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Humane Alternatives: Co-operative Education at Stony Mountain Institute

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Although the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that education is a human right, there is limited access to university education at either provincial or federal carceral institutions in Canada. Inspired by the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme in the USA, the Walls to Bridges programme in Canada offers courses that bring campus enrolled and incarcerated students together to study behind the prison walls. In 2014, the University of Winnipeg faculty began teaching courses for credit at correctional facilities in the surrounding areas of Winnipeg as part of this programme. Two of the courses offered are focused on co-operatives. Based on a case study of higher education at Stony Mountain Institution (Manitoba), we support the claim that education on co-operatives in prison could shift the prison culture from “maintenance mode” to a “community correctional mode” and would facilitate the development of co-operatives that support people inside the prison and in the community, post-release.

Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, cost-saving, relation-based co-operatives have grown in number worldwide both inside and outside of prison facilities, presenting the opportunity for a productive and meaningful future for justice-involved men and women. Social co-operatives provide options for those who face barriers to employment (Borzaga & Galera 2012; Corriveau, 2007; Girard, 2002). They put into action, the seventh principle of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) — “Concern for Communities” — and give reality to the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity (ICA, 2018).

In this paper we contrast two prison cultures: maintenance mode which social justice activists describe as warehousing, and community corrections which seeks to break down the walls that separate the prison from the wider community. Research suggests that a community corrections approach can increase pro-social interactions. Community corrections in Canada is generally understood to involve safe transition into the community through supports post-release.

Another interpretation of a community approach, the therapeutic community (Wexler et al., 1999), is focused more on the individual dealing with addictions. Community corrections initiatives on the inside are seen to have the potential to reduce the risk of post-release recidivism that escalates when people in transition lack community supports and gainful employment; conditions that often lead back to prison. Both of these strategies constructively highlight the needs of the individual. While there is little written about prison community aside from sociological studies that focus on prison code and pro-social behaviours in therapeutic communities (Wexler et al., 1999; Wilson & Snodgrass, 1969), we maintain that perceptions of prison culture tend to overlook the reality that there exists a sense of community even among incarcerated populations — particularly in medium and minimum facilities. Our view of community corrections begins with an awareness of the individual who also has a community-based identity.

Given the awareness that a prison community exists, and recognising a clear convergence of community and co-operative values, we propose that co-operative structures and education could contribute to an alternative model of prison community and to “re-humanising” corrections. Research on established prison co-operatives “shows how the co-operative culture and relational environment of these ‘social co-operatives’ [are] as important as the provision of paid work in contributing to prisoner rehabilitation” (Nicholson, 2016, para 26). Co-operatives in Italy and the United Kingdom have offered options for training and employment inside and outside of prisons. The benefits of co-operative education in prison, and opportunities for training and working in co-operatives, during and after incarceration, have been convincingly demonstrated

(Findlay et al., 2013; Hoyt, 2012). The benefits generally listed include “work-related skills and income” as well as “empowering a sense of self-efficacy” and the formation of “strong social bonds with other co-op members” (Findlay et al., 2013, p. 68).

This paper contributes to a larger in-depth investigation of post-secondary education in correctional facilities. Our three-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Development Grant (2018-2021) aims to analyse the potential for education to reduce recidivism and promote learning continuity and community integration. The focus here is on one course *Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives* and its unique short-term and potential long-term impacts on the facility and conditions faced post-release (our second course on co-operative management was postponed due to COVID 19). The authors are an instructor in the programme (2014–2020) and a student who has been incarcerated at Stony Mountain Institution. The paper is the outcome of the student’s observations, based on his experience of the correctional system, and the dialogue between students and instructor on the nature of social co-operatives and their foundational values and principles. The student’s application of lessons taken from McKnight and Block’s (2012) *Abundant Community*, and the authors’ assessment of the potential for co-operatives as a tool for rehabilitation and transition provide rich qualitative information and insights into behaviour in the prison community and the role of co-operatives and co-operative education in prisons. Accounts of prison co-operatives and social enterprise and their support for men and women post-release are prevalent in Italy, Scotland and elsewhere, more so than in Canada (see, for example, *Co-producing Justice: International Social Economy Network* — <https://www.coproducingjustice.org.uk>). The literature in the Canadian context points to the potential for co-operatives and other social enterprises to change the culture of corrections and to assist in re-integration (John Howard Society, 2013; Findlay et al., 2013).

Our case study contributes an example of prison co-operative education and considers its application in Canada and beyond. It reveals an opportunity for an alternative to the informal rules of socialisation or “prison code” that currently influences behaviour in many correctional facilities. These informal rules, as in any community, are a form of social control and coercion. We argue on behalf of transition from “maintenance-mode” toward “community correctional model”. We envision a collective or co-operative organisation of prisoner work to support a culture of community and to facilitate integration post-release.

Our discussion defines alternatives for both prisons and universities, we take note of McKnight and Block’s (2012) portrayal of systems that can generate fear and de-humanise and disempower. Similarly, Foucault (1979) describes institutions that *Discipline and Punish* and suggests a link between our capitalist socio-economic system and systems for correcting the wayward citizen. He depicts patterns of surveillance and control in hospitals, the military, corrections, and education that are accepted by those who fit and oppress those who do not. Foucault’s historical analysis reveals the divisive structures that have become common place in modern institutions. This leads us to a key question namely “is the aim of carceral systems to re-integrate people into society?” We assume the aim is to “re-integrate”, yet often there are clearly barriers that effectively exclude. We acknowledge that (1) structural barriers affect us all; (2) community has a role in healing and welcoming instead of creating new “clients” for institutions; and (3) we all have a right to education.

Background: Correctional Cultures, Higher Education and Co-operatives

John Restakis (2010) maintains that co-operatives are an effective structure for the delivery of relationship-based services. Since the institutions examined in this case study — corrections and higher education — provide relationship-based services, we believe that prison education courses on co-operatives are transformative in their impact on prison culture and in their approach to education.

Humanising corrections

Many penal systems prioritise two goals: protecting society and punishing through isolation. Victims tend to see anything else as “soft on crime” and often feel dissatisfied when community reintegration becomes the focus. From 2006 to 2015, Canada’s federal “tough on crime” approach in criminal justice policy had significant implications for correctional culture. In a report published in 2018, the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI) observed that punishment takes precedence over offender rehabilitation and community integration noting that the legal sentencing principle had changed over the past decade from “least restrictive” to “necessary and proportionate” measures (Zinger, 2018, p. 5). As a consequence, time spent behind bars elongated and prison living conditions deteriorated becoming “sterile, austere, barren and demoralising” (Zinger, 2018, p. 6):

Canadian penitentiaries are less safe than before for both prisoners and staff. Harsher, longer, and more restrictive prison conditions have not fostered an environment conducive to rehabilitation and overall public safety (Zinger, 2016, p. 614).

Canada’s rate of incarceration in 2018/19 (104) is low in comparison to that of the United States (639) or Russia’s (331) (Walmsley, 2018). Nevertheless, Manitoba’s rate is the fourth highest after the Northwest Territories and Nunavut (see Table 1). The OCI has remarked for some time on the increasing numbers of Indigenous peoples in the prison system and point to evidence of gang recruitment in carceral institutions. “[Correctional Service of Canada] has no strategy or intervention that addresses gang involvement, which is responsible for so much of Indigenous offending” (Zinger, 2018).

For many years now, researchers have taken an interest in the rehabilitating capacity of a punitive prison system. Based on a participant observation approach, Hayner and Ash (1940) found that the punitive model failed to rehabilitate inmates since prisons too frequently become training grounds for criminality. Staff and prisoners are often pressured to isolate and control interactions, creating a tense, hostile, and dehumanising environment.

Table 1. Incarceration in Manitoba and Canadian provinces and territories

	Manitoba		All Provinces and Territories	
	2018/2019	2008/2009	2018/2019	2008/2009
Incarceration rates (av. number per day per 100,000)*	201	177	127	141
Aboriginal Peoples (% of population)	18%	15%	4.9%	3.8%
Aboriginal Adult Male (% Admissions to custody)	72%	60%	28%	18%
Aboriginal Adult Female (% Admissions to custody)	84%	71%	42%	66%

Sources: Malakieh, 2019, Tables 1 and 5; *Walmsley, 2018.

Note: Calculations for this table are based on data from Calverly, 2010, Tables 1, 2, 3, and 7. Data for 2008/2009 excludes Nunavut and Northwest Territories.

The authors use the metaphor of the lion tamer with his chair and pistol to characterise the defensive attitudes they perceived on both sides: “When imprisoned men are treated as beasts, they either sink into apathy or stir up in rebellion” (Hayner & Ash, 1940, p. 578). Options for socialisation are typically other prisoners and, sometimes, guards who are often not helpful in preparing them to connect with society, yielding “little social profit” (Hayner & Ash, 1940, p. 578).

Hayner and Ash’s main goal in studying prisons was to promote the normalisation and humanisation of life in prison and holistic preparation for release into the community: “If the function of the prison is to protect society, the convict must learn, during the period of incarceration, how to live in society” (1940, p. 577). Their research was intended to guide

corrections towards prison reforms that, decades later, are still needed. Despite many advances in rehabilitation, much of it in line with Hayner and Ash's suggestions, the current penal system in Canada is still plagued by many of the same problems that they highlighted: isolation, mental health issues, increasing criminalisation, violence, social disintegration, and lack of preparation for release. Many of Canada's prisons "are outmoded or have long since outlived their original purpose. Some penitentiaries continue to carry forward an earlier punitive philosophy" (Zinger, 2018, p. 6).

Monitoring risk increases surveillance and generates insecurity and fear — characteristics of a "stuck community" (Block, 2008, pp. 37-46). Programmes that focus on crime factors fail to provide the more holistic healing that is needed. When corrections take a narrow focus, the institution, including staff and inmates, becomes stuck in "maintenance mode". Warehousing of prisoners, especially those who are in maximum security prioritises "the maintenance of order and security within institutions ... through an extensive array of restrictive rules and regulations" (DeRosia, 1998, p. 27).

Hayner and Ash (1940), Sykes and Messinger (1960) and, more recently, Cooley (1992b) and Crewe (2007, 2012) have all examined the nature of social control in prison and the prison as a community. These authors evaluate the claim that a prison code exists. Based on and adapting Cooley's maxims and informal rules (1992b, pp. 67-68; 1992a, pp. 33-34), the prison code might be summarised as follows:

1. do your own time / don't interfere;
2. be respectful;
3. don't trust others;
4. avoid the informal prison economy;
5. don't exploit others; and
6. don't talk to guards.

Such conditions might seem like an unlikely environment for co-operation. Sykes and Messinger (1960) reported that no strong evidence of a standard prison code was found in their sample of prisons but rather there is a set of informal rules of social control that provides group cohesion.

A focus on risk reduces exposure to potential violence but fails to acknowledge that social values extend into correctional institutions. Individualist therapeutic approaches overlook the reality that over time the facility inevitably develops a collective sense of community. In contrast, the community corrections approach surrounds the men and women with supports to facilitate their reintegration into the community. Inside-prison community corrections approach instills greater confidence and reduces fear. It builds on initiatives that connect with outside realities throughout the sentence and provides practical skills: "A whole community life in prison ... will encourage inmate participation and development rather than deaden initiative" (Hayner & Ash, 1940, p. 580).

McKnight and Block (2012) are leading proponents of an asset-based approach to community development that we believe would yield benefits for the prison system. Community development is a call to position those who are often excluded at the centre. McKnight and Block suggest that "capacities reside in individuals and can be nurtured to exist in the collective" (2012, p. 84) and point out that too many people are strangers to each other:

Our greatest community weakness is the fact that we haven't seen [the prisoners'] and felt their loneliness. We have often ignored or even feared them. And yet their gifts are our greatest undiscovered treasure. (2012, p. 138)

These undiscovered treasures, already present in many of those doing time in prison, can be unleashed and can transform their situation and their progress toward reintegration. A

community corrections approach might improve social life in prison through programmes that seek out the abundance of gifts already present in the prisoners as well as the staff. The incarcerated men and women can learn to appreciate that they “are worth something because [they] can contribute” (McKnight & Block, 2012, p. 84).

Moreover, Jan Strømnes (2016), Deputy Warden of Halden Prison, claims that Norway has a lower recidivism rate than any other nation, at 20%. He dramatically contrasts Norway’s “humane” prison system to the American system that comes from a “tough on crime” philosophy. Norway provides a range of community-based services, screening prisoners to identify needs and resources rather than focusing on risk. Norwegian prisons offer education, acting on the belief that, although individuals lose their liberty in prison, they do not lose the other rights that all citizens enjoy (Strømnes, 2016).

We align ourselves with Hayner and Ash whose hope, in 1940, was that “a clear realisation of the degenerating influence of our present prison system should encourage more experiments aiming to devise a community life for offenders that will actually rehabilitate” (p. 583). Their challenge is just as relevant for us today. We argue that, in the long term, society would benefit from a holistic reintegration process. Healthy reintegration requires breaking down barriers between the community and those inside the prison.

Higher Education in Prison

There is little access to university education at either provincial or federal carceral institutions in Canada. The Walls to Bridges programme in Canada (<http://wallstobridges.ca>) and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme (<http://www.insideoutcenter.org/>) in the USA offer courses that bring campus enrolled and incarcerated students together to study behind the prison walls. The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (I-O), established by co-founder Lori Pompa in 1997 (see Pompa, 2013), was Paul Perry’s inspiration. Paul is serving a life sentence at Graterford Prison in Philadelphia, PA. He believed that:

... if people inside and outside of prison meet over a sustained period to study, collaborate, and analyze challenging social issues together, they will grow as individuals, forge new ways to build community, and develop insightful, sorely-needed approaches to social transformation (Walls to Bridges, 2015, p. 5).

“Listen, learn, discuss, act” (Coady Institute, 2021), a motto of the Antigonish Movement led by Moses Coady and Father Jimmy Tompkins from the 1920s in Nova Scotia, Canada, could as easily encapsulate the priorities of the degree granting programme for incarcerated individuals conceived at Graterford Prison.

Dr. Simone Davis helped to co-found and co-ordinate the national Walls to Bridges (W2B) programme (formerly Inside-Out Canada) in 2009. Dr. Shoshana Pollack of Wilfrid Laurier University’s Faculty of Social Work, working with Peter Stuart, a prison educator, was successful in negotiating a partnership with the Grand Valley Institution for Women (Kitchener, Ontario) in 2012 (Pollack, 2016). The I-O/W2B approach has two decades of experience, during which time, faculty, and most importantly inside students with years of practice, have honed the pedagogical tools that have made these programmes a success in the USA and elsewhere, including a growing number of provinces in Canada. More than 1,000 instructors in nearly every state in the USA and 11 countries have been trained, and more than 40,000 inside and outside students have taken at least one Inside-Out course (Temple University, 2020).

Canada’s W2B programme, and the American programme from which it grew, recognises the value of students’ experiential knowledge and capitalises on the analysis that a focused group of students can provide. These courses can be the site of knowledge creation and mobilisation through reflection and transformation. W2B aims to build on understanding from a wider body of experience and literature regarding structural barriers and injustice. The following principles frame the overall approach to I-O and W2B classes (see Davis & Rosswell, 2013):

1. Establishing a circle of trust — participants speak from their centre to the circle's centre.
2. Trusting the process — what unfolds cannot always be known.
3. Creating safety and choices — choosing to share and hold courageous discussion.
4. Getting there together — co-learning (listening hard) (S. W. Davis, personal communication, 2012).
5. Instructor as a bass player, not a rock star — responding to comments arising from power.
6. Attending to the force that ambivalence exerts — working effectively with resistance.
7. Instructor awareness — knowing oneself, being reflexive and transparent.
8. Learning with our whole selves — coming to know ourselves and others.
9. Freirian, indigenous and feminist anti-racism — a pedagogy based on critical theory.

By working together, everyone feels their voice is heard and each person's knowledge can be applied to the work.

Prison Co-operatives

The John Howard Society (2013) contends that the “conditions are now conducive to testing a social co-operative involving prisoners in the Canadian correctional context” (pp. 3-4). The Society claims that prison-based co-operatives may provide an answer to current correctional challenges in Canada by referencing the European experience and the potential benefits of social co-operatives in prisons. Co-operatives and co-operative training for those facing barriers to employment are prevalent in Italy (see, for example, Alice Cooperativa — <https://www.alicecoop.it>) and are a growing phenomenon in England (for example, Ex-Cell — <http://www.ex-cell.org.uk>) and elsewhere as a means to educate and rehabilitate (Borzaga & Galera, 2012).

Italian social co-operatives and Type B (work integration) prison co-operatives have been established in locations such as Trento, Milan, Venice and Forli, supported by a society that, for generations, has been raised on co-operative values. In characterising Italian prison co-operatives, Hoyt (2012) emphasises that they focus on work integration, they are successful businesses, they work both inside and outside the prison, they pay wages equivalent to those on the outside, and they include significant post-release support. Based on evidence from Weaver (2016), Italian prison co-operatives bring benefits to workers by helping them to learn new norms of interaction that are needed for re-adjustment and re-socialisation.

According to Jessica Gordon Nembhard, professor at John Hay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, where she studies co-operatives as a tool to empower marginalised communities:

There are many benefits from co-ops that extend beyond their market value. They promote leadership development, financial education and literacy, high level social skills, and collective decision-making that extend beyond the operations of the co-op. (cited in Bacon, 2015, para 5).

Co-operative Experiences in Stony Mountain Institution

The introduction of a unique prison education programme to Canada, now known as Walls to Bridges, provided an effective approach to teaching relation-based community and co-operative development in Manitoba's correctional institutions. The first cohort at Stony Mountain Institute (SMI) was a group of men who were well-trained and engaged as peer mentors, “giving back” to their prison community. Our W2B course on Community Development and Co-operative

Alternatives demonstrated that the prisoner mentoring group, POPS (Peer Offender Prevention Services), knew a great deal about co-operation and community values.

Community development and co-operative alternatives course

Since 2014, the University of Winnipeg has been offering courses for credit at correctional facilities in Winnipeg. Justice-involved men and women (inside students) and campus-enrolled students (outside students) study together in the W2B programme behind the prison walls. The W2B programme has since involved over 150 inside and outside students. Among the different courses offered (see Table 2), two of them focus on co-operatives: (1) Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives, and (2) Community Development — Co-operative Management.

Table 2. University of Winnipeg W2B courses

Women’s Correctional Centre (WCC)	
2014	Colonisation and the Inner City
2015	Reading, Writing and Storytelling through Water
2016	Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives
2016	Indigenous Literatures
2017	Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives
2019	Restorative Justice
Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba	
2017	Community Development
Stony Mountain Institution (SMI)	
2018	Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives
2018	Academic Writing
2019	Visibility, Invisibility & Criminal Justice
2019	Topics in Cultural Studies
2021*	Community Development — Co-operative Management

*Note: 16 students enrolled for 2020, but postponed due to the COVID pandemic.

Based on our experience of co-learning about community values and basic co-operative principles with federal, justice-involved men, at SMI in Manitoba, we identify lessons regarding the role of higher education and co-operatives. We are focusing on SMI (Federal) instead of WCC (Provincial) since there are significant differences in teaching at these two institutions: length of sentence (provincial sentences are two years less a day); age of students (women are on average younger than men); level of education; expectations post-release (men want to provide for a family, whereas re-uniting with children has a stronger pull for the women); and level of violence and security. Students in our WCC class were not likely to take a second course in prison although a number of them are continuing their studies now that they have been released. The men are more mature both in years and having had time to reflect on their condition and what led them to prison. SMI is a very secure facility and provides an opportunity to isolate the classroom from the rest of the prison. The classroom at SMI therefore creates a liminal space, while the WCC space is not so distinctly experienced as a space “between”. When both inside and outside students are removed from their normal day-to-day situation, their positions on issues are suspended. This is an equalising factor at SMI. Co-operative courses have more potential to change the culture for the Stony men, some of whom now hold 12 credit hours of courses. The POPS programme at SMI is another programme that has instilled co-operative values, as discussed below.

Community is central to the Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives course. The Latin “communitas” implies an intense spirit of community. Community is defined by the way it integrates those who exist on its margins. Turner (1969) explained how the community could create a sacred space where marginalised people help us to envision alternatives.

Inside-Out and Walls to Bridges courses create a sacred/liminal space that is witnessed by all who participate — within the walls of the prison. Our course text, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighbourhoods*, written by McKnight and Block (2012), recognised leaders, theorists, and practitioners in the community development field. In the class, we examine ideas that are the foundation of community development and co-operative movements: associational life, reciprocity, mutuality, solidarity, accountability, belonging, and renewal. Based on student narratives and readings that cover the history of community and co-operative movements and the changing context, we break down the notions of community, development, and economy. The institutional logics of the university, the correctional facility and the dominant socio-economic system are challenged in focused discussion.

Students in the second year level Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives course examine the power, sustainability, and creativity of community as a social phenomenon and consider the factors that fragment and work against our “sense of community”. Restorative initiatives, activities in the social economy, and successes in the co-operative movement provide vivid illustrations of community and co-operative development principles and values at work. Groups of students, a mix of inside and outside students, are encouraged to create a circle of trust and to observe how social cohesion evolves within the group. The makings of McKnight and Block’s (2012) “abundant life” begin to take effect in the most unlikely places, within the aged tyndall stone walls of SMI. Notions of community, prison community, class as community, and transition into community play out in group and one-on-one discussion and interactive sessions. Students benefit from the demonstration of community values as we read the history of community development and undertake to design co-operatives in the class.

Since 2014, at the WCC and at SMI, the final sessions of the class are dedicated to reading about co-operatives and beginning to design in groups, co-operative business plans, supported by co-operative advisors. We make use of two small co-operative booklets: *Are Co-ops a Better Idea?* and *How are Co-ops Managed?* (Harris, 2016a and b). Instead of computers, Internet, and PowerPoint, we rely on effective “low-tech” approaches that challenge students to synthesise and integrate ideas: interactive discussion groups, circle pedagogy, flip chart diagrams, tableaus, visiting consultants, and group projects — in this case informal co-operative business plans. Teamwork is a valued co-operative skill that is called for in making decisions about the type, the niche, the market and so on.

Peer Offender Prevention Services (POPS)

Before we claim that this first co-operative course might account for the fermenting of foundational community and co-operative values and norms, we must give credit to a programme that has transformed lives in SMI. The POPS is a clear outgrowth of an asset-based approach that has pooled abilities already existing within the SMI population. Eight to ten POPS men were the first to study in the W2B programme. This cohort has successfully demonstrated how the model for prison community can shift away from one that is in “maintenance mode” toward a “community corrections approach” that prepares men for re-entry into mainstream society.

POPS was established in 2010, the brainchild of a correctional officer who was working in Mental Health Services at SMI. He saw the wisdom of co-counselling conducted by prisoners. The men who belong to the POPS collective are trusted, long-term residents, who fundraise to support training workshops. They are paid a minimal wage but provide an essential service to others who are in crisis and who regularly request their support. In the past eight years, POPS has responded to 23,000 requests (May, 2018).

The membership of the collective has not remained the same over time as some are released and new people take their place. At the time of writing, the POPS men and an additional group of five are studying in the W2B programme. Although not officially a co-operative, the POPS collective demonstrates a potential for the development of collectives that follow the seven International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) principles — see Table 3.

Table 3. Demonstrating co-operative principles

Co-operative Principles	POPS Collective
Voluntary and Open Membership	The collective membership includes representatives of a cross-section of the population at SMI. They are drawn from medium and minimum-security areas.
Democratic Member Control	Some members are older and more experienced and have earned the respect of the group due to their experience, but each has demonstrated through their work, that they have the willingness, ability and motivation to help others. Each member has a vote in any decisions. The staff person plays the unique role of an intermediary between administration and the POPS collective and intervenes when informal prison rules come into conflict with the work of the members.
Member Economic Participation	Funds raised by the collective are common property and each member contributes in sweat equity and according to his diverse skills.
Autonomy and Independence	The manager is keenly aware of informal rules of social control that may affect members of the POPS collective. He is known, within the prison population, to be responsible for any contraventions of the informal rules. Any autonomy that the collective enjoys is made possible by the manager/intermediary and his position in the organisation.
Education, Training, and Information	Education and training workshops are prioritised in the collective. Members have pursued their high school education and have now completed their fourth university course.
Co-operation among Co-operatives	At SMI, members of POPS support the idea of an Art, Writing, and Poetry collective that plans to bi-annually publish an informal “zine”. A zine, short for magazine, is a small-circulation, self-published work of original texts and images reproduced by photocopying. In our classes, we produced silk-screened covers for co-operative plans and other creative zines with the help of a member of Red Rising Collective, a collective who works together with the goal of creating a platform for Indigenous youth (https://www.redrising.ca). Such co-operation between zine collective Red Rising demonstrates commitment to the sixth co-operative principle that we hope will continue.
Concern for Community	The POPS collective was established as an expression of member concern for community. Members are driven to make a difference in their prison community and to begin to compensate in some way for past wrongdoings. The POPS programme provided the first student group for the Walls to Bridges course. In organising the first class, it soon became clear that the POPS men knew a great deal about community and co-operative practices. The POPS group we anticipate, will act as an editorial board for a planned publication, <i>CommUNITY Without Walls</i> .

Lessons Learned and Ways Forward

This case study presents the experience of co-operative education in prison and offers lessons for programmes that seek to humanise corrections and break down the barriers between the community and the prison. The University of Winnipeg and SMI as institutions have similarities according to Foucault (1979) as part of a “disciplinary society” that measures, supervises and corrects the “abnormal” (p. 199). W2B education within a liminal space in Federal corrections provides an opportunity for a discussion of community and co-operation. We believe that the POPS collective, in training men to mentor their peers, demonstrates a potential for the development of collectives that follow co-operative principles. Education is a human right and one of a number of services that cross the prison walls. Our education programme offers a service that continues “through-the-gate” and provides a two-way bridge to the outside community while bringing the perspective of the academy and wider society into the prison community.

Lessons in collaboration between University and Corrections

Negotiating entry of university courses into correctional facilities is difficult as austerity budgets cut deeply into programming at federal and even more so at provincial locations. However, Winnipeg's W2B brings paid tuition for inside students and course instruction is paid for as part of faculty load. At the University of Winnipeg, tuition for students comes annually through the Opportunity Scholarship Fund. Students regularly meet with Student Advising to answer questions about the direction our courses are taking.

Since 2014, when we taught our first W2B course at the WCC, University Administration and faculty in many departments have supported the initiative. The Registrar at the University of Winnipeg has presented certificates to all of the students in our classes at a final celebration. Davis (2018) observed that

the sheer fact of a project taking place in the marginal place between two contexts gives all participants — students, faculty, community participants and hosts — the opportunity for meta-reflection on the institutional logics that construct and constrain our perspectives so acutely. (p. 219).

Universities and prisons as partners bring very different mandates, philosophies, and assumptions. There are, however, values that are held in common. Both institutions value reduced recidivism and take pride in the successful completion of courses and transition into education post-release. Both value safety. Employing a similar approach to I-O/W2B, the Wahkohtowin class in Saskatoon (Buhler et al., 2015, pp. 103-111) have demonstrated the value of participating in a “community” of strangers.

Education and corrections in Manitoba are both influenced by racialised factors evidenced by the low percentage of Indigenous peoples accessing higher education and the high percentage of incarcerated adults who are Indigenous. At the University of Winnipeg, an Indigenisation strategy, including an Indigenous course requirement, is seen as a path towards reconciliation (Cox, 2019). For the Indigenous students in co-operative classes, the similarity between traditional values and co-operative principles is clear. Reciprocity, mutuality, sufficiency, and pooling of resources have historically been a means of sustenance and a foundation for a sustainable relationship to the land. Many would claim that Indigenous villages were the first examples of co-operatives (Harris & Cyr, 2016; Harris et al., 2019). Integration of Indigenous content in classes and the introduction of circle pedagogy and co-learning approaches are not always favoured in correctional facilities. As the programme progresses and is reviewed, the inside students will take on a greater role in shaping the programme. Our hope is to establish a prisoner advisory group. W2B courses aim to shift accepted practice in education and in corrections.

The POPS programme and the Community Development and Co-operative Alternatives course are good examples of alternatives where existing assets are mobilised. The development of co-operative values in minimum and medium security, likewise, instills a motivation to look out for others. Self-esteem and hope take the place of the prison code. Correctional staff recognise the benefits of these programmes and value the fact that the inside students “carry themselves differently” (a comment from a staff person at the WCC during the first class, and many similar comments have been made over the years) and have more self-esteem. The benefit of greater hope and self-esteem are seen in a calmer population and eventually more successful transition.

I-O/W2B pedagogy and co-operative education have the potential to re-humanise institutions. A recent student asked the question “Can a class act as a co-op?” and concluded, “the outcome of our class was a collective desire for justice and participation by all members” (Lavoie, Personal Communication, Nov. 23, 2018).

Lessons in Corrections: Shifting prison culture and support transition

We have explained that there is an opportunity for a new model and new relations within the Canadian prison system based on signs of potential for a “community corrections approach”.

Pro-social interactions are already common in minimum-security facilities and could be integrated into all layers and security levels of incarceration and into all aspects of regular prison life. The POPS initiative demonstrates the value of co-counselling and co-teaching in prisons. Prisoners who have been moved from maximum to medium and minimum can share their knowledge of a “community” with others, thus becoming agents of positive change.

When our team approached SMI about teaching a course about community, we were told that the POPS collective, who would be the inside students, knew a great deal about community. Their training and experience in counselling had taught them much about relationships. Furthermore, getting along in prison society requires an awareness of one’s community — being oblivious to relationships is not a sustainable strategy. Many of the values that are the glue and mortar for any community are found within walls of SMI. We argue that capacities like “kindness, generosity, co-operation, forgiveness, and acceptance of fallibility” (McKnight & Block, 2012, p. 84) are present in all communities and all institutions and that everyone has assets to contribute. The POPS programme demonstrates the fact that a co-operative is not antithetical to the prison culture. We observed evidence of a prison community, particularly at the minimum-security level, that is conducive to co-operative behaviour. Applying McKnight and Block’s (2012) analysis of community, we suggest that the methods needed for rehabilitation must focus on the factors that make for the abundant community and “the good life”, including emotional, spiritual, social, educational, and cultural elements of community.

The connection between community and prison goes both ways. Harris reflects on her life and neighbours while living in inner-city Winnipeg and for many years teaching community development. Her training in I-O at Graterford Prison (PA) revealed a disconnect — her “community” (as is the case for many Canadians) — clearly ended at the prison walls. Meeting and working with the men in Graterford prison and now at SMI, has altered her mental image of community, with the realisation that men and women in Manitoba prisons circulate in and out of her inner-city community and their families experience the prison as part of their everyday life (Harris & McLeod Rogers, 2014, p. 25).

Lessons in growing collectives and co-operatives in prison

Researchers and practitioners in the co-operative movement and in the field of corrections are interested in learning from an expanding global experience of prison co-operatives. The John Howard Society (2013) provides a comprehensive survey and highlights initiatives in the UK and Italy. Where government policies support prison education and prison co-operatives and social enterprises, the savings and social benefits are clearly demonstrated. Based on six years of experience in Manitoba we have some observations that build on and inform other similar initiatives in co-operative education and development. Correctional facilities present unique challenges to collective and co-operative training and development. As Corriveau (2007) has observed, the principle of autonomy and independence is not entirely applicable. As the SMI men move from the tindlestone walls of medium security to group housing in minimum, they experience the “wide open spaces” and a period of heightened anxiety. Informal prison rules are gradually replaced as people build relationships and this continues post-release. One of the men in our community and co-operative course showed an interest in co-operatives and took the initiative to interview others in his house about collaborating on gardening and cooking co-operatives.

While POPS was experienced as a collective, any safety concerns of the group were negotiated by a capable staff person and progressive prison administration. Gang activity creates a culture of coercion that could be compared to that of Mafia-controlled regions in Italy: “[t]his inherent tension creates a world that is best characterised as ‘partially unstable’. Stability or order is always partial, it can never be realised in full” (Rakopolous, 2015, p. 91). Even so, within this coercive environment, a collective spirit in POPS has provided support as the men transition toward life on the outside.

Corrections systems in North America tend to keep their facilities isolated from changes in wider society. The University of Winnipeg under recent administrations has supported new initiatives in experiential learning. Our outside students have been introduced to Indigenous epistemology and research methods and have had the opportunity of taking courses towards the Indigenous Course Requirement. In a discipline-focused prison context the W2B/IO use of circle pedagogy and our Indigenous instructors' use of ceremony are sometimes questioned. That the circle, as a technique, symbolises and generates equity, encourages deep dives into complex issues and promotes co-learning may not be widely understood by staff as well as students. Co-operatives as an alternative to sole proprietorship is an unfamiliar structure. But we have observed that the W2B/IO approach to teaching helps students to embody key co-operative values of reciprocity and asset-based development.

Even though education in prison and training and on-the job learning in the trades are recognised as an important part of a rehabilitation and transition plan, there is insufficient funding of education at both SMI and WCC. Teachers at Stony Mountain provide secondary education and are respected and innovative, yet they carry a heavy workload. At WCC, the women find it difficult to complete their education even at the secondary level.

The men at SMI have noticed that those in minimum and medium secure facilities are more likely to be approved for education and training programmes since they are preparing for release and the return on this investment would be seen in the shorter term. Yet, the wider impacts of reduced violence and the potential for a shift to a community corrections approach can only be realised if the inside students are introduced to the W2B programme early on and are able to earn credits and become involved in an inside co-operative.

Federal CORCAN training — part of the rehabilitation programme of the Correctional services in Canada — is limited to four trades: manufacturing, construction, textile, services (printing and laundry and agri-business) (Correctional Services Canada [CSC], 2013). CSC (2018) points to the fact that prisoners who have participated in the Federal CORCAN programme are three times less likely to return to custody. Vocational training is preferred over university education. Yet, in Scotland, both the government and the Scottish Prison System have called for reform and modernisation of prison work that too often involves low-skilled tasks, contributes to running the institution (e.g., laundry), is irrelevant to the outside labour market, focuses on already saturated labour markets, and lacks connection to the interests of the prisoner and the needs of local employers (Piacenti et al., 2018, p. 5). Co-operative education taught as part of a liberal education, while not for everyone, offers the student a wider range of choices and opportunity to master higher level skills.

I-O and W2B classes, where students consider options for reforming institutions that exclude, fail to satisfy and betray our obligation to future generations, provide hope for those who feel disempowered. An inside student in one of our early W2B courses attested that “Walls to Bridges took our moments of grey and gave us colours of hope” (Betha, personal communication, 2016). Hope might come in the form of university courses that create opportunities to stretch the intellect and provide periods of time when inside students “feel normal”. It also comes as an opportunity to give back as part of a co-operative community that extends beyond the prison walls.

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