

# Resistance and Desistance: the power and potential of adult basic skills in prison

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## PhD Project

### *Learning to Desist: Re-evaluating prison education's relationship with desistance from crime.*

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Ethnographic case study using an Appreciative Inquiry approach

Conducted May-November 2016

Mid North Coast Correctional Centre ILC

12 students tracked through learning program

Interviewed 3 times at 3 month intervals – beginning, middle and end of course

Questionnaires administered 3 times at 3 month intervals

- Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire (ASCQ)
- Social and Emotional Learning Questionnaire (MESH-SEL)
- Belief In Redeemability Questionnaire

Identity maps – administered twice – beginning and end      Reflective Learning Journals

Teacher Reports – completed 3 times per participant (MESH-SEL)

Staff Interviews – 11 staff interviewed once each











$\frac{1}{20}$ 0.05 5%	$\frac{1}{10}$ 0.10 10%	$\frac{1}{5}$ 0.2 20%
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$\frac{1}{4}$ 0.25 25%	$\frac{1}{3}$ 0.33 33.3%	$\frac{1}{2}$ 0.5 50%
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$\frac{2}{3}$ 0.66 66.6%	$\frac{3}{4}$ 0.75 75%
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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
3	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27
4	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36
5	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45
6	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54
7	7	14	21	28	35	42	49	56	63
8	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	72
9	9	18	27	36	45	54	63	72	81



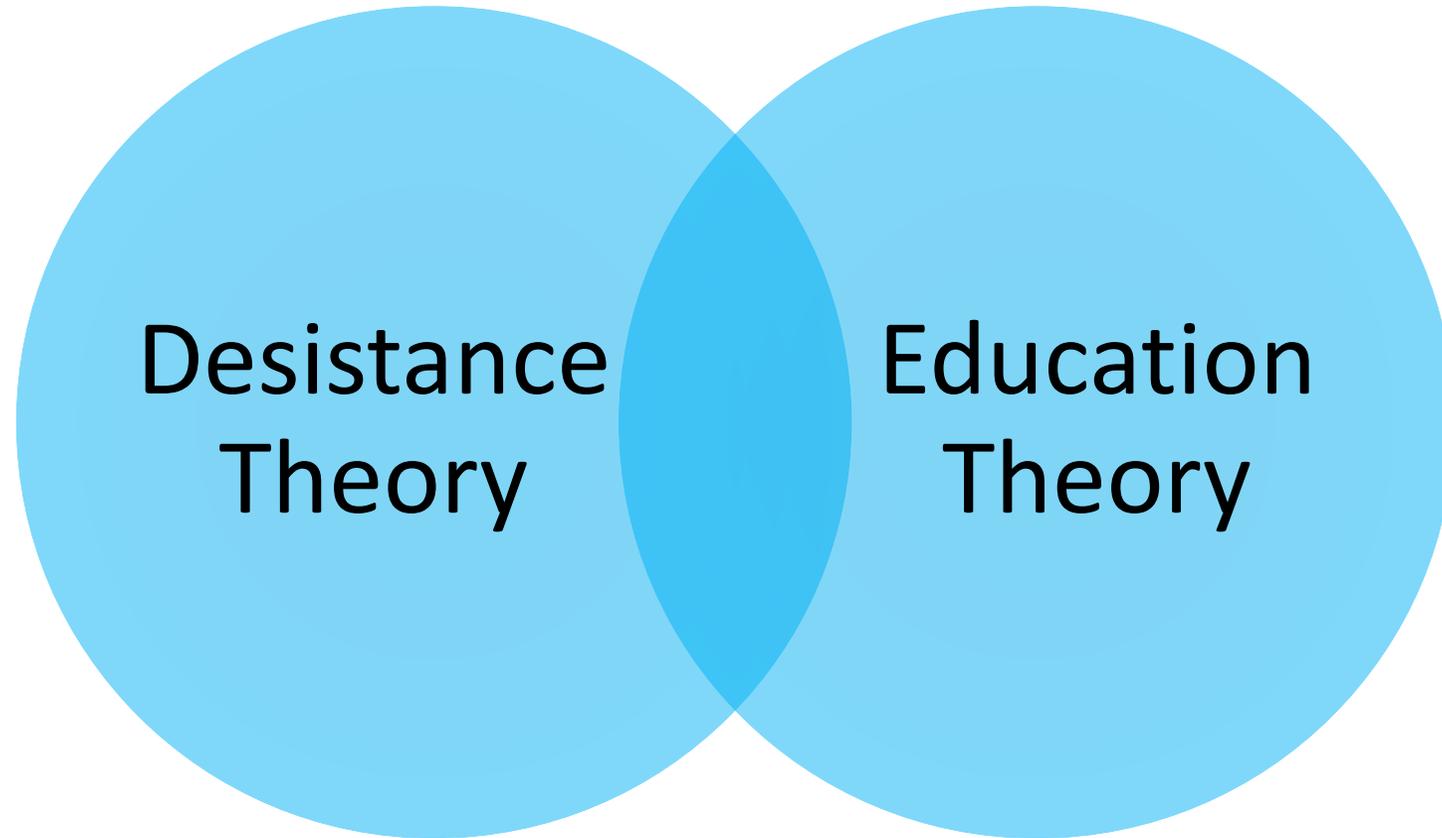
# Demographic details of the students

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Name	DOB	Age as 25/05/16	Ethnicity	Time in ILC (months)	Cert Level	Previous ed
Aiden	12/7/90	25yrs 10mths	Turkish-Australian	>3	2	11/TAFE
Barry	21/7/94	21yrs 10mths	Aboriginal	>3	1	12
Brett	23/4/79	37yrs 1mths	White Australian	>3	2	10
Cavanaugh	4/6/69	46yrs 11mths	Aboriginal	>3	1	7
Darren	30/8/73	42yrs 9mths	Aboriginal	>3	1	7
Eddie	16/6/86	29yrs 11mths	Pacific Islander	>3	2	7
Gary	16/5/79	37 yrs 0mths	Aboriginal	6	2	10
James	13/6/50	65yrs 11mths	White South African	>3	2	Degree
Marc	22/9/81	34yrs 8mths	White Australian	>3	1	9
Neil	3/4/86	30yrs 1mths	Pacific Islander	>3	2	7
Shane	3/9/75	40yrs 8mths	White Australian	>3	2	11
Terence	10/12/55	60 years 5 mths	Aboriginal	6	1	5

# Theoretical Framework

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# Recidivism: quick history

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Arising out of criminological studies

Interested in why people *start* offending

Identified 'risk' factors: criminogenic needs

- History of substance misuse/abuse – personal and family
- History of poor educational achievement/truancy/exclusion
- History of unemployment
- Family history of imprisonment
- Broken family unit
- History of physical, sexual, verbal abuse
- History of mental health issues

Evidence-based 'what works' focus on programs: Meeting those needs = reducing the risks of offending

Recidivism developed as a measure of success of programs that aim to address criminogenic needs.

# Desistance theory

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Desistance theorists are interested in why people *stop* offending. Reasons might not be the same as why they started.

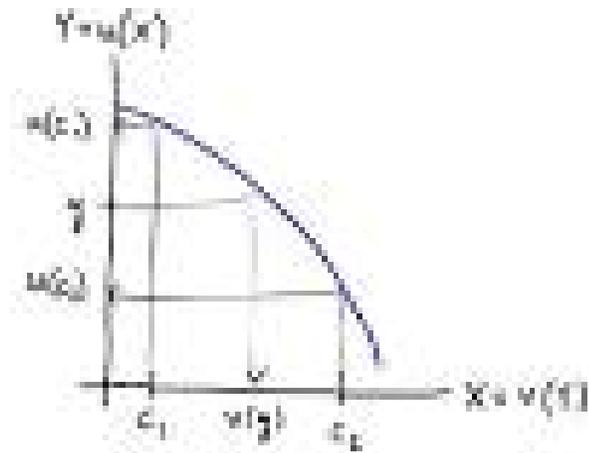
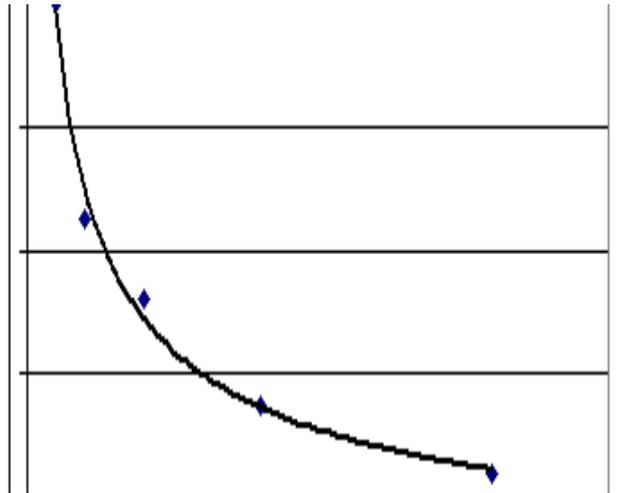
Desistance from crime is considered to be a *process* rather of stopping offending rather than an abrupt *stop*.

Progress towards desistance is indicated by longer gaps between offences and lessening seriousness of offence.

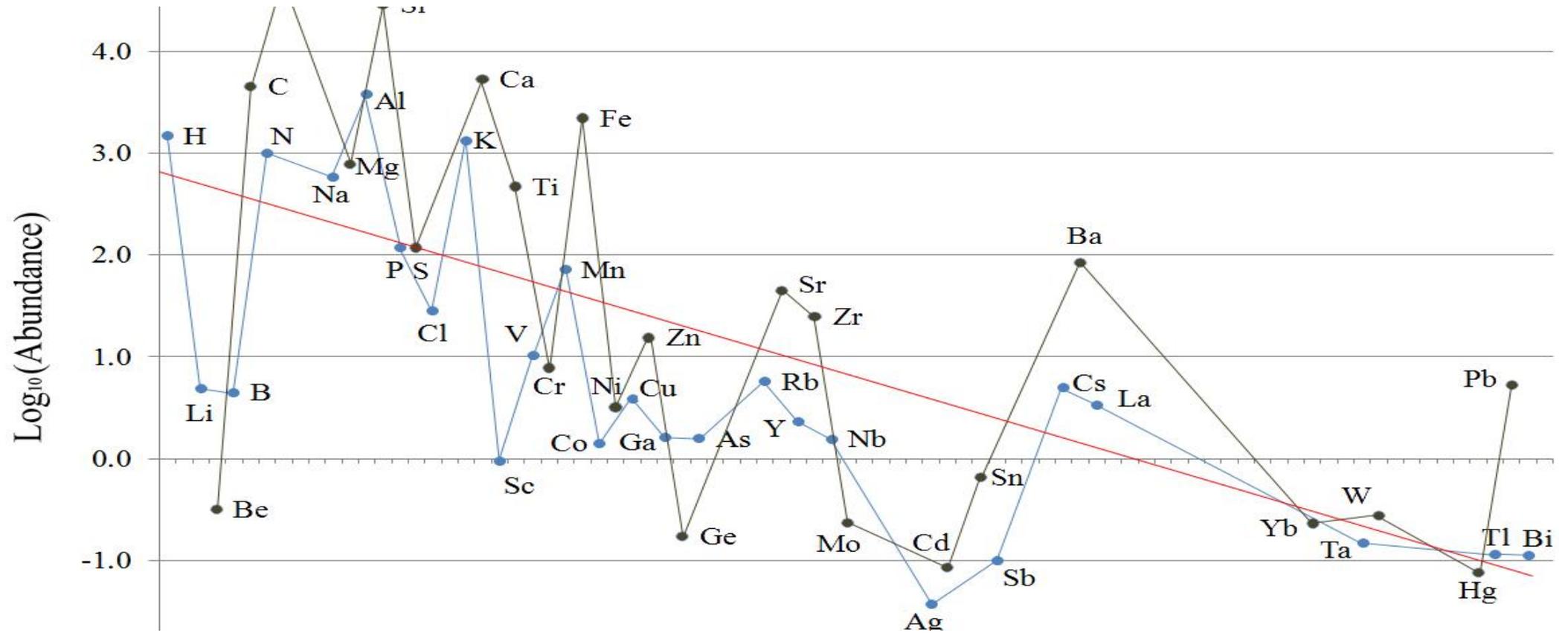
Made sense of my experience as a practitioner.

# Desistance as process

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# Often a messy process...



# Characteristics of successful desisters

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Narrative of self that 'knives off the past'. Makes sense of past by saying 'I'm not that person any more'

Imagined future non-offending self - Identity *not* in terms of offender or ex-offender, but of being defined in different, positive terms.

Hope for future – becoming, having pathways to progression that are real and achievable

Sense of agency – having choice, influence over what happens to self

Social inclusion/Connection – belonging, strong pro-social bonds

Maturation – not just age, social/emotional maturity

Self-reflection – shifting perspectives

Generative activity – desire to make amends, to do something to repair the damage caused, to 'make good'.

# Australian National Curriculum 7 General Capabilities

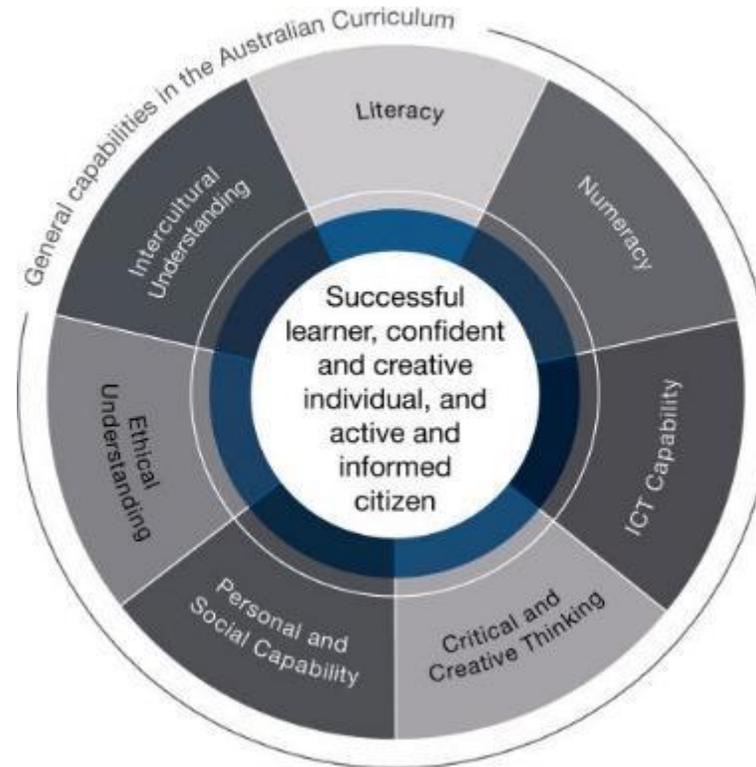
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## *The Old Guard*

Literacy

Numeracy

ICT Capability



## *The New Blood*

Critical and Creative Thinking

Personal and Social Capability

Ethical Understanding

Intercultural Understanding

# What is prison for?

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To punish

To rehabilitate

To keep communities safe

# What do we mean by rehabilitation?

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Medical model

Return to 'normal' standard'

Make more law-abiding

Make positive contribution to society/economy

Giroux 'middle class reformer' (1983)

C S Lewis 'kindnesses the recipient will feel as abominable cruelties' (1953)

# What is prison education for?

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Research indicates that participation in education while in custody can significantly increase employment opportunities and reduce the risk of re-offending following an inmate's release from custody.

The Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI) is the registered training organisation (RTO) for the provision of education programs for inmates of NSW correctional centres.

AEVTI provides education programs and services aimed at: addressing inmate identified skill deficits in the areas of language, literacy and numeracy; supporting inmate employment in Corrective Service Industries and participation in programs to reduce re-offending; providing the skills, qualifications and experience to improve inmate opportunities for post-release employment.

<http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/CorrectiveServices/related-links/publications-and-policies/policies-defined-gipa-act/aveti.aspx>

# What is prison education for?

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## Purpose:

- Equip offenders for Offending Behaviour Programs
- Fit offenders for the purpose of CSI workshops
- Help them get a job
- Address learning deficits
- Reduce recidivism

Basic skills 'deficits' are identified



Basic Skills teaching becomes perceived as 'rehabilitative': can become a form of social control

# But what if...?

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The purpose of education is to:

*help individuals “live as full lives as possible” by equipping them with skills to build their capacity to do so.*

A C Grayling (2015), Sydney’s Festival of Dangerous Ideas

# But what if...?

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Elinor Ostrom:

*“..extensive empirical research leads me to argue that instead, a core goal of public policy should be to **facilitate the development of public institutions that bring out the best in humans**”*

*Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems*. Paper presented at the Nobel Prize Lecture, 8 December, Aula Magna, Stockholm University: Economic Sciences Prize Committee, 2009.

Public institutions: hospitals, schools, libraries...and **PRISONS?**

# Redefine the purpose of prison education

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‘Activities that give individuals the skills they need to unlock, gain employment and become assets to their communities. ***It should also build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences.***’

Exploring the outcomes of prisoner learners: analysis of linked offender records from the Police National Computer and Individualised Learner Records - Joint experimental statistical report from the Ministry of Justice and Department for Education

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/633198/pnc-ilr.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/633198/pnc-ilr.pdf)

# So, what have I found?

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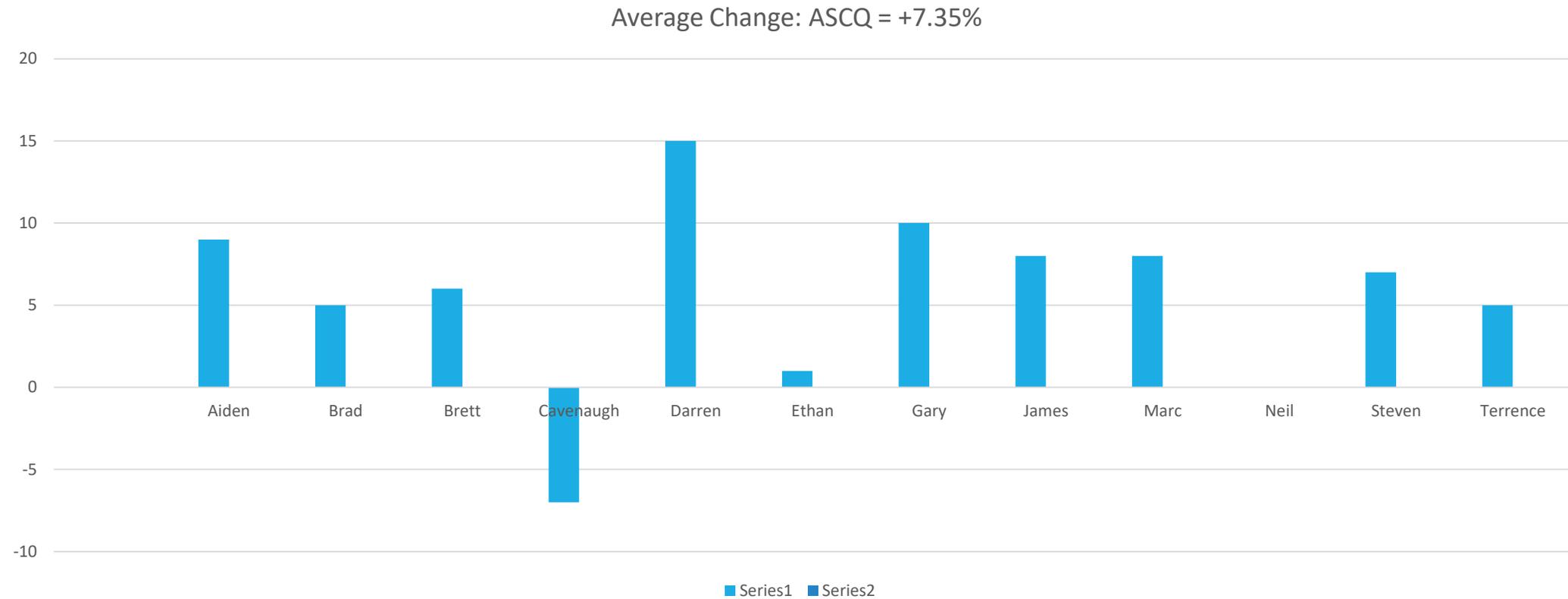
Prison Education (adult basic skills) is capacity building:

- intellectual
- social
- emotional
- identity

Access to skills that help individuals thrive even in adverse circumstances.

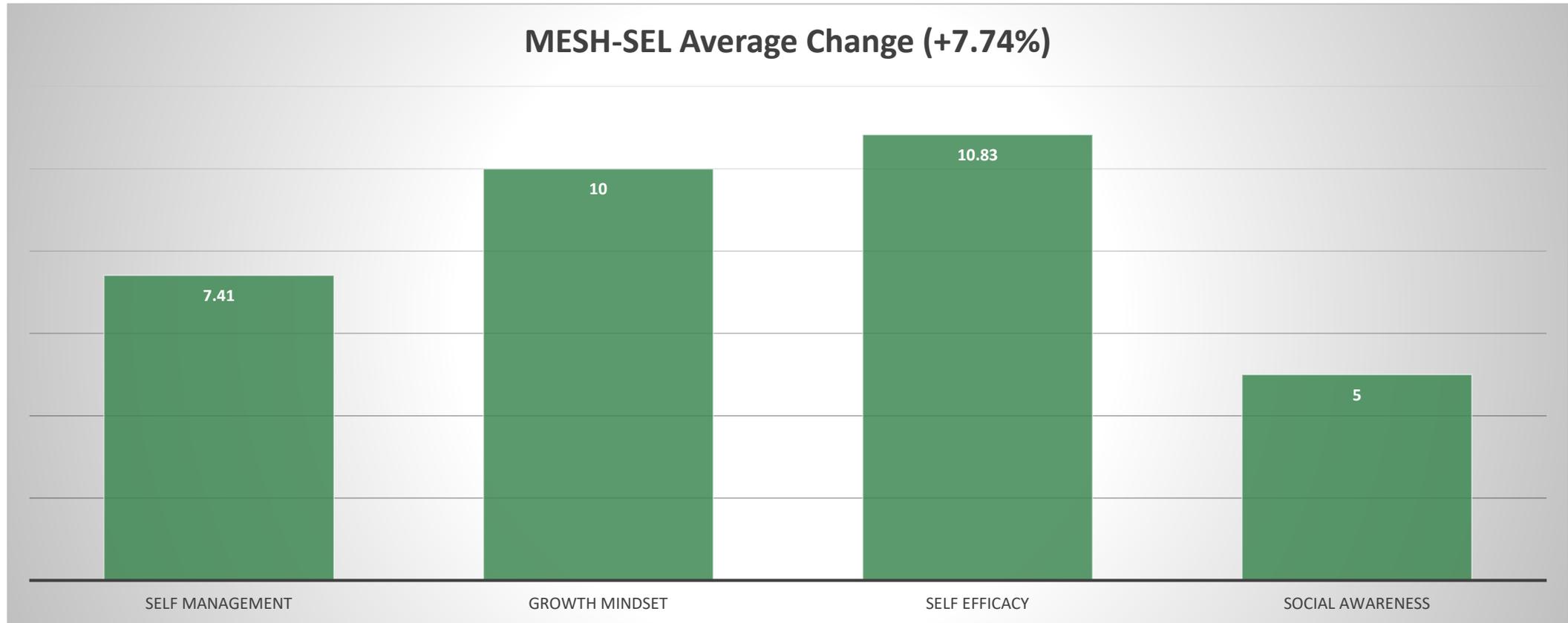
# Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire

Average Change = +7.35%



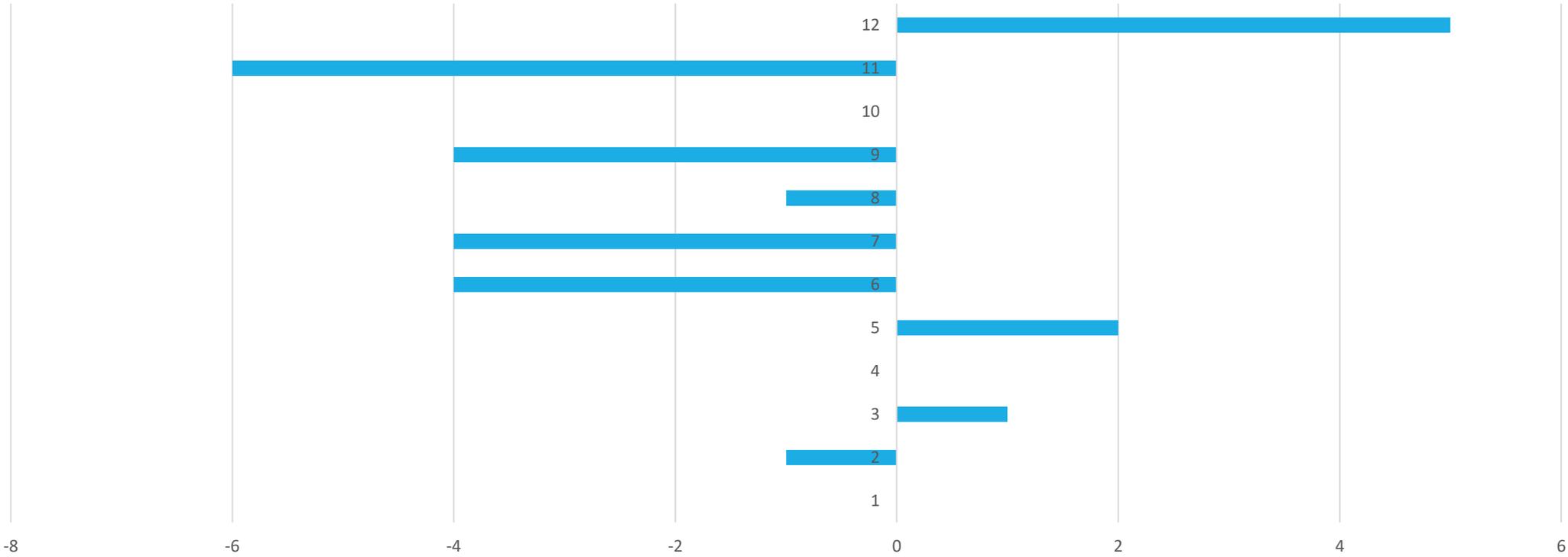
# Social and Emotional Learning Domains

Average Change = +7.74%



# Belief in Redeemability Average Change = -2.00%

Average Change Belief In Redeemability = -2.00%



# Importance of learning space

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- Engaging the mind
  - Active use of mind
  - Conscious of learning and progress
- Feeling human
  - Treated with dignity and respect
  - Safe
  - Can be more authentically self
- Surroundings
  - Physical design of learning space
  - Trees
  - Birds
  - Not-prison
  - Normalising

# Wellbeing, dignity and normalisation

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**Aiden: Yes. It's like you're away from...you're not in jail for this period in time. It has this impact, you know?**

Fiona: So are people different, do people behave differently in here?

**Aiden : 100%**

Fiona: Really? Tell me about that, I'm so interested in that.

**Aiden : It's really weird. I don't know what it is. I mean, I don't know...it's like I'm out. I talk to all the boys. It's like when we're out. It's like we're at TAFE or something, like *literally* like we're not in jail, like we're out, out of the jail system. Like we're at TAFE.**

Fiona : And that is good for the mind?

**Aiden : That's right, it's like we feel human again. And once we feel human, we're actually learning as well and I actually take it in more, I can't explain why and we're actually feeling happier...**

# Motivation: changes & increases

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Initially as act of resistance to prison regime/culture:

- Avoid CSI work
- Avoid certain people
- Seen as 'easy' option

**Terence: Yeah, you see that's one of the reasons I came in here because I didn't want to do the same old, same old things. Come into jail, go to work, come back.**

Fiona: So you kind of came in here to avoid the routine of the workshop?

**Terence: Yeah.**

Fiona: So then what happened?

# Motivation changes over time

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**Terence:** So I said I'll go to education. And I don't know if it was because of my health and that, because of my health, but I know I didn't want to go to the workshop. I tried it, but it didn't...

Fiona: It wasn't for you.

**Terence:** It wasn't for me, and I didn't feel it was right for me. You see you get these feelings about where you're supposed to be and where you're not supposed to be.

Fiona: Yeah, a sense of belonging?

**Terence:** Belonging. And you've got to be there for that reason, for a *reason*. And I sat in a class there for a while, maybe for a couple of months just thinking about a lot of things and just pretended to work, but then it just snapped and then you just do somethings because you *wanted* to do things, I just *wanted* to.

# Metacognition

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Initial focus on mechanics of basic skills

Learning how to learn becomes focus

Ability to apply knowledge in different areas

Ability to learn 'anything'

Growth Mindset

Fiona: If you weren't in education now, what would you be doing instead in prison?

**Aiden: Yeah exactly, I don't know. It's just once I've learned these things like problem solving and just basic maths even, it gives you more confidence to do...why can't I do other things, you know? Like, it opens doors up, you know?**

# Empowerment through basic skills

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## Importance of literacy and numeracy

- Some mention of vocational skills
- Access to dominant discourse
- Generative activities – giving back to community/younger generation

# Access to dominant discourse

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**Terence: It is an important thing, yes. It's like I can communicate these things where I might not be able to talk it, might not be able to talk it, express myself that way, but I learn how to write and express myself that way a bit better.**

Fiona: Yeah, yeah.

**Terence: In that way, in that language. Hmmmm...In your way. In white fellas' way.**

# Resistance to dominant ideology

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Does not see paid employment as being end-goal

Literacy and numeracy skills

- Investing in own community
- Investing in own children
- Being a catalyst for change

Speeches of Neville Bonner seen as very important. 'Played them at their own game'.

Access to discourse gives power to challenge the dominant ideology.

# Investing in children & community

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Fiona: What are your plans for the future, Terence? What would you like to do?

**Terence: Ah, I'm not quite sure yet where I am, what the future lies at the moment. If it was a possibility, I'd be, I'd be like, teach somethings, like here, give them some grandkids with the knowledge about some things and help them with every day learning.**

# Importance of Indigenous culture in curriculum

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Transformative for Indigenous learners

Development of empathy

Reduction of anger

Pride in culture

Want to pass on learning about culture

Sense of belonging

# Importance of culture in curriculum

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**Terence:** So it's like the world is a cruel place and a lot of people went through a lot of massacres like we did in this country. They went through the same things all around the world, so we weren't just the...

Fiona: And they still are?

**Terence:** And they still are, yeah. So that sort of opened my eyes a lot better and my attitude toward other people has changed a bit too.

Fiona: Has it?

**Terence:** Hmmm..

Fiona: So what, in what way has it changed?

**Terence:** They've been through genocide and everything like we did, and they had a raw deal, and we're not the only ones. Yeah , we suffered a lot but they suffered as well.

Fiona: And you didn't realize you had that almost similar history of cruelty against a particular people?

**Terence:** Yeah, yeah...yeah. It was like that you know? And I...yeah it just opened my eyes up a lot better and opened our minds up to it, to broader things, to wider things and looking at it in a different way to what I used to. Yeah.

# Importance of Indigenous curriculum content: Belonging → Connection

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Fiona: What would you do if you were in charge of prison education?

**Terence: I would get all Aboriginal people and allow their culture. That's the first thing I would do here is have all the young people learning about their culture first then learning about the rest of the world.**

Fiona: Do you think that helps with that sense of belonging and connection?

**Terence: Yeah, they're belonging, where they're from. Knowing from here to there what culture they're from, what tribe they're from. Once they know all that, they'll connect. People connect, things will connect.**

# Empathy

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Fiona: Does it make you feel better to be this way?

**Terence: Yeah, it makes me feel *heaps* better, that I can understand where they're coming from. Where other people are coming from.**

Fiona: So it's almost like you've developed an empathy to understand someone else's point of view even if you don't agree with it?

**Terence: Yeah, *exactly!* Exactly!**

# Hopeful for the future

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Speaks often and positively about the future

Sees self continuing learning

Frustrated by blocked learning pathways

Sees self returning to community to make a positive contribution

Taking learning back

# Need learning progression pathways

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Fiona: Are you glad you came here?

**Aiden: 100%.**

Fiona: Things work out for a reason, huh?

**Aiden: That's right. Funny thing even, I'm going for classification, what is it...6 months from now and because I'm B classo now, I could get a C classo back to minimum but the thing is I seriously, like I was thinking about it, for a couple of months in my cell...**

Fiona: You would sacrifice that to keep going?

**Aiden: Yes, if there was a Cert 3 to continue, 100%.**

# Curriculum/Pedagogies of Desistance

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Model of Australian National Curriculum – embed basic skills in all 7 General Capabilities

Agency for teachers *and* learners

- Allow teachers freedom to choose what to teach and how to meet curricula requirements
- Less teacher centred teaching – scaffolding towards independent learners

Progression Pathways

Narratives of present and future selves

Exploring identity

Exploring cultural heritage

Reflection on self and progress

Metacognition – learning how to learn

Growth mindset - neuroplasticity

Social and emotional learning

# Why is teaching basic skills in prison so important?

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- Seems to create a growth mindset – a portal to other critical and creative thinking.
- Supports the development of critical and creative thinking, empathy, intercultural understanding, interpersonal skills
- Builds different types of capital: intellectual, social, emotional and economic.
- Provides access to dominant discourse
- Allows resistance to dominant ideologies
- Seems to catalyse the desistance process.

# Thank you

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**Let's connect!**