

Institution: University of Hull (UoH)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 27: English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: “ ‘Hopeful’ Approaches to (Ex) Prisoners’ Reintegration; Creative and Critical Educational Practices”		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 - present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Josephine Metcalf Dr Adam Calverley	Senior Lecturer Lecturer	Feb 2012 – present September 2009 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>UoH research supported prisoner reintegration through the use of new interventions in prison education, emphasizing the potential of <i>hope</i> as a corrective pedagogical tool. Former prisoners and current prisoners, policy advisors, prison staff, related professional practitioners and members of the public had their social and political horizons broadened by reconsidering the role of (prison) education in the processes of reintegration. The researchers engaged 64 participants – both in and out of prison – in study groups across 60 weeks to encourage debate about US prison narratives (memoir, film, poetry). The discussions then underpinned creative and reflective writing activities. The outputs have been exhibited in publications and at events that have attracted 100s of participants in the Humber region, encouraged social inclusivity and supported (ex) prisoners’ learning.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The research programme is inherently interdisciplinary – drawing on American Studies, Critical Prison Studies, Criminology, and Creative Writing – and was inspired by fieldwork undertaken by Metcalf for her 2012 monograph (R6) about gang memoirs. Since then the UoH has produced significant research exploring prison narratives, desistance (stopping reoffending), and ultimately creative writings. The research was supported by Arts Council England (£12,255) and Hull City Council Arts grants (£1,350) awarded in 2018; a Ferens Education Trust grant (£1,000) awarded in 2015; and a British Academy Small Grant (£5,070.39) awarded in 2013. The three key research themes / insights are as follows:</p> <p>a) That US (prison) culture fascinates participants as a discussion topic. The impetus of this work partly came from Metcalf’s research (R4) that studied memoirs of Shaun Attwood. The significance of Attwood’s books arguably lies in their “Americanness”; as an Englishman entangled in the “exceptional” US system his narrative provides a crucial (transatlantic) perspective. Such cross-cultural reflections reveal a fascination with US prison culture. For example, the depiction of prison and life <i>post-prison</i> in <i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> constituted an accessible and useful way to enter into critical reflection and writing (R1). Cultural awareness arguably serves as a foundation of communication, and consequently transformation (R3, R4). Calverley (R3, R5) has similarly investigated the ways in which cultural engagement may impact prisoner behaviour post-release.</p> <p>b) That we should attend to the views of (ex) prisoners as cultural consumers. Metcalf has previously conducted interviews with US memoirists (both in and out of prison) and extensive audience research with a variety of readers who consume such books (R6). This revealed that while for some an incarcerated author was somehow “exciting”, many readers were ostensibly more interested in the narrative arc where ex-offenders were reintegrated back into society (i.e. that redemption was possible). The research found that to understand texts that deal with “real-world” issues, we should ask “real-world” readers what they do with them. This corroborates Calverley’s findings that we should attend to the views and experiences of ex-prisoners (R5) in formulating desistance supportive social context and policy. Furthermore, the research (R1, R2, R5) verifies that this specific form of co-creative production, sparked and stimulated by apposite texts, has the potential to support reintegration.</p>		

c) That prisoners' engagement with hopeful narratives can help make sense of their lives.

Narrative Criminology considers how offenders engage with narrative to "make sense of their lives". This research argues that in the case of Attwood and others like him, we should consider not just what they say about violence but how they say it (R1, R2, R4); this can hold particular meaning for ex-prisoners who are working hard to desist from crime. The act of writing can be particularly meaningful in the desistance process, especially when combined with hope as both Calverley and Metcalf have noted (R5, R2) and as underpinned over half of the study groups. The co-produced output, *Hope Walks By Me; Justice and Liberty in the Lands of the Free – Poetry & Prose by Ex-Offenders* (R1), was incorporated as a teaching tool into the next phase of the project.

3. References to the research:

R1) Metcalf, J., and R. Litten (eds.), 2019. *Hope Walks by Me; Justice and Liberty in the Lands of the Free – Poetry & Prose by Ex-Offenders* (London: Barbican Press).

R2) Metcalf, J., 2019. " 'O Prison Darkness ... Lions in the Cage'; The 'Exceptional' Prison Narratives of Guantanamo Bay", in Marcus Harnes et al (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Incarceration in Popular Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

R3) Calverley, A., 2019. "Exploring Processes of Desistance by Ethnic Status: The Confluence of Community, Familial and Individual Processes" in Farrall, S. (ed.) *The Architecture of Desistance* (London: Routledge).

R4) Metcalf, J., 2018. "Narrating Prison Violence and Masculinity in the Shaun Attwood Trilogy", in Clare Bielby & Jeffrey Murer (eds.), *Perpetrating Selves: Doing Violence, Performing Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

R5) Farrall, S., Hunter B., Sharpe G. and Calverley, A. et al. (eds.), 2014. *Criminal Careers in Transition; the Social Context of Desistance from Crime* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

R6) Metcalf, J., 2012. *The Culture and Politics of Contemporary Street Gang Memoirs* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi).

4. Details of the impact

The impact has several dimensions: a) individual learning transformations of (ex) prisoners to support their reintegration (both emotionally and practically); b) innovations in (ex) prisoners' education and increased productivity for professional practitioners in the field; and, c) improved public understanding of the challenges facing (ex) prisoners when released. The evidence collection is case-based and qualitative analysis, as well as creative and participatory.

a) Individual Learning Transformations to Support Reintegration into Society

Researcher Metcalf partnered with ex-prisoner resettlement organisations in Hull between 2015 and 2019 where she offered "courses" for service users alongside Russ Litten, a former writer-in-residence for HMPPS. In the fall of 2020, another module was run at HMP Hull though by distance as part of the Learning Together (LT) national network. Originating at the University of Cambridge, LT is a prison education initiative which unites university and prison learners. It provided in-cell education documents ("Thinklets") for prisoners across the UK during the first Covid lockdown in 2020 (R13). At the in-person meetings and also remotely, participants studied a different US prison text (e.g. poems from Guantanamo Bay, *The Shawshank Redemption*, memoirs by Shaun Attwood and former street gang members, or Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail) to discuss issues such as race / class / gender / immigration / citizenship / human rights / economy, both in the US and UK. UoH research informed the fieldwork practices (i.e. the choice of text for study – R2, R4, R6) and the tutors then used these critical discussions to spark creative and reflective writings.

The emotional confidence of participants was significantly enhanced, especially through becoming published authors. One of the ex-prisoners' key-workers stated that the groups and being published in *Hope Walks By Me; Justice and Liberty in the Lands of the Free – Poetry & Prose by Ex-Offenders* (2019) gave the participant "such a boost to his confidence, outlook, and general attitude that I had not seen in the three years that I had known him" (E5). Changing opinion about oneself was regularly flagged in the poems, revealing a "new" sense of identity and self-worth in contemporary society: "Stay confident, see things through / Do the best things for you" (R1).

Participants (mostly unemployed and seeking work) were equipped with beneficial and eye-catching experiences / skills that could be put into a CV or job application (E4, E8, E11).

Several of the chosen texts for study deliberately addressed questions around re-offending and desistance from crime drawing on Calverley's research (R3, R5) and the struggles that Attwood faced (R4). Not all desistance research revolves around longitudinal sociological studies (i.e. tracking prisoner behaviour long after release); the study and ensuing writings encouraged participants to think about desistance and its counterpart, re-offending. Evidence suggests that for some this "real-world" research initiated a reflection on their goals, and encouraged them to rethink who they wanted to be. As one participant wrote, *"Keep strong, be a fighter / One day you / Could be a creative writer"* (R1). Learners at HMP Hull also articulated how the study helped them confront and resist temptations to re-offend. As another noted, *"the Shaun Attwood session seemed to hit a nerve with me, because, I'm currently in the same kind of situation Shaun was in, and eventually [he had] the outcome of desistance. It really gives me the hope that I can accomplish those things"* (E3, 11).

While encouraging the group discussions about reflecting on one's own identity, and coming to terms with a change in lifestyle, the tutors guided participants to explicitly consider the ways in which, as Calverley's research highlights, hope has a key role to play in daily life both in and out of prison (R5). This was then seen in feedback on the sessions: *"I'm finding that in some way or another, the word hope can be used in every session I've taken, it's a very powerful thing is hope and broken down, the word can be interpreted in many ways"* (E3). Meanwhile, the poems suggested that hope became a useful way for participants to humanise themselves and hence a leveller of sorts with others in the community upon release: *"Hope is what makes us human"* and though *"Hope is different for me than it is for you"* *"[It] is something that we all own from birth right through to heaven"* (R1).

b) Innovations in Prison Learning & Increased Productivity for Practitioners

Money from the sales of *Hope Walks by Me* was ploughed back into Litten's fees to run similarly-structured sessions by himself. This happened at two further centres for "at-risk" populations in Hull in late 2019 and early 2020 where the majority of service users are ex-prisoners (E1, E5). These two centres had attended a community morning run by Litten and Metcalf in October 2019 where their lesson plans and content had been showcased, as well as the resultant publication. The book generated interest in such a fashion that it was hailed a "book of the year" by noted writer and critic Bonnie Greer in 2019 in *The Financial Times* who described the writings as "powerful" and "true" (E13). Joe Hakim, presenter of the prime time "Culture Night" show on BBC Humberside called the book an "amazing project" and invited Litten, Metcalf and the Director of Barbican Press (the publisher of *Hope Walks*) to record an extended segment for his show discussing the role of art in the reintegration process of ex-prisoners (E2).

Hope Walks by Me (R1) was thereafter used to underpin a Thinklet document on *The Shawshank Redemption* in April 2020 (R13) which helped transform prison education nationally during the Covid pandemic. Three further Thinklets were then produced, informed by Metcalf and Calverley's research (R2-R5) to use US prison culture as prompts to explore key ("life skill") themes of Hope, Desistance, Persuasiveness and Humanity on a LT module run in the fall of 2020. This LT module, with learners from both UoH and HMP Hull, was the first of its kind in the UK to encourage connectivity through written correspondence; university learners peer reviewed the prison learners' assessment portfolios (which included both critical and creative materials) and vice versa. The creative component of this module, was a distinctive new development of a LT network that was already established by Calverley in Hull in 2018. Many of the prisoner learners on this course were nearing their release date.

The Directors of the national LT network note that *"Through this work Jo has made an outstanding contribution to Learning Together's aim to be at the forefront of developing and implementing innovation and excellence in a higher education which explicitly includes people who are under criminal justice supervision"* (E10). The Directors have already shared learning from Metcalf's pilot at Hull across the LT Network and with HMPPS which has reached *"hundreds of colleagues"*

working in relevant areas of policy and practice in HMPPS, the Ministry of Justice, national and international universities and beyond (E10). They reported on Metcalf's work to the Policy Lead for Prison Education at the Ministry of Justice who contacted Metcalf thereafter to find out more about her pedagogical ambitions and experiences. LT are currently using Metcalf's course as an example for other partnerships, not merely as they adapt to current circumstances as a result of Covid-19, but also as they advance their collective strategy for extending digital innovation across the Network (E10).

Metcalf's four Thinklets have also been identified as useful pedagogical tools by other practitioners working with (ex-) prisoners, as they encourage their clients to think about their reintegration. The Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) have made the four Thinklets available as to probation officers to use in 1-on-1 situations across Humberside, Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. Indeed, court orders issue "Rehabilitation Requirement Days" and as part of that ex-offenders have to do "meaningful activity". An Education, Training and Employment regional lead for the CRC deemed them *"an interesting and creative way of exploring themes that may relate to our service user's offending behaviour"*, adding, *"I was keen to find a way to include them in our ETE package"* (E8). The Thinklets are also distributed at Humbercare (one of the resettlement organisations that originally partnered with Metcalf), where one of the Managers, Emma Wagner, is *"regularly seeking ways to engage our service users in productive and engaging activities, which has been a challenge in lockdown"* (E4). Wagner took part in the *Shawshank* event and believes that the significance of *Hope Walks* lies not merely with individual contributors, but in the way it serves as strong evidence to the Humbercare Commissioners that the facility could improve service users' lives through such groups (E4).

Working with Metcalf and Calverley has changed Litten's choice of subject matter for his tutoring work in creative writing. He continues to teach at various HMPs in the North-East and across Yorkshire, YOIs and also "First Story" (with marginalised young people) using similar texts as inspiration and thus mainstreaming the approach originally suggested by Metcalf: *"Using American history and culture as a prism through which to view the concepts of justice and freedom was a master-stroke"* (E1). Throughout his work, Litten now incorporates concepts of hope throughout all such work more explicitly than he had ever done prior: *"I now see hope itself as a learning outcome in much of my tutoring work, rather than merely as a philosophical discussion point"* (E1). The research also shaped the vision of the Director of Barbican Press (publisher of *Hope Walks*): *"In publishing terms, what was new for me was allowing a rawness to come through, and political statements and sentiments that to me were abrasive but I knew not to censor, because I saw that these views came from a rawness of life that was genuine and not usually explored in published works"* (E2).

c) Change of Attitudes towards (Ex) Prisoners & their Reintegration

Attwood delivered talks to participants at two of the ex-prisoner resettlement projects where Metcalf worked (R&R, Humbercare), and was a guest speaker at a 25th anniversary screening of *Shawshank* at the UoH (May 2019). Before the film Metcalf delivered a talk, followed by Attwood, and then chaired a Q&A panel consisting of a Wagner, Attwood, Litten, and two group participants (ex-prisoners). This was followed two months later by a book launch of the creative writings produced by the groups (July 2019), featuring a panel discussion with Calverley and Metcalf, Litten, a service user and two Humbercare community practitioners. Approximately 200 members of the public attended the events in total, with evaluative questionnaires pointing towards a real appetite for believing in the possibility of change, rather than just people attending out of curiosity (E6).

At the May 2019 event, Wagner spoke of the challenges Humbercare have faced in housing ex-prisoners in the local community (E4). Early in the focus groups, it became apparent that some participants were struggling with negative attitudes from members of the public in a variety of ways (e.g. stereotyping at job interviews, in housing applications, from family members etc). The events, as well as *Hope Walks*, aimed to raise awareness among individuals in the community / society more widely of the difficulties facing prisoners upon release. The audiences at the events included students (though no one under 18) and local citizens from a range of ages and backgrounds. If

social inclusion is key to reintegration, the two events sought to challenge stereotyping, create more empathy, and remind the public that prisoners have a right to reintegrate. Quantitative and qualitative feedback from the events suggests that this was certainly achieved on some level. For example, at the Shawshank event, 96.1% of the respondents (strongly) agreed that their understanding of (ex-) prisoners and their social problems had been increased, while at the book launch with 18 respondents this figure was 87.5% (E6).

Emma Horrex, an attendee at both the *Shawshank* talk and the book launch, was inspired to apply for – and secure – a weekend job in the library at HMP Hull and volunteer work with ex-offenders at Humbercare (E7), stressing that both events served to challenge her preconceptions of (ex-) prisoners (E7). Horrex, as well as staff from HMP Hull, have spoken about the importance of Metcalf's work in disseminating such views with a range of age groups including young people (E7, E11). An adapted version of the LT module has been rolled out by Metcalf at the sixth form where Horrex works, as well as two others (a public college in Lincolnshire and a private school in Newcastle). This provides "Extended Opportunities" for 17 and 18 year-olds seeking enrichment opportunities for UCAS applications, while simultaneously these Thinklets, as the head of training at Horrex's institution explains, provide "*an opportunity that is urgently required within sixth form establishments due to the complexities surrounding prisoners both inside prison and once released*" (E7).

Such changes in attitude were also evident among university students who undertook the LT module at HMP Hull (E3). The Directors of the national LT network assert that Metcalf's "*clever mix of creative and critical exercises in the course as a whole gave prison-based learners ways to think about how they may support themselves upon release, and university learners the opportunity to think about the responsibility we all have to support reintegration after prison*" (E10). For example, while one university learner commented in their assessment portfolio that, "*I now realise we need to work to de-stigmatise ex-convicts and reintegrate them back into society - I wholeheartedly believe that change and reform are possible*" (E3). The specific choice of texts studied, and exercises deployed on the module, enabled this. Having been required to write a letter to Boris Johnson to persuade him to put more funding into prison education, another university learner noted "*The letter made me change the way I view prisoners, I have more empathy now*" (E3, E9). In their letter to the Prime Minister, one of the students even went so far as to suggest a new association called LILAC – *Living Inspirational Lives after Conviction* whose aim is to "*offer real world education and training packages that take into account people's current psychological well-being, their educational attainment and their hopes and dreams*" (E9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- E1) Testimonial from Russ Litten, HMP Writer-in-Residence & Author
- E2) Testimonial from Martin Goodman, Director of Barbican Press
- E3) Feedback from group participants at Humbercare, HMP Hull & University.
- E4) Testimonial from Emma Wagner, a Humbercare Manager
- E5) Testimonial from a Support Worker at The Crossings
- E6) Qualitative & Quantitative feedback from the Public (Community Events x 2)
- E7) Testimonial from Emma Horrex, sixth form Learning Manager & event attendee
- E8) Testimonial from the Community Rehabilitation Company
- E9) *Dear Mr. Johnson*, a UoH publication
- E10) Testimonial from Amy Ludlow, Director of Learning Together
- E11) Testimonial from Anna Parish, Head of Reducing Reoffending at HMP Hull
- E12) "Thinklet" teaching document on *The Shawshank Redemption*
- E13) Bonnie Greer's "Book of the Year" article in *Financial Times*