work, but also about every individual understanding and mastering themselves in their surroundings in the world. In this respect, education is about developing a democratic attitude,



identity(ies) and understanding. Who am I? What values are important to me? How can I voice my opinions, ask critical questions, and contribute to a community that is greater than myself? How can I be a positive participant in society?

From a pedagogical perspective, we are talking here about the formative dimensions of education (Ulvik & Sæverot, 2013; Biesta, 2009; 2014; 2015) where both subjectification and socialisation are central. Education, knowledge, and learning take place both in formal educational institutions and in other arenas outside what we normally associate with school and teaching, such as education and training in prison. Education can therefore be understood based on three dimensions; qualification, socialisation and subjectification. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1.** *The Education Mandate*



For people who fall outside the education and training system, especially adults, it often seems obvious that learning that takes place in the family, among friends or through the media is just as important and relevant as the learning that takes place in formal settings. However, learning that occurs outside the formal education system, for example in the workplace, is not necessarily assigned the same value as that which takes place within formal educational institutions. Much of the research on learning therefore concentrates on learning outcomes through formal education and training, rather than looking at learning as something that happens in different situations and phases in life and in society, such as in prison. In its report, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2005; 2019) tries to develop strategies in order to use all the skills, knowledge and competencies people develop wherever they come from. This is more necessary than ever in a rapidly changing world.

The different learning methods classified by the OECD (2005) can be divided into three main categories: Formal learning that is organised and takes place within the formal education system, i.e. in kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, university colleges and universities. In Norway, incarcerated persons receive an offer of educational provision within primary and secondary education and training that is imported from the regular, official education system. This type of formal learning is organised and structured and has defined learning objectives and outcome descriptions. In prison, as in life in general, we also find many examples of informal learning, which is the process of acquiring attitudes, assessments, skills, and knowledge through daily activities in interaction with other people or through the media. Informal learning is never organised, does not have defined learning outcomes, and is not intentional. The OECD also points to so-called non-formal learning that may be organised and may have learning objectives. Non-formal learning can take place on the

initiative of individuals, but also as a by-product of more organised activities, even if it does not have expressed learning objectives and usually occurs outside the formal education system, for example as skills development through courses, organised education in organisational life, voluntary work, as an international exchange, or in meetings between an incarcerated person and the personal contact officer. In non-formal learning, there is an intention to learn, but the learning takes place using different methods and in different situations and environments than in the traditional school system. Non-formal learning requires voluntary and active participation and is therefore closely linked to the participants' own needs, wishes and interests.

The reason why the different learning methods are highlighted here is to show that the aspirant and later the prison officer, during the working day in prison, encounters several different learning situations in interaction with the incarcerated persons, and perhaps especially the incarcerated persons for whom the person in question is a personal contact officer. In this interaction with incarcerated persons and other staff, the prison officers acquire knowledge and attitudes, individually and socially, which are later integrated with formal knowledge from the education. Both the incarcerated person and the prison officer learn in such situations.

The prison officers' mandate and duties are not strictly linked to school and training in prison, but as we will see in the section below and also in the findings section, prison officers regularly find themselves in various situations that can be defined under the aforementioned learning methods. It is important that prison officers are aware of this, because collectively and in a broad sense, incarcerated persons' formal, informal, and non-formal education and training in prison is about knowledge building and learning for the incarcerated person.

## **Methodology**

The analysis is based on data obtained through qualitative semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) with 16 prison officers (eight women and eight men) in four Norwegian prisons. The strength of semi-structured interviews is that they appear dynamic and goal-oriented (Hatch, 2002; Silverman, 2011). In this investigation, the aim has been to obtain prison officers' descriptions of experiences and perspectives.

As a result, we have been able to produce in-depth knowledge about the officers' perception of their own role and practice, in other words the 'world' that the officers describe they experience and live in (Hatch, 2002). An important caveat, then, is that the interviews provide knowledge about prison officers' role and practice as it appears to the officers, and not as these phenomena should normatively be, or are. In line with the qualitative research tradition, the empirical source data in the study should therefore not be generalised.

The sample of the four selected penal institutions can be characterised as maximum variation sampling, where the intention has been to highlight as much variation as possible in the sample (Patton, 1990). We emphasised three variation criteria: gender, size and security level. In collaboration with a leading representative from the Norwegian Correctional Service, we made a strategic sample that meets the three criteria and that includes both female and male penal institutions, high and low security levels and which vary in size regarding the number of incarcerated persons. The sample had a good range of ages; from young relatively recent graduates to older officers who had been in their positions for a long time and who were trained at an early stage of prison officer training.

The Norwegian Directorate for Correctional Services directed the first inquiry about possible participation in the study to the respective prison governors at the four selected prisons. The four prisons then provided participants for the interviews. In some of the prisons, the participants received a request directly from the management, while in others, the participants reported their interest before being asked directly. Of course, in those cases where the management asked employees directly, some may have experienced pressure to participate. For this reason, we chose to start all the interviews by asking the participant whether they agreed

with the informed consent. In this way, we were able to make it clear that participation in the study would not have consequences for the participants' further work and relationship to their own workplace, while at the same time ensuring that all participants gave their free informed consent (Hatch, 2002; Silverman, 2011) to participation in the study.

Six of the participants work in prisons for women, and ten work in prisons with male incarcerated persons. None of the prisons have both male and female incarcerated persons. After completing their education, approximately half of the participants have also worked at other prisons, while the other half have been at the same institution as they are at today. However, the participants in the latter group have worked in different departments, involving both high and low security. Overall, we are therefore of the opinion that the sample represents variation in accordance with the variation criteria on which the study is based.

The interviews took place in staff rooms, in combined kitchens and meeting rooms, or in visiting rooms and lasted from one to two hours.

The project has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). In studies like this one, participants have basic rights; such as the right to autonomy, the right to give informed consent, the right to safeguard one's personal integrity, to confidentiality and information about possible consequences of the investigation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We found that the participants felt confident that we were taking care of ethical aspects regarding the interview situation in a responsible manner. Further in the text, the analysis and the key findings are presented.

This study used a case study method for the in-depth inquiry on how recently released mothers feel about their current parenting practices in regard to taking a parenting course while incarcerated. This method permits the researcher to answer "how" and "why" type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study will give allowance for research inquiry that examines a real-life contemporary phenomenon, in this case parenting after prison, by exploring situations that have no clear set of outcomes (Yin, 2009). This research approach allows the researcher to view and interpret the incarcerated mothers' experiences with the parenting class from a variety of sources (Tellis, 1997). Individual interviews with the mothers, artifacts (e.g., self-reflection, class discussion assignment), questionnaires, and parent logs were collected over time were used to gain the data needed for this research study.

## Findings

Through the study, we identified two general trends in the interviews. The first deals with how prison officers' position themselves (Nygård, 2000) as actors in incarcerated persons' education, and the dimensions (Biesta, 2009) in which prison officers experience that their role is important regarding incarcerated persons' education. The second trend deals with how prison officers experience their position in incarcerated persons' education when placed in context with other educational actors.

### Prison Officers as Educational Actors

In our conversations with the prison officers, they expressed a traditional understanding of education that primarily revolves around the idea that education qualifies students for participation in the workforce or studies in higher education institutions. Therefore, most of them did not understand their role in relation to the field of education and training. However, when we had conversations about the broad mandate of education, where learning also takes place outside what we traditionally perceive as school, several participants believed that they did play a role in incarcerated persons' education and training.

Here, the prison officers pointed out that they acted as 'door openers' towards education in prison. For example, "*we encourage them to go to work and to take their schooling serious-*

ly, but in a way, we are not involved with them when they are at school” (participant 3). The operation of the prison school was perceived by most of them as the activities of an external actor, “this is something external that we are not really involved with, except that we make sure facilities are available” (participant 13).

In this perceived division between the actors in prison, the prison officers nevertheless considered mapping and keeping incarcerated persons motivated as important tasks. Motivating incarcerated persons in relation to education and training is not only about encouraging incarcerated persons to pursue education in prison, but just as much about processing any resistance and setbacks incarcerated persons have experienced in their previous schooling.

*We have always had an important task regarding motivating incarcerated persons when it comes to education. Because that is what we have to do all the time. If we focus on the current situation, then we have got the BRIK tool. Based on this, we have to identify both the resources and the needs. In other words, what an incarcerated person requires. This can include so many things. It is then entirely up to the individual to make the choice about what they want to do, and of course – to possibly motivate them to go to school, if this is lacking. It turns out that many have a low level of education and have gaps all the way back from lower secondary school level, so we try to fill in those gaps. That is basically our job. At least to inform about and motivate them for school and education, and perhaps try to help them by saying something about the fact that the teachers who work in the field of prison education have a lot of experience. After all, they are not as scary as the teachers they might have met at school when everything went wrong* (participant 14).

When working with incarcerated persons, prison officers find themselves in situations that can be considered educational on a daily basis. Such situations often involve learning and building knowledge for the incarcerated persons, and maybe for the prison officers as well. We are used to defining knowledge and learning as things that are reserved for the institution of school but learning also takes place in the relationship and in meetings between incarcerated persons and prison officers, which in addition has a formation aspect (Biesta, 2009; Ulvik & Sæverot, 2013). If the prison officer acknowledges that encounters with incarcerated persons involve elements of learning and formation, educational situations – or educational moments – can be defined more easily, “I think that prison officers contribute more to incarcerated persons’ education than they realise themselves” (participant 2).

The fewer educational opportunities incarcerated persons have to choose from in prison, the more important it becomes that the prison officer is aware that he or she also has a role as an educational actor, “I wish that incarcerated persons had access to more opportunities regarding formal competence within the educational programmes on offer” (participant 2). It is the prison officers who talk to incarcerated persons about their opportunities regarding education and training in the prison in question. They often find that the offers are few, and that it may not be possible to build up real expertise within the educational programmes that are offered. It can then be difficult to motivate incarcerated persons to express an interest in the offers that actually exist. The dilemma is that the prison officers must motivate the incarcerated persons and get them involved with meaningful activities on the one hand, while on the other hand, they must try to motivate them to choose something within an inadequate educational offer, often involving long waiting times to get a place.

Furthermore, the prison officers pointed to the level of security in the prison as a decisive factor in the work involving incarcerated persons’ educational motivation. One prison officer said that it is easier to contribute constructively to incarcerated persons’ lives in open prisons than in closed, high-security prisons. However, regardless of the type of prison, all



regarded themselves as important elements in incarcerated persons' social learning and found that incarcerated persons seem to benefit from the conversations they have together. In the conversations, the prison officers emphasised being clear about requirements and expectations; they wanted to develop a good relationship with incarcerated persons, so they were in the best possible position when trying to motivate them regarding the learning of social rules and norms, teaching them to trust others or taking responsibility for writing application attachments etc. The analysis shows that the prison officers take subjectification and socialisation responsibility (Biesta, 2009; 2014; 2015) in the conversations with incarcerated persons. They consider themselves people in a position of trust who take part in many different situations that affect the incarcerated persons, for example when they feel weak and afraid.

*There was a good tone between us. Then he goes to court, comes back and is not quite himself. You could see it straight away. Then I ask him face-to-face: What's the matter? What's happened to you today? (...) You spend time with him. He is scared and very anxious. You get him some professional help, but then he was moved to a different wing because he was so young. Then I go and greet him and get a hug. I don't mind giving incarcerated persons a hug, but some officers don't do it. I'm thinking: is it so dangerous? And it was really nice. He said he appreciated it. This was a guy who was self-harming. Some incarcerated persons don't trust us, and we don't trust them. That's kind of the rule. (...). But the fact that the rule doesn't exist for just a few moments is really nice. It is good to be able to have that relationship (participant 3).*

Because prison officers meet the incarcerated persons on a regular basis, especially those for whom they are the personal contact officer, they find that they often take on a kind of parenting role, where they have to correct behaviour. This positioning (Nygård, 2000) relates in particular to positions and roles we know from familial relationships. One officer said, "I see the incarcerated persons that I am the contact person for more often than I see my own children" (participant 3).

When it comes to the parenting role that some officers believe they have, they claim that it is about being a role model, but just as much about being oneself, being curious about the incarcerated person and what he or she says, providing advice and input on what the incarcerated person needs to try to change, providing support when they get things right, showing that the prison officer in question really sees the incarcerated person. They say that many incarcerated persons have low self-esteem, and that the prison officer's task will then be to work together with the incarcerated persons so that they can grow and hopefully change their behaviour in the future. It can be about small things that are easy to convey or teach, such as making the bed or keeping their things in order, but which can nevertheless be of great importance to the incarcerated person in prison, and later on if they return. In this way, we see that both the subjectification function and the socialisation function are prominent in the prison officers' positioning of their own professional role.

*Some have struggled right from the start, they can't make their bed, they don't have their own things in order. These are simple things to teach, but many have never done them before. They need to learn how to communicate with each other. We are open about this, and we talk to each other in a good way. There is a good tone between us. Just the fact that we greet each other, that we have a duty to greet each other here. When we lead by example, they say hello back to us (participant 10).*

The prison officers emphasised that incarcerated persons must learn to master the tasks they have to do, but also that they are able to master life in prison and life after their sentence has been served.

*I provide incarcerated persons with guidance all the time. Show them the impor-*

*tance of getting a job they like. I want to have an impact on incarcerated persons' life skills, otherwise I might as well do something else. They need help to help themselves so that they are prepared for a life after imprisonment (participant 8).*

There is much to indicate that the prison officers experienced that they are important in incarcerated persons' lives in prison, that they help them to see opportunities, and that they contribute to the incarcerated persons' life skills, including taking responsibility and making their own choices, and that they teach incarcerated persons to believe in themselves. In conversations and meetings with incarcerated persons, the prison officers build on their own life experience.

Although most of the participants in the study did not consider themselves teachers, one pointed out that prison officers play an important role in creating conditions for learning:

*I help provide an important learning foundation for incarcerated persons, through social training. The incarcerated persons have a great need for this. Many incarcerated persons are not aware of social codes and do not know how to behave when together with other people. The prison officer is a teacher for incarcerated persons by being a role model for how one talks to others, showing consideration towards each other. (...) personal aptitude is important, not all knowledge can be learned from a schoolbook (participant 13).*

In order to be a good support and advisor for incarcerated persons, several of the prison officers are of the opinion that they need to believe that what they contribute has an effect, and that conversations and situations can contribute to change. This has a positive impact on both parties, not only for the incarcerated person's life skills and social development, but also for the prison officer's professional practice.

### **The Role of Prison Officers in Relation to Other Educational Actors**

The analysis highlighted that prison officers primarily perceived themselves as key actors in incarcerated persons' socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2009; 2014; 2015), both of which are important educational dimensions. However, prison is an institution in which different professions meet in relation to incarcerated persons' education. Together, the various actors can contribute to the safeguarding and exercise of the broad societal mandates in both the execution of sentences and education. However, the conversations with the prison officers give an indication that the various actors' knowledge of each other's tasks is relatively inadequate, that there are few suitable meeting places, and it is often somewhat by chance that employees from the various sectors meet to exchange information and develop a good strategy for collaboration. One participant describes the collaboration between different actors as follows: *"In open prisons, collaboration with schools works well, in closed prisons, you don't see the teachers at all. (...) It is important that everyone talks to each other, has common goals, and doesn't just focus on what their individual task is"* (participant 7).

As seen in the above quotation, prison officers' point in particular to the differences in practice based on the level of security in the various prisons as important conditions regarding interaction between the actors. Most prison officers have practices from different types of prisons and can therefore compare them to a certain extent in terms of frequency and types of collaboration between actors and sectors. The quotation points to different practices in high-security and low-security prisons, but also that common objectives and criteria for collaboration must be formulated. When it is lacking and when the collaboration becomes random, its value decreases: *"collaboration with schools is limited to picking up keys during the shift and about the dissemination of information and the handing over of needs"* (participant 8).

Questions about security are not only about the importance of security levels, but also pose a general challenge in the interaction between the actors regarding incarcerated persons' education. Several prison officers expressed both concern and experience of not being under-

stood when security issues were highlighted in interaction between the actors. Here, some prison officers pointed out that the school didn't always seem to take security issues seriously, which could lead to risky situations: *"of course we tell them about things, but what they then do about it is out of our hands. It is frustrating. We are in control of everything else here, in a way"* (participant 13).

As mentioned, the role of prison officers is not specifically linked to tasks related to incarcerated persons' education. As a result, the prison officers do not see the establishment of collaborative arenas between sectors and actors as being their task. This is despite the fact that several of the prison officers say that they would like to see more of this type of collaboration:

*I am not really involved in the school side of things. I would like to have more information from school, then I could give better advice to the incarcerated persons. The school could also join us in the morning meetings once a week, for example. Very rarely do they join us. We have a number of collaborative meetings, otherwise there is little communication during the day* (participant 9).

The analysis reveals that although collaboration with school works well in some prisons, there seems to be little exchange of information, both in terms of the school as a system in prison, the teacher's role, the content and programme description, and what type of educational activities the individual incarcerated persons are engaged in. A lack of information from the school means that the prison officers sometimes feel uncertain about how to follow up the incarcerated person for whom they are the personal contact officer. They call for regular meetings with more information about the school and how incarcerated persons function during the time he or she is at school. This, of course, goes both ways. The school also needs information about the prison officers' duties; opportunities and limitations in relation to the school and incarcerated persons' education and training plans.

## Discussion

Incarcerated persons' right to an individual plan regarding the execution of their sentence is laid down in both national and international legislation and conventions (Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education and Training; the Education Act, 1998; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948), and is also expressed as a clear political ambition in Norway (KD, 2005). However, safeguarding the rights of incarcerated persons requires collaboration between the actors who are involved in various ways in incarcerated persons' education in prison. Furthermore, it requires the application of a broad and holistic educational mandate in the interaction that takes place between the actors (Hawley et al., 2013; King, 2019). In our study, we have questioned how prison officers understand their role as actors in incarcerated persons' education. Our findings indicate that prison officers play a significant role in incarcerated persons' education in prison, but that the officers are partly unaware of this role. Furthermore, they find that their own role is not in a collaborative relationship with other actors who facilitate incarcerated persons' education.

As previously mentioned, we find several expressions in the study showing that prison officers play an important role in incarcerated persons' education in prison. We have previously shown how learning and education can have different forms, content and objectives, and how education and learning take place in different arenas, both inside and outside school (Biesta, 2009; 2014; 2015; OECD, 2005; 2019). Through conversations with incarcerated persons, the prison officers conduct work so that incarcerated persons are able to master their own lives during the execution of their sentences and, not least, after completing their sentences. In this work, the subjectification and socialisation functions of education (Biesta, 2009) are particularly prominent. Here, the prison officers see themselves as role models for the incarcerated persons, and work to strengthen the incarcerated persons' self-image, self-understanding and social skills. Prison officers often use their own life experiences, and often use terms found in

familial relationships, such as brother, father, son, or sister, when describing their role. Based on the OECD's (2005; 2019) categorisation of learning, which is mentioned in the introduction, we can say that the prison officers' work can be primarily linked to informal learning, where the prison officers work to ensure that incarcerated persons change or develop the attitudes, assessments, skills and knowledge necessary to live a crime-free life after completing their sentences. In this way, the prison officers express that they have a role as primary socialisation agents, or educators. Such an understanding of roles can be regarded as care-oriented, where the prison officers perceive themselves as important caregivers in line with what Tait (2011) calls a 'true carer'. However, such an understanding of roles may also indicate that the prison officers do not link the education mandate to their professional practice, and instead adopt a somewhat infantilised perspective, where incarcerated persons are 'children', 'brothers' or 'sisters' in need of 'adults' who can help them further in their own lives.

Informal learning can be unintentional, in the sense that situations where learning occurs are not planned and structured in advance (OECD, 2005). Daily meetings with incarcerated persons can nevertheless be regarded as possible moments in which the prison officer, through his or her relationship with the incarcerated person, introduces a 'pedagogical dimension' to the meeting. According to van Manen (1991), we can look at such situations as pedagogical situations, in which the prison officers bring forth their own life experiences in order for the incarcerated person to spot new opportunities: "For the pedagogical situation to bear a pedagogical moment, the adult must do something pedagogically right in his or her relation (...)" (van Manen, 1991, p. 40). Several officers talk about the importance of building a good relationship with the incarcerated persons and also describe situations in which they feel that the relationship put them in a position to contribute something positive to the incarcerated person's life situation. Of course, this must not be overinterpreted, but it nevertheless seems important that the officers are also aware of the relationship's importance and inherent possibilities in their daily work with incarcerated persons.

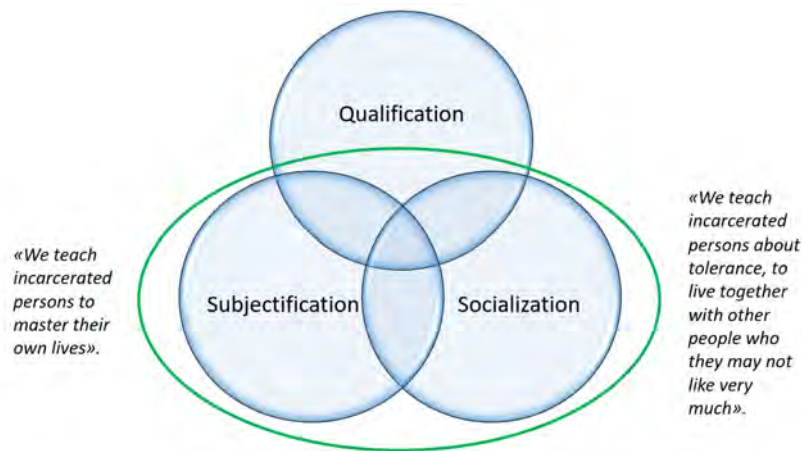
The purpose of referring to van Manen (1991) is that the time spent building relationships and establishing trust with the incarcerated person can facilitate situations in which the prison officer can contribute constructively to the incarcerated person's learning, mastery of their own life, and how the incarcerated person views themselves (Biesta, 2014; 2015). However, in order for such informal situations to be characterised as pedagogical moments, awareness and courage are required on the part of the prison officer, at the same time that the officers recognise that these can be time-consuming processes. However, the prison officers describe that being involved in incarcerated persons' education is a personal matter, in the sense that it is up to individual prison officers whether they engage themselves in incarcerated persons' activities in school, training and work. They describe it more as personal expertise (Skau, 2002) on the part of the individual prison officer rather than part of their own professional understanding (Author, 2020). This is despite the fact that building motivation and learning processes for incarcerated persons is a core task for personal contact officers, as stated in the Norwegian Correctional Service's description of the role of prison officers (Author, 2019; Author, 2020). Raising prison officers' awareness of the importance of their own role as a learning actor in incarcerated persons' learning and education may therefore seem necessary.

The fact that prison officers play an important role in incarcerated persons' learning and education is not only linked to informal learning situations. If we look at the education mandate as we have presented it in the introduction, we find that the prison officers' encounters with incarcerated persons and the work involving incarcerated persons' life skills also apply here. In the education mandate, we have referred to three dimensions: the qualification dimension, the socialisation dimension, and the individualisation dimension. The latter two are referred to as education's formational dimensions (Ulvik & Sæverot, 2013). When the prison officers say that they are trying to teach incarcerated persons to "take responsibility for writing applications",



“make the bed”, “keep their things in order”, “behave when together with other people” and “show consideration towards others”, this is a learning contribution that can be found in the education mandate, as shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2.** Prison Officers as Educational Actors



Instead of describing themselves as important actors in incarcerated persons' education, the prison officers claim that they regard the school's and their own tasks as separate, and that prison officers and teachers rarely interact when it comes to the tasks involved in everyday prison work. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that most of the prison officers we have spoken to in our study regarded incarcerated persons' education as qualification. The broad education mandate presented here was therefore not prominent in the prison officers' knowledge and understanding of what prison education should encompass. Several prison officers also expressed that they wanted to gain more knowledge about this, and about incarcerated persons' educational opportunities and how they can guide incarcerated persons in relation to educational choices.

In their report on career guidance in Norwegian prisons, Byholt, Bakke and Ianke (2017) state that career guidance is an effective means of achieving goals related to restructuring, integration and implementation at all levels of education. This may include motivational work towards incarcerated persons and the learning processes they are part of. In our study, prison officers relate their work with incarcerated persons' motivation as a form of guidance that is a key part of the personal contact officer's function (Hjellnes, 2001). The individual personal contact officers are given responsibility for following up and facilitating the individual incarcerated person's motivation and learning process. However, it is important that the personal contact officer is confident in their own expertise and ensures quality in counselling, guidance, adaptation and follow-up of the incarcerated person (Byholt et al., 2017). Several of the prison officers involved in the study requested more knowledge about incarcerated persons' educational opportunities, which points to a need for continuing education within the field of guidance, and possibly further education in fields that are related to school, education and career guidance.

Therefore, we see that the prison officers perform daily work tasks that are key to incarcerated persons' learning and educational opportunities in prison. These are tasks that they currently describe as being separate from other actors such as teachers, health professionals and other counsellors. In addition, several prison officers point out that there are relatively few and often irregular meeting places between prison officers, teachers and other actors, which prevents the exchange of experience and the development of holistic sentence plans, and knowledge about incarcerated persons and each other's roles and work. Such collaboration is essential for ensuring quality in the follow-up of individual incarcerated persons over time (Hawley et al., 2013).

Prison officers do an important job, which includes helping to make the serving of sentences in prison as favourable as possible for incarcerated persons, given the context in which they find themselves. In addition, they create conditions so that the transition to society after sentences are served is as good as possible. In the time between incarceration and release, the prison officers in the study do what they can to make incarcerated persons change their direction towards a life without crime. However, the study indicates that the potential that lies in the role of prison officers is not utilised well enough, neither by the prison officers themselves, nor by the correctional service as a system.

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**Helene Marie K. Eide** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education at the University of Bergen in Norway.

**Kariane Therese Westrheim** is a Professor Emerita in the Department of Education at the University of Bergen in Norway.