Profits of Leisure Activities for Juveniles in Correctional Institutions

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1. Introduction

Some years ago I was involved in research in a Dutch Correctional Institution for Juveniles that took place in connection with a EU Leonardo da Vinci project under the name “Youth”. The programme was focusing on leisure activities. The idea was to paint, do handycraft, make music or other creative activities with the juveniles. The products of these activities had to be brought to the people outside the walls by exhibitions. At the end the response of the public should be transmitted to the juveniles. Our project was organized during the “summer holidays” of the juveniles, more correctly, the period during which the teachers were on holiday and the juveniles stayed behind while almost nothing was organized that could replace the lessons.

The project was a cooperation between the universities of Thessaloniki, Greece as leading partner, Bremen, Germany and Groningen, the Netherlands. The 4th partner was a resettlement organization settled in Rome, Italy. The project was put to practice with the help of volunteers. In the Netherlands the project took place for five weeks, five days a week in the morning and in the afternoon.

Before we could start to paint, construct cells that should be painted or make music, we had to collect the juveniles, always up to six boys, from their unit, were they spend the day-time in a living room. In this way we were able to watch what they were doing during their leisure time. We were confronted with a thick layer of lazyness and decided to add an observation study to our project, focusing on the leisure behaviour of the juveniles. The result of this study can be summarized in a nutshell: The situation could and should be better.

In the following we will discuss why leisure activities can support education in prison and promote well being of the inmates.
Our starting point is the ability to life long development all human beings have (2). Next we shall focus on learning and motivation (3) followed by a short discussion on the psychical situation of detainees or in other words on their well being (4). Under 5. the subjects ‘learning’ (3) and ‘well being’ (4) will be combined with the subject ‘leisure activities’. Then we will focus on leisure activities of Dutch juveniles not deprived and those deprived of liberty (6). We end with some conclusions (7).

2. Ability to life-long development

Education in a broader sense includes all pedagogical means and proceedings used while the child is going through his or her socialization process, developing into an adult. While traditionally education was interpreted as a finite event, one is nowadays more and more convinced that maturity is not a pedagogically fixed condition that can be reached and no more be lost, but that a lifelong learning process is going on. There is thus no real too late.

The results of education mainly depend on the characteristics and abilities of the individual prisoner and on the quality of education, training and further forming in prison. Decisive is whether the education in a broader sense meets the person. Therefore it must be correlated with the individual intellectual and psychological predispositions and needs of the individual in question. According to modern developmental psychology everybody is principally able to influence his or her own development. We all are changing our identity constantly and all one’s life. And, in contrast to Freud, most modern scientists are convinced that although there are continuous influences dating from childhood acting further in life, we are not life-long totally bound to these experiences. These modern views offer positive perspectives to take our life in hand and to try actively to make the best of it. It is important to inform juvenile (and adult) delinquents about these facts in order to motivate them to try a new start that offers positive perspectives for the future.

According to recent Dutch research, 40% of detained adults in Dutch prisons are not motivated to battle with their past and to try to change their lives.

2 The difference between „education/upbringing/German:Erziehung” and “education/erudition/German:Bildung” cannot be discussed here.

3 Bureau Montfoort/WODC (Scientific Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, 2003.)
As a matter of fact, the problems detainees have, are difficult to overcome: psychic problems, problems at home, at school, with peers. At work, drug and alcohol addiction, debts etc. They all need help that should result relatively quickly in some success for the inmates, based at least partly on own commitment. In this way they learn that they really have the ability to better their situation.

In order to reach this aim one should begin with relatively easy activities and tasks that are pleasant to do for the individual inmate. Almost every juvenile in prison has abilities to do something creative. Promoting leisure activities, however, is a good means to start a process of change as it is an activity in which the assessment must not be strict and in conformity with definite rules.

3. Learning and motivation

Learning takes place in a formal and an informal manner. Modern learning concepts try to let formal learning appear as being informal, in order to stimulate students to be active, curious, inventive and self-regulating, so that they may discover that the gaining of insight is a pleasurable experience and that they have fun in learning.4

Thinking about motivating others to learn, we have to distinguish between intrinsic motivation – doing or learning something because you enjoy it – and extrinsic motivation – doing or learning something because it is rewarded externally. Pupils learning out of intrinsic motivation are more curious, feel more pleasant5 and often have better results.6

According to research findings by Ryan and Deci three factors are decisive for intrinsic motivation:

1) Control

Intensive control that leaves little space for self-determination can have a negative influence on intrinsic motivation. Many students need a certain extent of autonomy.

2) Competence

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Students need the feeling that they are good in what they are doing. If they have the idea that their activities lead to nothing, their intrinsic motivation diminishes or comes to an end.\(^7\)

3) Social attachment

Intrinsic motivation is also related to safe surroundings, an atmosphere of mutual trust and a certain appreciation.

The motivation theory of Ryan and Deci is thus based on the hypothesis that human beings are generally motivated to learn by nature and, indeed, there are several facts, such as the extent of human encephalisation quotient\(^8\)\(^9\) that seem to justify these presumptions.

Thus it is necessary to forecome everything that has a negative impact on the natural motivation to learn. A strong obligation to learn and permanent controlling belong to the negative influences. For allochthonic students furthermore an intensive feeling of alienatedness can reduce their intrinsic motivation.\(^10\) Being obliged to learn things of which one does not understand what they are good for, threatens the feeling of competence. Similar negative consequences have the many tests that were used everywhere, as they can only offer few individuals feelings of competence. It seems as if this research finding already has started to have influence in practice as in the Netherlands the number of tests decreases by and by.

4. Psychical situation of detainees

Detention has various consequences for man. Several studies were focussing on the consequences far-reaching dependence on others has, or on the question what the consequences are of being deprived of the possibility to decide in most own matters. Another consequence is sensorial deprivation: The surroundings have only little variation. The day programme is monotonous. Visits are relatively seldom. Until now it seems that no broader research has been done on the impact of sensorial deprivation on the inmates. That is a lack that should be filled up soon.

What we know from research is, that prisoners conform more the longer they stay in prison. They surrender to the situation, they are simply getting used to it.\(^11\) That promotes a rather passive behaviour, something that does not support a habitus that tries actively to make a new start.

\(^8\) I.e. the brain volume in relation to the body volume.
According to the research of Zamble in adult prisoners the detention led by and by to a decrease of depression, an increase of motivation to change the wrong behaviour and even to an increase in well being. According to Zamble’s study the psychological functioning of the inmates kept stable during the one and a half year his research lasted. Earlier studies had similar results.\textsuperscript{12}

As a matter of fact, however, the influence of detention on a person depends strongly from the individual situation at the beginning of the detention period. Many prisoners enter prison as addicts and several come while tending to suicide. Their situation can improve under the influence of an adequate prison regime. Other inmates have other serious problems for which solutions can be found in prison. Consequently the results of the above mentioned studies do not necessarily say a lot about the influence detention itself has on the inmate.

According to the research of Gibbs\textsuperscript{13} the kind of prison regime can have influence on the extent of stress under the prisoners; stress, however, affects the way detention is experienced. Gibbs came to the conclusion that psychopathology in detention cannot simply be explained by saying that those problems were just imported to prison.

Toch\textsuperscript{14} stresses the need of privacy, structure, help and emotional feedback as the decisive factors for the ability of inmates to conform. According to him prison regime has thus an impact on the inmates.

Quite interesting are the findings of the study of Wright that took place in 1993. He concluded that prisoners conform less quickly when their surroundings offer little possibilities to develop, offer only little security and few possibilities for social interaction. The experienced extent of control was found a central concept in several studies on psychological wellbeing.\textsuperscript{15}

The extent of experienced control was qualified as an important factor in relation to violence, sickness, fright and depression under the prisoners.


\textsuperscript{13} J.J. Gibbs, Environmental congruence and symptoms of psychopathology: A further exploration of the effects of exposure to the jail environment, Criminal Justice and behaviour, 1991 (18), p. 351.


In 1999 Wooldredge\textsuperscript{16} came to the conclusion that the stress situation of prisoners increases when they have little time for structured activities, few visitors and became victim of maltreatment by inmates. In the study of Wooldredge, the offered day programmes were judged as insufficient to create a feeling of control. Both, control and own influence on what is going on are important factors in relation to the psychological well being of the inmates.

As far as research was done, we can conclude that there are almost no doubts that (the content of) the prison regimes are of influence on the psychological well being of inmates. The cited research results all related to adults. For juveniles the situation will not be different for what concerns the interaction processes described. The probability, however, that the influence on juveniles is even stronger must not be underestimated as in these cases influences are concerned on those who have not yet finished fully their process of development to a grown-up person.

5. Leisure activities, learning, motivation, and well being

5.1. Leisure activities and learning

The three above introduced factors important for intrinsic motivation, control, competence and social attachment, can easily be put to practice in connection with leisure activities. In connection with them juveniles can have much autonomy (factor control), can receive more easily positive feedback (factor competence) and will more easily find (factor 3) social attachment as they will altogether show a more social behaviour while being busy with leisure activities that will be answered by a likewise friendly and positive response.

Leisure time learning based on intrinsic motivation can be trained and what has been learnt can be used later in connection with learning activities that not necessarily belong to leisure time but are part of vocational training courses or lessons at school. Where is the difference between learning in connection with leisure activities and in another context if one is interested in what one is learning and fond of doing it?

\textsuperscript{16} J.D. Wooldredge, Inmate experiences and psychological wellbeing, Criminal Justice and Behaviour, 1999 (26), p. 235.
In this way, leisure activities can be a good starting point to stimulate and develop intrinsic motivation for learning or doing things one has chosen for and at the same time for learning itself. Sports, painting, making sculptures, handicraft, computering, making music etc. are activities that can have various positive effects useful for learning in general: Concentration, perseverance, knowledge, various skills, interests, creativity etc.

5.2. Leisure activities and well being
As stated above detention has negative influences on the psychical well being of inmates. Mainly stress, deprivation of the possibility to decide in own matters, sensorial deprivation and separation from partners and family are detrimental to the individual’s well being. Under these circumstances leisure time activities can be helpful up to a certain extent as they offer the opportunity to be busy and creative so that the mind is taken off from the problems detention causes. Leisure activities, mainly such such as making and listening to music, writing poems, short stories or a diary, offer furthermore the inmates the possibility to express their emotions and they can do that more or less indirectly, thus without the need to tell exactly what one is moved by. There is no doubt that these activities will improve the well being of the kids.

During our EU Leonardo da Vinci project YOUTH we could experience how the juveniles all over appreciated their leisure activities and how content they were, when they succeeded in finishing their piece of work. The results of their commitment made them proud, they had shown competence. We could also observe that several juveniles were interested to learn how to paint certain objects and how to improve their painting techniques.
Furthermore we experienced what a Dutch social worker described as follows: “While painting you see how their masks are falling from their faces.” Yes, indeed, while painting and making music they forget their surroundings, their situation, their pain. They were relaxed and almost happy.

6. Leisure time of Dutch juveniles in general and in detention

6.1. Leisure time of Dutch juveniles in general
Juveniles should learn how to use their leisure time in a positive way as nowadays juveniles (and adults, too) have quite a lot of leisure time next to school or work. Furthermore there are relatively many and in any case too many juveniles unemployed and for them positive leisure activities are even more important.

According to the study “Youth 2003” of the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics juveniles and adolescents aged 12 to 24 years have about 6 hours leisure time per day.

What is a day of a 12 to 24 years old like in the Netherlands nowadays?
Almost half of the day is used for personal care: sleeping, washing, dressing and eating at home. On an average – not all of the sample attend school or have a paid job – juveniles spend 2.5 hours at lessons and a bit more than 2 hours for a paid job. One hour they need to reach school or work and to do the shopping. Another hour they use for household activities. The rest is leisure time. How do they use their leisure time?
About two hours per day juveniles are watching the television or a video or they listen to music. One and a half hour are spent with family and friends. Half an hour per day the Dutch juveniles are actively busy playing games, making music, doing handy craft or acting (theatre). Half an hour they do nothing, go to a restaurant, a bar or attend sports.

80% of the juveniles up to 18 years of age is attending sport at least one hour a week. The percentage decreases when the juveniles become older.

Relatively many Dutch juveniles are member of one or more clubs, organizations etc. About two thirds of the group between 14 and 17 and half of the group of the 18 tot 24 years old participate at least once per month in a club, society etc.

About 25% of the 15 to 24 years old are singing or playing an instrument at least one hour a week. About 30% of the age-group 12-17 is painting, drawing or doing handycraft activities etc. for at least one hour per week.

Relatively few juveniles visit museums (6% of the juveniles visit a museum more than three times a year). Classical music is not in, whereas 13% of the 18-24 years old attend pop-concerts at least four times a year.

Juveniles are fond of going to the cinema (about 75% of the 15 to 24 year old are going to see a film at least four times a year).

About one third of the juveniles are going to a coffee-shop/bar once a week. The disco is also the territory of the youth. About 50% go out dancing once a month.

Walking and biking in nature are not the favourite activities of the modern young ones.

Most juveniles are altogether content with their leisure time activities.

Summarizing we can state that the leisure time activities of Dutch juveniles are not at all extreme, but rather modest.

6.1. Leisure time activities in a Dutch Correctional Institution for Juveniles

In the questionnaire belonging to the Leonardo da Vinci project ORESTIS we had included some questions about the leisure activities of the inmates. In the Forensic Orthopedagogical Centre where our research took place in 1998 the juveniles attended an internal school. They had to attend three lessons in the morning and two in the afternoon.

For what concerns the leisure activities of the juvenile inmates, watching television was the most important “activity” with 61% of the answers. This result emphasizes the importance of

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17 The Dutch research was part of the Leonardo da Vinci project ORESTIS and took place in the private Forensic-Orthopedagogical Centre „De Kolkemate“ in Zutphen.
special television programmes for inmates that offer as well intellectually as emotionally adequate responses to their needs. According to the Guideline of Riyadh of the United Nations of 1990 massmedia are accepted as playing an important role as socialization factor and in connection with preventing juvenile delinquency.

Furthermore television can help a hand in connection with informal learning.

In our survey sport came on the second place with 20%, followed by learning with 6% and computer games with 4%. Overviewing the answers we can conclude that two thirds of the leisure time is used in a passive way and one third in an active one.

Furthermore inmates are generally fond of listening to music. We recognized that during the ORESTIS and the YOUTH project. When we met the juveniles for painting and handicraft activities they always asked whether they were allowed to hear music. One day one of the volunteers brought classical music to prison. That caused a kind of general revolution and some of the juveniles got extremely angry and aggressive. Perhaps you know that at Hamburg Central Station junks are kept from the station by loud classic music spread from big loudspeakers.

When we asked the juveniles whether they would like to do anything else in their leisure time they just asked for more sport. That can be seen as a natural reaction on detention that deprives them of the usual extent of moving around, which is a strong need of juveniles.

Ideas for other leisure activities were not given. Generally open questions are not so useful in exploring opinions of deprived people. Perhaps this was also the reason for the many missings in the case of this question. Possibly one can also conclude that they are not really missing so much concerning leisure activities in prison, except of course their freedom.

Comparing leisure activities of those outside prison walls and inside prison walls we can conclude that the differences are not very big and as far as they exist they probably are mainly the consequence of one of the two groups compared being deprived of liberty.

7. Some conclusions

Leisure activities thus can have many positive effects in relation to the situation of juveniles in detention. They are able to improve social skills and better the well being of the inmates. Furthermore they can stimulate learning processes, improve the motivation for learning,
intensify interests and feelings of competence. Leisure activities are also able to stimulate creativity, independence and a sense of self-esteem.

As a matter of fact these positive effects do not appear without any own commitment, but they can help to reach objectives aimed at.

When we think about the present situation in prison with increasing numbers of inmates and decreasing financial means, leisure activities can offer good perspectives to overcome the consequences of the economy measures already introduced. Recently the principle of two inmates or perhaps more in one cell was introduced and the time locked in cell (about 6 square meter per person) was extended from 43 hours to 73 hours per week for adult inmates. Juveniles have to stay in their rooms also longer than before. Under these conditions leisure activities become of special interest as they are not necessarily expensive and after the detained have chosen their favourite leisure activity and are sufficiently motivated to put it to practice they are also able to do something creative while having to sit in their room (cell).

Last but not least, education in leisure activities should be integrated in general education as a whole, as there are increasing numbers of people without a paid job again. For the well being of those not participating in the common labour process and for their well being and the well being of society the way how they spend their leisure time is of great importance. Having a job makes people content and happy, is one of the finding of modern psychologists, the other is that you should not do it just for money. The important effect of working is the “flow”. If money is not the important factor, but the pleasure of being busy, doing something enjoyable, something that causes satisfaction, then leisure activities should be able to offer similar effects and in this way have a positive impact on the individual and indirectly on the common well being.

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