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Adult education as care work in a South African prison: the role of adult educators

Abstract

The 2000s saw a change in South Africa's Department of Correctional Services' theorising about adult education's potential to shift incarcerated men's thinking about their future in a proactive way. The plan was to advance active citizenship in the incarcerated. As such, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) introduced holistic, integrated adult educational programmes at twelve of its prisons. Although the policy and scaffolding aspects of AET (Adult Education and Training) received extensive attention, limited research was done to understand the situational and institutional challenges that adult learning centres are presented with, and how institutional culture impacts on the successful implementation of policy. The contributions that adult educators make in advancing transformative learning in adult learning centres, often go unacknowledged because they are seldom the focus of educational research.

This article reports on a case study of a successful prison-based adult learning centre. It explores the adult learner-AET educator relationship, specifically the role that educators play in fostering transformational change in such students' lives, through education. The data were generated through semi-structured interviews with students, their educators and the ALC's (Adult Learning Centres) manager, as well as through observations in the prison setting.

The findings show that there are strategic employees within the prison environment who resisted the educational opportunities available to incarcerated students. This hostility presented with unique institutional and situational challenges that work against the adult students' participation and success. However, through facilitation and reflective mediation, the educators established an educationally viable environment in which their students could accumulate cultural and social capital to benefit their educational journeys whilst incarcerated, and their chances of success once released from prison. The educators' actions resembled a caring pedagogy that was based on social justice principles.

Keywords: *adult education, incarceration, transformative learning, pedagogy of care, South Africa*



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1. Introduction

Research in the sociology of education has long identified formal education as an important indicator of social status. However, educational research also found that education systems reproduce social inequality in society through

cultural and structural mechanisms (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Lareau, 2003: 5-9; Daniels, 2018: 111-112). In South Africa, race and social class have often been determinants of opportunities that exist both inside and outside of the education system. The hierarchical, racially defined, and stratified education system that was in place in South Africa made the production and exchange of knowledge a contentious act during the period 1948 to 1994. The then government used its education structure to secure power positions for white citizens by prioritising white children's education and by unequally distributing educational resources to the various separate educational departments it created. This period in South Africa's history was marked by the educational marginalisation of black children and consequentially, their lower social standing in society (Aichinson, 2016: 134; Daniels & Adams, 2010). Despite the initiatives by the post-1994 democratic government to restructure all education and training contexts, and to facilitate access and inclusion of its previously marginalised student populations, Adult Education and Training (AET) continues to battle adult illiteracy and incomplete basic education amongst the black adult population. Though AET policy documents are infused with social justice and lifelong learning rhetoric, its reconceptualization and renewal thus far have been mostly conceptual and structural. The negligible attention that has been given to the situational and institutional challenges that adult learning centres are presented with, is reflected in the continuously weak performances of AET students in the national General Education and Training (GET) exit examinations.

Despite the barriers and challenges that AET experiences, UMALUSI, South Africa's standards generating body for GET in South Africa, annually report that some adult learning centres distinguish themselves from the rest in that their adult students consistently perform well in the external GET (General Education and Training) national examinations. No educational research existed that could explain why these ALCs consistently outperform other centres. In 2015, UMALUSI contracted a team of South African academics to conduct research on the institutional efficacy of twelve successful Adult Learning Centres (ALC) that they purposively selected from four provinces.¹ The aim was to gain knowledge on these exceptional centres' governance, teaching, and learning. My involvement in this multiple case study was as the primary researcher for the Western Cape, where I conducted research at three sites: a medium security prison ALC, a state ALC situated in a township, and a semi-private ALC.

For the article, I focus on one of the cases, the Lonehill ALC, which is situated in the New Horizon medium-security prison.² Post-1994, the Department of Correctional Services established adult learning centres at twelve of its prisons and introduced holistic, integrated adult educational programmes to incarcerated men who had not completed their formal basic education. The aim was for incarcerated men to participate in educational programmes that could capacitate them with skills and qualifications whilst they were serving out their sentences, and so address the recidivism problem with newly released inmates. This DCS initiative was, however, of limited success, as participation in their education programmes was poor, as was the student throughput in the GET certificate exam. Of the DCS adult learning centres, only Lonehill's students were consistently performing well in the national General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) examination. Furthermore, Lonehill's GETC graduates continue their education by completing their high school education, and through correspondence, some pursue post-school educational and training opportunities.

1 The research was conducted in the Western Cape, Limpopo, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

2 This is a fictitious name for the ALC and the prison.

When compared to the other eleven ALCs in the UMALUSI study (2016), Lonehill's student profile and the conditions under which education happens, is very different. Whereas adult students at public ALCs exercise their individual right to access and participate in AET, incarcerated adult students' participation is governed by strict rules and regulations. Incarcerated students must apply for permission from the prison authorities to attend classes during the times the centre operates and are under continuous surveillance whilst they attend classes. These conditions are necessary, as the students are serving out long-term sentences for serious crimes that include murder, sexual abuse, and drug trafficking. The profile of the adult students at this facility is very similar to the other South African prison populations. Incarcerated adult students are mostly black men in their early twenties to late thirties who are spending key years of their life course in prison due to their lengthy sentences.

Given the restrictive conditions of their engagement with AET I hypothesised that the adult educators would act as mediators of their engagement and as facilitators of their educational success. As such, I sought to answer the following research question: How do adult educators facilitate the educational success of incarcerated adult students? The aim was to seek knowledge on the roles that educators play to facilitate the participation of incarcerated males in the DCS programmes. It was also to gain insight into the social networks that educators establish to aid students' perspective transformation about education.

2. Literature review

When the Constitution (RSA, 1996) was passed in 1996, it became the overall framework for governance in democratic South Africa, obligating all government departments to align their core business with it, and their *modus operandi* with the governance framework. The Department of Correctional Services, which was renowned for its militarised prison environment, and its incarceration-as-punishment *modus operandi*, had to align its operations with the national social justice rhetoric on educational transformation. Its post-1994 policy documents reflect a transformative shift towards rehabilitation through development and the advancement of active citizenship in incarcerated males through education and training opportunities for them (RSA, 2005). This stance is very similar to that taken by the USA as supported by their Second Chance Act of 2008 (US Department of Justice, 2014) which recommends services and programmes that aid the incarcerated person's rehabilitation and his positive participation in society post-incarceration. The National Crime Prevention Strategy was to transform South African prisons into effective rehabilitation centres that produce skilled and reformed individuals who can successfully reintegrate into their communities as law-abiding citizens (RSA, 1998; RSA, 2005; RSA, 2014). The goal with its AET programmes was for all incarcerated men with low literacy skills to acquire the General Education and Training certificate (GETC). The AET Level 4 examination is the exit qualification for the General Education and Training band and the equivalent of a Grade 9 pass in the formal school system. The GETC (or Grade 9) is the prerequisite qualification, should the graduate wish to continue his education through the Further Education and Training (FET) and Higher Education and Training (HET) bands of the education system (Daniels, 2020).

Most educational initiatives that are aimed at marginalised adults, though, locate the adult education debate within the human capital explanatory framework, and rationalise the educational investment in the individual in terms of education's market value. The justification for education is framed in terms of the corporate world's needs for skills, knowledge, and credentials to build a strong workforce. This viewpoint corresponds with the dominant

global viewpoint that an individual's ambitions, economic efficiency, and social justice can be realised when economies are driven by skilled, highly waged workers (Brown & Lauder, 2012). However, as some researchers point out (Warhurst & Thompson, 2006; McLennan, 2003), human capital accumulation is not the product of formal education only; the influences and investments of family, community, and society, and individuals' engagement with the world all contribute to capital accumulation. Furthermore, an individual's circumstances and how he is acted upon play an important role in his social and cultural capital accumulation. Very limited understanding exists on the impact of enforced social and cultural isolation on an individual's educational development. Incarcerated individuals, for example, function in a world of enforced social and cultural isolation as part of the conditions of their sentencing. When the individual's incarceration period starts, there is an automatic severance of his outside social networks. The opportunities to establish new social networks within the prison are restricted by the rules and regulations that govern incarceration. A prisoner's social isolation might even be intensified by dispositional challenges such as low self-esteem and his poor literacy and numeracy skills. These social conditions might intersect to create a context where educational opportunities that are available to them hold no value and are rejected. I believe that it is naïve to assume that incarcerated men would automatically participate in AET programmes, and that the outcome of participation is always a positive self-image, enhanced self-efficacy and successful reintegration into society. My contention is that the conditions under which education happens, and the mediators of such education are as important as the student's investment in education.

The prison environment is not a welcoming one, as imprisonment is shrouded by stigma and dishonour. Incarcerated men are serving out sentences for crimes they have committed against society. As such they are often treated with hostility by their warders as wards who are undeserving of second-chance educational opportunities. They might show a lack of compassion for their wards, which might amplify the incarcerated men's social isolation and alienation. Educators, like warders, are also employees of the DCS; so incarcerated men might expect them also to treat them with contempt. As such they might be suspicious of them and question the educators' motives and commitment to their education and development. The intersectionality of institutional, situational, and dispositional challenges accounts for the diverse responses of incarcerated men to the educational opportunities that the DCS offer in its prison based ALCs.

There is a body of literature on reflective scholarship that asks of adult education educators to consider whether their classroom pedagogies are responsive to students' experiences of social and historical traumas (Zembylas, 2014; Palmer, 1998). However, most research on reflexivity and critical reflection by the educator is specific to the higher education context. These scholars envision an educational space that is defined by dialogue and relationship building, and by healing and compassion (Roy, 2016). According to Nussbaum (2001), one would normally show compassion when one can relate to the other person's suffering. However, her line of argumentation also implies that educators will not be compassionate towards adult students if they think that the suffering is somehow deserved. My concern is that a conditional compassionate stance might discourage healing, as in the case with adult offenders who have had troubling childhood histories.

Historically, the relationship between AET facilitators and adult students is very different from the lecturer-student relationship in higher education. In the AET relationship there is an acknowledgement that educational marginalisation during childhood might be at the root of

the adult's illiteracy or his incomplete formal schooling. I classify incarcerated adult students of low literacy and numeracy skills and incomplete formal education as a marginalised student population. Contemplative scholarship asks that educators reflect on how they relate to such marginalised adult student populations and the roles that they can play in fostering transformational change in such adult students' lives (Fleming, 2022: 8-10). Freire, Giroux, Mezirow and Brookfield all theorise that critical reflective practitioners are more likely to engender activism for positive change as part of their educational agenda. Paulo Freire (1970) use the term, conscientisation, to refer to education that has as goal the social transition of adult students. Freire's critical pedagogy was informed by his belief that education's goal is to free learners from oppression of the mind and their oppressive circumstances. The pedagogy is highly political because "it offered students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life, and particular notions of critical agency" (Giroux, 2010: 71). This type of education follows an emancipatory ethic (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004) that acknowledges the worth and importance of people and recognises adult students' desire and right to manage their own lives and the decisions that affect their lives. According to Brookfield (2017), critically reflective educators engage with four sites of learning, namely learning through interaction with their students, learning from their autobiographies, learning from theory, and learning from their colleagues. Critically reflective practitioners prepare the social climate of the classroom as a space where the development of knowledge is mediated and exchanged. Therefore, as McLennan (2003) points out, in a critical reflective space, both the adult students and their educators have a stake in the outcome of the action. As such, they are instrumental in facilitating a particular outcome. This implies that the role of the educator is also as a co-student and the role of the adult student is also as a co-facilitator in the learning space.

3. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Conceptually, the study draws from various theories. In my theorising about the prison-based AET programme I align myself with the critical theorist perspective of the educator as a caring, critical activist whose goal is not just to advance transformative learning, but also to initiate change in the individual's world. Firstly, I draw on critical theory and Freire's liberatory pedagogy (1970) to propose an education that could lead to critical reflection and self-introspection about the adult student's troubled history and his racial marginalisation as a black child growing up in an oppressive society. As an educator I subscribe to a caring pedagogy that Noddings (2004) defines by four key components, namely modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 2004; Smith, 2020). Modelling refers to the educators' demonstration of their caring attitude, i.e. the way they behave towards their students. Noddings (2004) describes dialogue as an essential part of the practice of caring, which is to exercise care through performing reflective actions. The final component, confirmation, refers to acknowledgement in terms of affirmation and encouragement of the best qualities in others.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth theory acknowledges the mutual engagement and influences between individuals and the low socio-economic communities that they are part of. According to Yosso (2005:72), socially marginalised communities accumulate cultural wealth through six forms of capital, namely aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. She defines aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005: 77). Navigational capital refers to the skills that people acquire to manoeuvre through social institutions, such as adult education centres. Social capital, in a Bordieuan understanding, refers to networks of

people and community resources that one can access for support (Yosso, 2005: 79). Linguistic capital refers to “intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005: 78). Familial capital denotes the cultural knowledges about community history, memory and culture that are nurtured among family members. Yosso (2005: 80) describes resistant capital as “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality”. Yosso engages with these forms of cultural wealth as dynamic inter-related practices that build on one another, leading to knowledge that are constantly being re-negotiated, adjusted, and produced when individuals move between real and virtual spaces on their life journeys.

Community Cultural Wealth theory enhanced my sense making of the cultural wealth and social capital that the incarcerated men accumulate as students in the AET programme and through their interactions with educators in the Lonehill ALC and the broader correctional community. In a strictly regimented space such as a prison, the typical pathways for accessing social capital might not be readily available. Moreover, incentives for developing social capital in prison may be different from the social capital drivers within the community. The Lonehill inmates are housed two inmates to a cell, which means that opportunities to network with other incarcerated men are impossible. Furthermore, access to systems that could benefit the individual’s accumulation of cultural and social capital are prioritised differently in a prison setting, as access is subject to the regulations of the prison authorities. My understanding of a social network is an exchange of resources within and beyond the complex prison networks (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Through analysing the social networks that educators and adult students establish and access, and the cultural capital that they accumulate, I sought insights into what the adults learned about themselves as human beings, and whether this knowledge shifted their thinking about their role in society, post-incarceration.

4. Research design and methodology

A qualitative case study design was selected for this inquiry because my researcher’s interest was to gain an in-depth understanding of institutional efficacy at the prison-based ALC. As already explained, this case study was one of twelve exemplary ALCs that were purposively selected in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, and the Western Cape, based on the following inclusion criteria:

- performance in the General Education and Training Certificate: ABET Level 4 exams, or other relevant national or provincial assessments.
- recruitment, retention, and throughput of students.
- perceived efficacy according to key stakeholders in the adult education field.

The article only focuses on the Lonehill ALC case study. Merriam (1998) differentiates the case study from other qualitative research designs in that it provides intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system. The case study design allows one to explore the complexities of navigating AET in a prison-based ALC in depth. The research participants were four adult students, two AET facilitators and the centre manager. In my collection of data, I located the participants’ narratives “at the intersection of history, biography and society” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005: 132).

I followed a social constructivist approach to the participants' realities and situated my epistemological interest in these adults' personal experiences of doing education in a prison context, with an understanding of them as knowledgeable and knowing individuals. I interpreted their knowing as both personal, as it is their life experience, and social, as it reflects the milieu in which their experiences in education play out (Clandinin, 2015). I assumed that the context of the Lonehill ALC would be immensely complex, as would be the lives of the adult students and their educators. As such, my telling of their experiences, and my hearing of and responding to the incidents they shared always included a mindfulness of how experiences have been shaped and continue to be shaped "on past and present landscapes and how the landscape with its interwoven stories is shaped by our telling them" (Clandinin, 2015: 190).

The data collection methods were semi-structured personal interviews and observations. I engaged with each participant on a one-on-one basis and conducted semi-structured personal interviews, as well as did observations in the prison spaces I had access to (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006; Patton, 2002). For the thematic data analysis, I made use of Chase's (2005) five interrelated analytical lenses in my coding of the data and to arrive at the findings. My engagement with the narrated text was through the lenses of it being a vehicle for human action, narrator voice, social circumstances as constraints to narrations, social situatedness of the narrative, and the researcher as narrator. The data were furthermore analysed with three strategic contexts in mind, namely the adult learning centre, the broader prison environment, and the individual cell of the incarcerated adult student.

5. Findings and discussion

My analysis of the data led to various themes emerging, which I present and discuss in this section.

5.1 Facilitating a second chance educational opportunity in a hostile environment

The setting of the Lonehill ALC had a strong influence on the centre's operations. New Horizon prison, which is the ALC's setting, is a medium-security prison where incarcerated men are serving out sentences for serious crimes that include murder, assault, abuse, and robbery. The educators and the adult students alike experience the prison environment as an alienating space for adult education. Though the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996), states in section 29(1) that "Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education", the reality is that strategic DCS employees question the incarcerated person's right to an education. Mr Leeman, who is the Lonehill's centre manager, believes that many members of civil society oppose the investment that the state makes in incarcerated persons. They see the DCS's educational opportunities to the incarcerated as a waste of valuable, scarce public resources that should have been channelled towards "more deserving" adult students. According to Mr Leeman, many Lonehill warders openly vocalise this viewpoint and say that "drug pushers, sex offenders, abusers, and murderers, are not deserving of those opportunities". Mr Leeman and Mr Dawson, another educator, believe that the warders' mindset was influenced by the severity of the crimes that these men committed. According to Mr Dawson, who has also worked for more than a decade as a warder, warders buy into the stereotype of incarcerated men "as remorseless, conniving men who are out to cheat the system". That mindset, though, threatens the transformative goals that the DCS has for the AET students, as well as their right to participate in the programme. The warders and

the managers of the “housing units”³ are crucial links in the adult education chain. Without their collaboration, Lonehill’s adult education grinds to a halt, as I will explain next.

The simple act of attending an adult education class is a collaborative process in the New Horizon prison. The prison authorities must grant permission for the students to attend classes between 8:30 and 13:00. However, because Lonehill ALC is not situated in the prison building, the students must be transferred from the prison building to the ALC. Such commuting must happen under strictly warder-controlled conditions. Firstly, the housing unit managers must organise all the adult students into groups immediately after the breakfast session ends. Each group is then assigned into the care of the on-duty warders, under whose watchful accompaniment they complete a 5-minute walk to the centre. The housing unit managers and the warders’ cooperation and assistance are thus a crucial part of the AET process. In addition to accompanying the incarcerated students and supervising their commute from the housing unit to their respective classrooms, the warders’ duties are also to guard the ALC building and its occupants during the ALC’s operational hours. An additional warder duty over weekends is the accompanying and guarding of incarcerated men who participate in sporting activities. An incentive to participate in AET is that the incarcerated men can participate in one of the three sporting codes of cricket, soccer, and rugby. On Saturdays they compete against teams from other prison-based ALCs and approved external sports clubs. These warder duties are seen as “additional” duties and are not always welcomed by them. My informants said that the warders often renegade on these duties, and so take away incarcerated sportsmen’s right to participate in such events.

There are also institutional occurrences that intermittently interrupt, even hijack, the adult education programme and process. According to Mr Leeman, the management structure at New Horizon shows total disregard for the academic timetable in their management decisions. So, for example the prison management permit POPCRU to schedule their union meetings for 12:00, which is during AET class time when warders are on duty at the ALC. It leaves Mr Leeman with no choice but to cancel all AET classes for the day.

They will let you know that a sports programme for warders is happening now. Then they lock up the inmates, our students. We can do nothing about it. These things make our work situation very challenging. (IAE/L)

A second institutional hurdle for the AET programme is the once-a-month Zama-Zama shopping day at the prison shop. Mr Leeman explains,

Every month New Horizon has what we call, the Zama-Zama day. Once a month the incarcerated men are allowed to buy toiletries and do shopping at the prison shop. You cannot deny them that opportunity, but it affects us negatively. Then the school stay closed for two days. For two to three days ... the school stop operating. (IAE/L)

Though the Zama-Zama day is scheduled for only one day, it always spills over into a second and third day due to the high volume of shoppers. On such days, student absenteeism is so high that classes must be cancelled. The adult educators say that decisions are taken unilaterally by the prison authorities, and that they are never consulted on matters that impact their operations, such as the union meeting dates, and the Zama-Zama day. Both Mr Leeman and Mr Dawson experience it as an abuse of power from the prison management side, and a show of disrespect towards their education colleagues.

3 The educators refer to the four prison buildings in which the incarcerated men are kept as “housing units”.

5.2 Setting the stage for educational participation

Since 2013, it has been mandatory for all incarcerated males with an incomplete formal schooling to enrol in the adult basic education programme (RSA, 2005). As such, all new inmates, irrespective of their high-school credentials, are assessed by a panel which consists of a social worker, an educator, an educational administrator from the DCS, and a representative of the New Horizon's skills department. An intake interview gathers information about his life history, his school history, and his aspirations in life to recommend an educational pathway for the newly incarcerated individual. Bronson, Garrit, Jan and James, the incarcerated males who participated in the study, said that they were confident that they would score high on the AET assessments, because all of them came with high-school experience. When they were assessed, though, their literacy and numeracy scores were well below their formal school grade level. Bronson was shocked when he tested at AET Level 2, which was seven grades below the grade he passed in high school. Their low literacy scores seem to be confirmation to the men that academically, they were failures.

According to the educators many incarcerated men initially rebel against the assessment outcome, are resentful towards the facilitators and questioned their placement decisions. Mostly the assessment panel will recommend that those with high-school experience provisionally enrol at AET Level 3. Should they cope well, they are promoted to Level 4 halfway through the year. The educators are used to the oppositional behaviours of high school dropouts and attribute their anger and resistance to their troubled histories with schooling, which left them distrustful of educators and angry at the education system. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) refer to these reactions as oppositional behaviours that have self-defeating and conformist qualities that feed back into these individuals' insubordination.

The reasons that the participants gave for changing their minds and participating in the AET programme were very similar. I found that their physical confinement and social isolation were the deciding factors in their decisions to sign up for the AET programme. When the accused men are awaiting sentencing, they are temporarily sentenced to the older, overcrowded South Africa's prisons where incarcerated men share their prison cell with 25 to 40 other individuals. Compared to that setup, the New Horizon setup is a total culture shock for the new inmate. In this facility the inmate shares his cell with only one other male with whom he spends 23 hours per day, every day. Bronson summed up his reasons for participating in AET, as follows,

In this prison, education (AET programme) represents freedom. You are free. So the classes help one to be on the outside (in the ALC), out of the cage ... I would rather go to class as I know I can move around. Because in the unit one cannot move as you are locked up for the whole day, do you understand? (AL4 interview),

Bronson's motivation to participate in the AET programme was not educational; it was an opportunity to temporarily escape the monotony and social isolation of his two-person cell. Instead of sitting in his cell for the whole day, with only one person for company, he could have contact with at least 25 adult students and the facilitator if he attended AET classes. Between classes, he could socialise with the students from the other AET level classes. Thus, as an AET student he has approximately five hours daily, during the week, to escape his cell confinement and enjoy freedom of movement and association, in the Lonehill centre.

My analysis of their narratives shows the potential of the AET programme to restore the students' confidence in themselves and in their academic abilities. The participants all recalled the amazement they felt when they passed tests and made academic progress as adult students. The knock-on effect of doing well on tests and in exams was that it awoke their

competitive spirit and encouraged them to work harder. Two of them, James and Garrit, were top AET achievers on the national adult basic education exit exams. Garrit won a national award for the Lonehill ALC and a monetary award for himself,

I received a certificate as the best student for Afrikaans, in the Western Cape. I also received a trophy and a R3 000 for myself. (IAL/G)

James was also one of the top AET Level 4 students nationwide. I found out that, in addition to studying towards the General Education and Training certificate, many of Lonehill's AET students were also doing matric subjects as correspondence students. James was one such student who used the opportunity to fast track his education. At the time of the interview he was doing the national technical certificate in carpentry as well as taking correspondence classes to write the remaining three subjects for matriculation. He did the first three matric subjects while he was enrolled in AET Level 4. The AET educators encourage the academically stronger students to fast track their education by simultaneously enrolling for more than one programmes. Even though they are only responsible for the GET band, they facilitate their students' access to FET opportunities.

The academic successes of their AET students are celebrated at an annual awards ceremony that the Lonehill educators arrange. At a function where all the AET students are treated to a special meal and festivities, the top academic achievers in each of the four adult education levels are celebrated with awards, certificates and trophies. The awardees are photographed, and their photos are displayed in the broader prison environment for all to see. This end-of-year event is described by Mr Leeman as both a celebration of the students' achievements and encouragement to be the protagonists in their life stories. Jan, or Mr Andrews, the incarcerated student who is also appointed as an educator on the AET programme, remarked that students who do well academically earn respect from various sectors of the prison community,

when he does well in the tests and on the exams, it makes other inmates sit up and notice him ... and everyone talks about him ... (IAE/A)

When I probed his statement and asked who he was including in "everyone", I found that the education programme sometimes becomes a platform that men who have gang affiliations, use to reclaim some of the respect and power they lost when they were incarcerated. Three of the AET student participants were former gang members, and the fourth was a street gang member. In New Horizon, gang members have limited opportunity to pull rank or exert their power over other inmates due to their isolation in the two-inmate cell setup. Interaction with inmates other than their cell mate is minimal, as are the opportunities to influence and recruit new members as would happen in the other South African prisons. Jan observed that gang influences in Lonehill are happening in a covert way. An example he used was the competition that exist between members of rival gangs who are attending the same classes to achieve the highest marks on tests and exams.

The men start their sentencing with their lives in disarray: they had committed crimes against society; they had failed their families; they have no formal school credentials. In the prison environment the hostility of their warders seems almost justified. With this as background they find the AET educators' helpful and supportive demeanour a welcome surprise, and uplifting. Garrit recalled how it would motivate him when the educator says,

Go on you are doing something good for yourself. Use your time wisely. Use your time in here to accomplish, so that when you leave here, it is with something useful. (IAL/3)

The 30-year-old Bronson elaborated more on the caring attitudes of the AET educators towards him. He said that it was their personal investments in him that made him start believing again that he is a worthy human being. He was a 17-year-old high school dropout who became a gang member, and then two years later, a long-term inmate in a medium-security prison. After being imprisoned for more than a decade, he started believing that he has no future to look forward to. Then he enrolled for AET, and his path crossed with educators like Mr Dawson who saw potential in him and encouraged him to reflect on how education can benefit him. Bronson's experiences in AET vindicated his disempowering formal school experiences. He describes his participation in AET as a journey of self-discovery,

I have come to realise that education does not just play a role in what you learn, but also in the person that you become. That has been the catalyst for me to persevere. Now I can communicate with people on a higher level than before. (IAL/B)

Education seems to have a different value for Bronson than it has for the other three men. Education has given him the tools to be reflective and critical about who he wants to be in the world. It has changed his outlook on life in a profound way, something that Mezirow (2000) refers to as a perspective shift, which in turn is part of the process of transformative learning.

Though his and the other participants' motivation to participate in AET was initially for the instant gratification of socialising with others and to enhance their status in the gang-influenced prison community, their success with education has made them think about their potentiality beyond incarceration. James is the father of four children, Garrit of three, and Jan of a 15-year-old daughter. All three seem to have taken limited responsibility for their children's upbringing pre-incarceration. My analysis of the data on their lives tells a story of absent fatherhood, gangsterism, hard drugs and alcohol abuse. None of them had stable, full-time employment before their incarceration.

When I interviewed them, all four had completed their GETC and probably would pass matric too. On average the men have 15 years of incarceration ahead of them, so potentially they have the time to acquire higher education qualifications too. I engaged the participants in a discussion on what the future holds for them. Jan completed Grade 10 at a technical school and started a panel beating course while he was in a different prison. He is currently studying towards the BA degree in Christian Education, which could prepare him for an education career. However, he sees counselling as his calling. He talks about his ministry being to give to incarcerated men what he missed in his life: encouragement and hope.

When I applied for a bursary to study Christian education, it was to see a change in others' lives. I want to make a change in their lives, make them feel worthy. I have since realised that I am doing it in prison already (IAL/J)

The 38-year-old James had completed two years of his 15-year sentence when I interviewed him. He excelled in the AET Level 4 exams and won two national awards for being the top adult education student in two subject areas. James was fast tracking his education by doing the national technical certificate in carpentry as well as taking correspondence classes to write the remaining three subjects for the senior certificate. He was using his second-chance opportunity to complete his schooling as well as learn a trade whilst incarcerated. His motivation for working hard and improving his qualifications was to show his family that he can be responsible. Though he still has 13 years left of his sentencing term, he seemed

very goal directed with his studies. His plan is to qualify as a carpenter whilst serving out his sentence, so that when he is released, “*his chances of getting a job, are better because he is a qualified artisan*”.

In all three men’s conversations they allude to life after incarceration. Their narratives all link their educational success to the opportunity it offers to them to redeem themselves in the eyes of their families and children and to be seen as responsible human beings. James was showing, through his accomplishments, that he has become a responsible person; Jan had turned his life around and want to work in service of humanity. He wants to bring hope and encouragement to men to turn their lives around like he did. Bronson wants to win back his family’s trust. Since becoming involved in AET, he has been expanding his social networks, and readying himself to reconnect with his aunt and relatives. Bronson wants to redeem himself to his family by showing them that he completed his senior certificate and is making life decisions that do not involve gangsterism.

5.3 An incarcerated man also deserves a second chance to redeem himself

This heading reflects the Lonehill educators’ response when I asked their views on how knowledge of the students’ criminal history influenced their engagement with them. Mr Leeman and Mr Dawson chose not to dwell on their students’ criminal histories. They said that engagement with that knowledge would impede their efforts to build meaningful educational relationships with students.

The perception that those on the outside have when they see the orange prison clothes, is that it is a dangerous person ... but there are various reasons why people find themselves in prison. (IAE/D interview)

Though the above quote comes from Mr Dawson’s interview, it captured the positioning of the adult educators as reflective practitioners. When I reminded the educators that New Horizon is a medium-security facility for men who had committed serious crimes and that it is realistic for the public to think of them as potentially dangerous, both iterated that they are not naïve about their work context; nor about who the men are that they teach. Their experience, though, and their engagement with this student population have given them the insights to know that incarcerated men are not a homogenous group. The men come with diverse social and cultural histories and realities. Thus, even though they all committed serious crimes, not all are hardened criminals, or dangerous.

The sub-population that seems to draw the most empathy from both Mr Leeman and Mr Dawson, is the first-time offenders within the New Horizon adult student population. Mr Dawson is a qualified high school teacher who had worked as a warder at New Horizon until 2003, before he was seconded to the AET programme.

In my work with first-time offenders (as a warder) I came to know about their problems and had to think carefully about how to help them ... with their dilemmas. In the prison there are many challenges that first-time offenders face. Now, (in AET) just like when I was a schoolteacher ... you basically are their mother and father. You take them by the hand and become that link with the outside world that has been severed because of their families rejecting them. (IAE/D)

Mr Dawson explained that many young, first-time offenders had troubled childhoods and disorganised family backgrounds. His educator knowledge about some of his wards has taught him to be cautious about engaging with community and family contexts as static environments that have no agency or influence on the individual's life. The educators believed that the structural violence caused by community poverty and family disorganisation are circumstances and histories that tend to be misrecognised by society as contributing factors to some young men's engagement with crime.

Bronson's narrative about his life story validated their point. When his teenage mother was deemed unfit to raise him because of her drug addiction, his grandmother became his parent. However, they were living in a Western Cape township community where parents fear that their children, especially their boys, will succumb to the influences of gangsterism. His grandmother removed him from the negative influences of the community by enrolling him as a boarder at a former Model C school in Franschhoek, an affluent Boland town. However, when his grandmother died, his aunt could not afford to keep him enrolled at the school, so she enrolled him at a township school. Bronson struggled to fit in at his township school and his poor academic performance contributed to his marginalisation and isolation. When he failed Grade 11, he dropped out of school, moved out of his aunt's house and became involved in a gang. In an alienating world, marginalised young males like Bronson are perfect recruits for street gangs and the world of crime. When he committed a serious crime, his aunt and relatives severed their ties with him. For the past 13 years, Bronson has had no social contact with his family or community.

According to the educators Bronson is part of a sub-population of incarcerated men who never receive visitors because their families and their communities have severed their ties with them. Mr Dawson says it is the first-time offenders who are vulnerable and who need someone to take their hand, to "*keep them alive, and to tell them that all is not lost*". Mr Dawson and Mr Leeman's empathy for incarcerated men like Bronson and Jan, their colleague, stem from them having been raised in similar communities as the incarcerated men. The two educators said they spoke from experience when they say that they understand why the street gang becomes a haven to marginalised youth from dangerous communities.

Jan, or Mr Andrews' relationship with the incarcerated students is different from the other two educators, because he himself is incarcerated. His childhood was marked by sexual abuse at the hands of the family saviour who took them in when the family was homeless. He was sexually exploited and introduced to a life of organised crime and illicit activities from an early age. Jan says he was leading a criminal lifestyle that he is not proud of. By the age of 24, in 2002, he was sentenced to a high-security prison for a serious crime he had committed. He was later transferred to the medium-security facility where his job in the Lonehill centre is as "teaboy" for Mr Leeman. Due to the delays by the Department of Correctional Services to make a suitable AET appointment, Mr Leeman appointed Mr Andrews to teach an AET Level 1 class. He has no formal teaching credentials, but has taught in the AET programme at another prison. Mr Andrews is currently studying towards a degree in Christian education. He, like the other two educators embrace a caring ethos towards the students.

In my ministering of them I tell them how valuable they are, and that there will be a future for them. I realised that God told me that I have a future, that I mean something to Him, because I am still here standing here. And this is how I encourage them every day (IAL/J)

The AET Level 1 students usually are older individuals who have never been to school or who have had very limited exposure to basic education. Mr Andrews has found that many of these older students are seeking redemption for the serious crimes that they committed. They turn to him for counselling, because they know that he can relate to their histories. He says that the AET Level 1 students appreciate his teachings from the scripture, especially the ones who want to increase their spiritual capital by becoming knowledgeable about the bible's teachings. What comes through in misters' Leeman, Dawson and Andrews' narratives is the solidarity that they share with their adult students. However, they iterate that their solidarity is given with a mindfulness of the power dynamics present in their ALC context. The educators say they must always be alert, and should never forget who their students are, or why they are incarcerated.

5.5 The educator as a caring, compassionate collaborator

One of the surprising phenomena I observed in the Lonehill ALC building was the frequency of the students' visits to Mr Leeman's office. I noticed that there was always a student patiently waiting outside his office for his turn to consult with the centre manager.

When I officially start in the mornings there is already a long line forming outside my office. I send them to class first, but I also listen to their problems. Some are problems that should be resolved at their housing units, that they bring to me to fix. So I handle the problem myself because my door is open ... (IAE/L)

Mr Leeman follows an open-door policy with students. Though they state that they want to consult with him on academic matters, he mostly finds that their conversations are about the students' personal issues and the challenges they experience in the unit. They share their fears and disappointments when family and friends miss a visit or stop communicating with them. Mr Leeman said that these men see in him a confidante and a sympathetic listener. In the New Horizon community there are few people who can take on that role, so the educators probably are the most likely individuals to turn to when they need to be comforted.

The centre manager says that a good relationship exists between the educators and the students. From what I could deduce, the educators invest a lot of time and effort in building a relationship with their students and to advance educator-student dialogue. They identify communication and trust as a prerequisite for adult education in the prison. The first step they take towards building a relationship with their students is to challenge the image they have of the adult educator as "warders who teach", and to gain their trust. It is also to change the AET student's childhood memories of the classroom as an autocratic, punitive space, and the teacher as a hostile adult who criticizes. As a former warder who worked closely with youthful first-time offenders, Mr Dawson reflected on his knowledge of this population when he says,

You need to know, many of them are still very angry at the world, and they can become very rebellious if you do not approach them in the right way. (IAE/D)

The educators said that they worked very hard to establish a respectful mode of communication with their students, and that they always model a caring demeanour. This is validated by the students who all described the ALC educators as caring practitioners who have their students' interests at heart.

According to Mr Dawson, it is important that their communicative behaviour is age appropriate. They acknowledge their students as adults who bring a wealth of knowledge to the learning environment. However, in the restrictive prison environment their students' actions are regulated by rules and regulations, which set up the classroom space as a restrictive space that might inhibit the students' participation. They work hard selling the AET classroom as a safe space where dialogical discourse is encouraged. The educators are selective in the vocabulary they use when talking to, and about their students. I experienced firsthand during the interviews how the educators avoided using terminology and labels that could stereotype their students further when they spoke about them. When I once used the word, prisoner, to asking about a student, the educator requested that I use the label, "candidate" instead of "prisoner" when referring to the adult students. When they talked about the prison cells, they referred to it as "housing units".

Their caring attitude also extend to the environment outside of the Lonehill ALC, that their students inhabit. Mr Leeman and his educating team constantly monitor the prison environment for potential barriers to participation. My analysis of the data shows that the educators invest a lot of time and energy in strengthening the educational environment for their students. Their insider knowledge of how their students' access to the AET programme can be short-changed when unit managers renegade on their responsibilities led to proactive actions that minimise such occurrences. Mr Leeman comes to work earlier to go to the housing unit where he helps the unit manager with getting the students ready for their commute to the ALC.

I run down to get them (the students). The teachers also occasionally do. It is tiring to have to do this all the time ... We would not have to do this if that unit manager took control over the students ... but he doesn't. (IAE/L)

This action of the educators has led to a decrease in student absenteeism and an increase in students' participation in the AET programme.

The educators say they constantly advocate and lobby for an improved educational environment in the cells. The DCS rules and regulations forbid incarcerated students from having materials, even educational resources, in their cells. They are also not allowed visitors to their cells. These rules and regulations are detrimental to their ability to do research for homework assignments, collaborate with other students on assignments or to study together. Access to a library or the internet for guidance and support is prohibited, as is recourse to consult with their educators. These are challenges that are governed by the unique conditions of incarceration. However, the constant effort of the Lonehill educators to conscientize the Department of Correctional Services about the importance of study spaces paid off as the DCS paid heed to it by incorporating some of their recommendations in the organisational structure of the housing units. The DCS has restructured the unit space in New Horizon with the student population in mind. The management now assigns accommodation to students according to the educational programme they are enrolled for and pair cellmates according to their AET education level. Such decisions make pedagogical sense and have increased the students' opportunities for intellectual exchange and have encouraged peer support with homework and studying. This setup has also encouraged the formation of informal support networks. In the units each student now has his own desk and chair with which to create his personalised study area.

6. Conclusion

In this article I explored the roles that educators play in the success of the students of Lonehill ALC. The prison context is a challenging space to situate an ALC in, as there are many rules and regulations that place restrictions on educational freedoms. The student population are incarcerated men whose participation happens under close surveillance in a heavily guarded space. Incarceration is cloaked in stigma and dishonour, and AET as a second-chance educational opportunity for these incarcerated men is not always supported by the DCS employees. Their hostilities play out in ways that threaten the men's constitutional right to access educational opportunities. It also threatens the educational project and impact negatively on the adult educators' work.

What I found was that the educators at Lonehill invest a lot of time and energy to enhance Lonehill's profile as a safe, trustworthy educational space. Furthermore, they work hard to form relationships with their students that are built on trust and respect. The empathy that these educators show towards their students was partially due to them having worked one-on-one with marginalised adult learners in other contexts as well as being familiar with the history of adult basic education. They, too, have personal experience of community poverty and family disorganisation and recognised these circumstances as contributing factors to some young men's engagement with crime. The AET educators were sensitive to the vulnerability of their adult student population and saw as part of their educational role, the emotional, social, and academic support of their students. They spoke with compassion about wanting to facilitate first-time offenders' transformation into productive citizens. The philosophy that guides Lonehill's goals is that incarcerated students are people of worth who have a contribution to make to society. The caring ethos of the educators, their belief in the potential of the adult students, and their right to second-chance opportunities are their recipe for success.

The educators define their role as much broader than just an AET educator. They know that many students' link to outside informal support networks was severed when they became incarcerated. The Lonehill ALC is promoted as a space where new social networks can be formed, and education as the tool through which social and cultural capital can be accumulated. Initially it is not the educational opportunity that attracts the incarcerated men to the AET programme; rather, it is the opportunity to escape their monotonous lifestyle and isolation in the cell and to interact with other students and educators. However, once they start participating in AET and experience the caring pedagogy, a productive educational and life pathway opens for them. Their accomplishment in the adult education programme becomes the aspirational capital that makes them become critically reflective of who they are in the world and what their potentialities are for living in that world. The perspective shift that students make is that Lonehill holds the promise to rewrite their educational and life histories.

The educators at Lonehill wear many hats. In the absence of family, community, and societal support, the educators become confidants, mentors, role-models, and family to their incarcerated students. They mentor their students to see educational opportunity as a catalyst for a productive life, post-incarceration. The educators facilitate lifelong learning in their students and encourage them to take up further educational opportunities beyond the GETC. They serve as liaison between the student and the outside educational world and mediate educational opportunities on their behalf. So, for example, they register students for matric classes so that they can gain the senior certificate and so open the educational door to the FET and HE band. In so doing, the ALC becomes an environment in which second-chance

AET students experience success as well as see it as an investment for further educational opportunity. I found that the emancipatory pedagogy of the classroom, together with the caring actions of the educators, leads to a scholarly ethos in the New Horizon prison environment, and the success of its AET students.

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