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A useful tool for teachers and
trainers in prison and detention
environments



 **dieBerater**[®]
Human Concern

Teaching Languages Behind Bars

A useful tool for teachers and trainers in prison and detention environments

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A useful tool for teachers and trainers in the prison environment

1. Introduction and Background.....	3
Communication in Multilingual Prisons	3
Policy and practice.....	3
Professional Training and Development of Prison Staff	4
Languages Behind Bars: Meeting the needs and challenges in European Prisons	5
Development, Piloting and Finalisation.....	6
2. Materials, Tools and Methods.....	7
Workbook.....	7
Flashcards	9
Visual Dialogue Builders	9
ICT and Audio Tool.....	10
Teaching Methods and Trainers' Guidelines.....	11
3. Train-The-Trainer: Teaching Languages Behind Bars.....	12
The Purpose of the Train The Trainer Programme	12
Taking part in the LBB Train-the-Trainer Programme	12
4. Looking to the Future.....	13
New Languages, New Ideas.....	13
The EPEA.....	13



Despite the high proportion of foreigners in prisons worldwide, and their special needs, in the majority of countries there are no policies or strategies in place to deal with foreign national prisoners. Taking into account the growing trend in foreign national prisoner numbers in many prison systems, there are urgent ethical and practical reasons to establish strategies that address the special needs of this group of prisoners: firstly to ameliorate the harmful effects of imprisonment in a foreign country and assist with resettlement, and secondly, to improve prison management.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009:80

1. Introduction and Background

Languages Behind Bars (LBB) is a support tool developed for European prisons, and is concerned with three closely interlinked themes: Communication in Multilingual Prisons, Prison Education, and the Professional Training and Development of Prison Staff.

Targeted at prison administrations and teachers and trainers in prison, including those involved in staff development, LBB provides useful material to help promote better communication in the prison setting, and ensure that the needs of foreign-national prisoners and detainees, as well as those of prison staff are addressed in the best possible way.

Communication in Multilingual Prisons

Foreign nationals make up a high portion of prisoners in Europe (Hofstee-van der Meulen, 2008), and this goes hand in hand with language barriers. Linguistic problems are a major source of disadvantage for foreign national detainees. The inability to communicate, or to communicate effectively is a cause of frustration and emotional stress, and can exacerbate all of the other problems already faced by foreign national detainees. A lack of knowledge about legal rights, access to consular assistance, ability to communicate physical and mental health concerns, exclusion from work opportunities or activities relating to education and training, possible difficulties maintaining contact with families (within the country or in other countries) and a general deprivation of contact with the outside world are all deeply affected by one's ability to make oneself understood.

However, these special needs may not always be taken into consideration by prison staff, administrations or national authorities.

At the same time, increased numbers of foreign national inmates also present a huge challenge to prison staff. Prison staff work very hard to maintain order under difficult circumstances, and language barriers can make it extremely difficult for them to communicate important information with the inmates they are responsible for, making their work even harder.

Policy and practice

LBB addresses issues at the centre of policy recommendations on European and International levels. Referring specifically to the linguistic problems faced by foreign-national prisoners, the United Nations sets out recommendations for prison authorities:

- To ensure that prison rules and regulations are available in written form in a number of languages corresponding to the nationalities most commonly represented in prisons and to provide foreign national prisoners with a copy on admission. To make available additional copies in the library. To explain them carefully to each prisoner in a language he or she understands, immediately after admission to prison and subsequently, as necessary.
- To ensure that prison libraries hold an adequate number of books, periodicals and newspapers in a variety of foreign languages.
- To facilitate communication between prisoners of the same nationality, taking into account security considerations and the wishes of the prisoners themselves.
- To provide the opportunity for foreign prisoners to learn the language spoken in the country of imprisonment.
- To ensure that interpreting is available during legal counselling, health care provision, disciplinary hearings and complaints procedures.
- To allow prisoners to use their own language during prison visits and communications by letter and telephone.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009:100

Whilst in Europe, the CoE (Council of Europe) adopted broader recommendations for prison education:

- All prisoners shall have access to education, which is envisaged as consisting of classroom subjects, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, physical education and sports, social education and library facilities;
- Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age groups in the outside world, and the range of learning opportunities for prisoners should be as wide as possible;
- Education in prison shall aim to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context;
- All those involved in the administration of the prison system and the management of prisons should facilitate and support education as much as possible;
- Education should have no less a status than work within the prison regime and prisoners should not lose out financially or otherwise by taking part in education;
- Every effort should be made to encourage the prisoner to participate actively in all aspects of education;
- Development programmes should be provided to ensure that prison educators adopt appropriate adult education methods;
- Special attention should be given to those prisoners with particular difficulties and especially those with reading or writing problems;
- Vocational education should aim at the wider development of the individual, as well as being sensitive to trends in the labour market;
- Prisoners should have direct access to a well-stocked library at least once per week;
- Physical education and sports for prisoners should be emphasised and encouraged;
- Creative and cultural activities should be given a significant role because these activities have particular potential to enable prisoners to develop and express themselves;

- Social education should include practical elements that enable the prisoner to manage daily life within the prison, with a view to facilitating the return to society;
- Wherever possible, prisoners should be allowed to participate in education outside prison;
- Where education has to take place within the prison, the outside community should be involved as fully as possible;
- Measures should be taken to enable prisoners to continue their education after release;
- The funds, equipment and teaching staff needed to enable prisoners to receive appropriate education should be made available.

Council of Europe Recommendation No R(89)12 1989

Despite these recommendations however, education and training generally remain a low priority for prison personnel compared with other duties, such as order and security leading to barriers for detainees in accessing their right to education and training.

Amongst the main issues for prison teachers, according to the UKs ‘Skills for Life’ programme, are curriculum development, delivery mode of contents and resources to teach with. This is not surprising, with a reliance on mainstream teaching materials, geared towards learners in mainstream society. Language learning in particular is often context-based, dealing with everyday situations faced in mainstream society, such as ordering in a restaurant, or going on holiday. These are contexts that couldn’t be more irrelevant in the prison setting.

Professional Training and Development of Prison Staff

The emphasis on providing training for prison staff is pursuant to the findings of the Grundtvig funded “Pathways to Inclusion” final report, following the conference in Budapest 2010, which states that:

„Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the training of staff engaged in prison education, in order to equip them more effectively for coping with the special challenges – social and psychological as well as pedagogical – of working in this environment“ (p 5).

The 2010 report identifies not only the training of staff per se but the awareness-raising amongst staff of the benefits of prison education as being of key importance. This is echoed in the 2011 Directorate General for Education and Culture commissioned review of Prison Education and Training in Europe, where it is stated that “prison officers should be viewed as key players in encouraging prison education” and that “their training should also be improved” since “they have the potential to motivate prisoners to engage in education as they are the people that have most contact time with them” (p 13).

However there is little information available on the professional training and development of prison staff. It is clear that provisions clearly vary from country to country and between prisons. Some prisons offer internal or external courses for prison staff like e.g. dealing with stress, presentation skills, computer skills, drug counselling, mental health, pro-social modelling, or anti-bullying, whilst at the same time training is often cut, offered too late or available only when absolutely necessary.

Languages Behind Bars: Meeting the needs and challenges in European Prisons

Languages Behind Bars started life as a European-funded project under the Lifelong Learning Programme. Its goal was to tackle the issue of communication in multilingual prisons and secure detention centres through capitalising on the role and potential both of educational activities within the regime and of professional staff training and development opportunities, helping prison staff and foreign national inmates to communicate basic things in a common language, and encouraging a better cultural understanding

of each other through the use of context-relevant educational and training material.

Not looking to replace existing and established language training or communication programmes in prisons, a toolkit of multilingual learning aids would add new, relevant tools and materials to complement and enhance existing services. It would provide a clearly identifiable solution for engaging both foreign national offenders and prison staff in education, training and development programmes, and would promote better communication and cultural understanding, help prevent unnecessary additional psychological and emotional stress, and facilitate more effective rehabilitation. It would stimulate enhanced cooperation amongst staff and foreign national detainees, and support more humane as well as more effective processes on a bi-lateral level.

Prior to the project, work had been done already on improving communication between offenders and staff in a prison context. The Prison Translator, a joint project between the Prisons of the Canton of Zürich and the European Prison Education Association (EPEA), provides an extensive and comprehensive list of relevant phraseology for various sections of prison life which can be translated into and between 22 international languages (see www.prisontranslator.eu). The project “Eliminating Language Barriers in European Prisons through Open and Distance Education Technology” sought to break down communication barriers through second-language instruction to prison personnel.

The idea of the Languages Behind Bars project was to take the concept of these other initiatives further, that is to develop tools and materials for classroom-based foreign-language instruction with strong intercultural components that can be used to provide both staff and detainees with a common language of basic communication (be it the local language, or a relevant European language) geared to the communication needs of the prison

population, whilst encouraging a greater cultural understanding of one-another and of their surroundings. As a European-wide language-learning tool, Languages Behind Bars would establish a system whereby language and cultural skills can be practised and enhanced by inmates through written (and moderated) correspondence with inmates in partner countries, and would develop European consistent certification for prison staff to provide a clear benchmark for the inter-lingual and cross-cultural competence of staff working with foreign national offenders.

As a project with a defined duration and finite resources, one of the key aims would be to establish a sustainable framework; a base-product that could be easily adapted to new languages, that was flexible enough to meet diverse and changing needs and contexts in European prisons and that had the support and backing of critical networks and associations.

In line with these core objectives, the project resulted in a **work-book**, **flash-cards** and **visual dialogue builders** and **audio practice material** which, supported by a **trainers' guide** and a **trainers' course**, can continue to be used by professionals in prison education, as well as by those involved in the professional development of prison staff.

Development, Piloting and Finalisation

Languages Behind Bars was a project running from October 2012 to March 2015, coordinated by the training company *die Berater*® in Vienna, Austria, with partners INSUP Formation, in Bordeaux, France, BUPNET in Göttingen, Germany, Prison Fellowship Bulgaria in Sofia, Bulgaria, Gevangenenzorg Nederland in Zoetermeer, Netherlands, and Seeds for Growth in London, UK. The project, financed by the European Lifelong Learning Programme was mandated with developing a new communication and training tool for prisons and detention centres, whereby foreign national prisoners and detainees and prison staff would have the opportunity to communicate with each other in the context of the prison setting.

An initial needs analysis helped to identify the core communication points in the prison setting that staff and foreign national prisoners and detainees felt were most relevant to their day-to-day lives, and on the basis of this a set of situational dialogues were developed, illustrated through attractive comic strips, with an accompanying set of worksheets and learning activities. An initial methodological approach was adopted, around which these materials were based, and a trainers' meeting with prison teachers and trainers from across Europe was used as an opportunity to see how teachers and trainers would respond to the materials, and how they would be able to integrate them into their training.

“Around twenty staff members at the prison of Bordeaux-Gradignan have received Bulgarian language training thanks to LBB's functional tools. The participants, including guards and officials, doctors, probation officers and social workers, all emphasised the usefulness of these LBB materials. Their main benefit derives from their' relevance to the day-to-day work of Prison Administration personnel and to the real-life situations with which they are directly confronted. All of this is reflected perfectly in the comic strips whose topics, although incomplete, were considered by the profession to be extremely pertinent, as was the choice of key words and phrases.”

Jean Marie Dubile, INSUP

Far from assuming that the developed materials would be immediately suitable for use in prison settings, prison teachers and trainers took the developed materials and found different ways to implement them in their teaching and training settings. The result of this on-the-ground testing therefore allowed these materials to evolve into practical tools, compiled as finalised outputs of the Languages Behind Bars project, currently in English, French, German, Dutch and Bulgarian (with additional languages planned in the future) and now made available to prison teachers and trainers as well as prison staff training professionals across Europe and the wider international community.

2. Materials, Tools and Methods

Workbook

The workbook – similar to a conventional language learning ‘text-book’ – is a set of learning units designed to meet the communication needs in a prison context. Ranging from giving personal information and talking about nationalities to giving and understanding prison-specific instructions and discussing rights and obligations in prison, this workbook can be used by both prison-

ers and staff looking to improve their ability to communicate with other people in prison. The structure of the book enables its use both in classroom and training settings, but also for private learning. Learners are encouraged to use the book to note down translations in their own language, to keep a record of words and phrases for practical reference.

The workbook doesn’t only emphasise functional language, but exposes learners to a culture of positive interaction. Dialogues between prisoners, detainees and staff are based around the conventions of polite conversation where terms such as “excuse me”, “please” and “thank you” are common practice. Not only does this promote politeness and respect amongst prisoners and detainees



Picture 1: An example showing pages in the workbook

People, Identity and Nationality	Your Space	Health, Religion and Culture	Living Together	What Next?
Thematic areas covered:				
Introductions and personal information	Objects and places in the institution	Human body and sickness	Routines and activities	Being released
People in the institution	In your private space	Feeling and emotions	Contact with the outside world	Social workers and probation officers
Understanding general information	Understanding instructions	Religious and spiritual needs	Rules and sanctions	Work and accommodation

Table 1: Structure of the Workbook

when interacting with prison staff, but evidence from the piloting of the programme indicated very strongly that staff using polite terminology in the native languages of the prisoners and detainees with whom they are talking has a profound impact on the subsequent level of respect and cooperation.

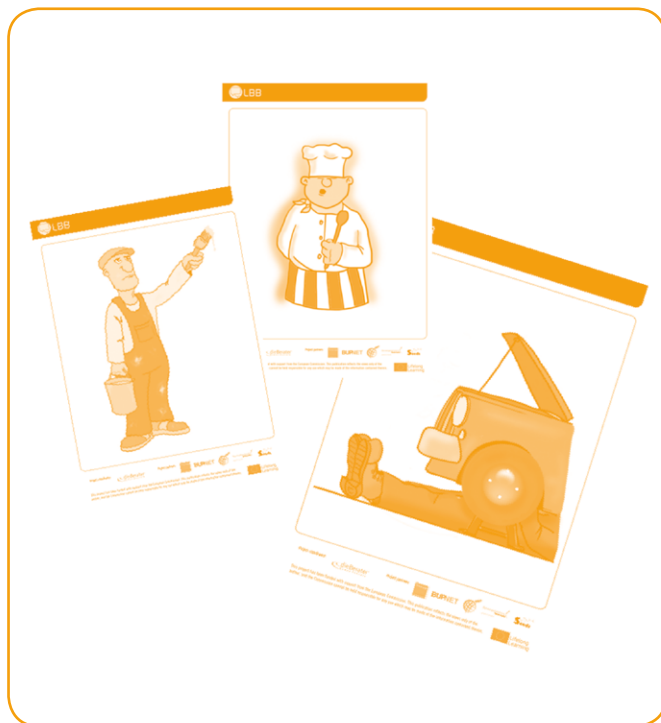
After taking an LBB course in Bulgarian for prison staff, one prison guard in Bordeaux, France was amazed what happened after being able to communicate basic words such as “hello” and “thank you” in Bulgarian to a Bulgarian inmate. The inmate became more respectful and more cooperative knowing that the guard had tried to speak his language – it was just a symbolic gesture, but had a positive effect on the dynamics of their interaction.

The workbook can be used in various contexts; as a tool in the classroom in the prison or detention centre, as a reference resource for prison staff in professional training programmes, and for self-learning. However, there is no requirement to follow the structure of the workbook. Teachers and trainers can choose to structure their language courses around the content of the workbook, but can equally select individual sections and activities within the workbook to support and complement their existing educational programmes. In this way, the LBB materials needn’t replace existing tools and programmes, but can help to provide context and specific content to teachers’ and trainers’ own portfolio of materials.

Flashcards

Imagery is hugely important in learning languages in prison settings, and is as useful for prisoners and detainees as for prison staff. An extensive set of flashcards can be used in training sessions, but can also be equally useful in practice; when communicating specific things in a prison setting without linguistic resources, imagery can help get messages across and reduce misunderstandings and the tension in communication.

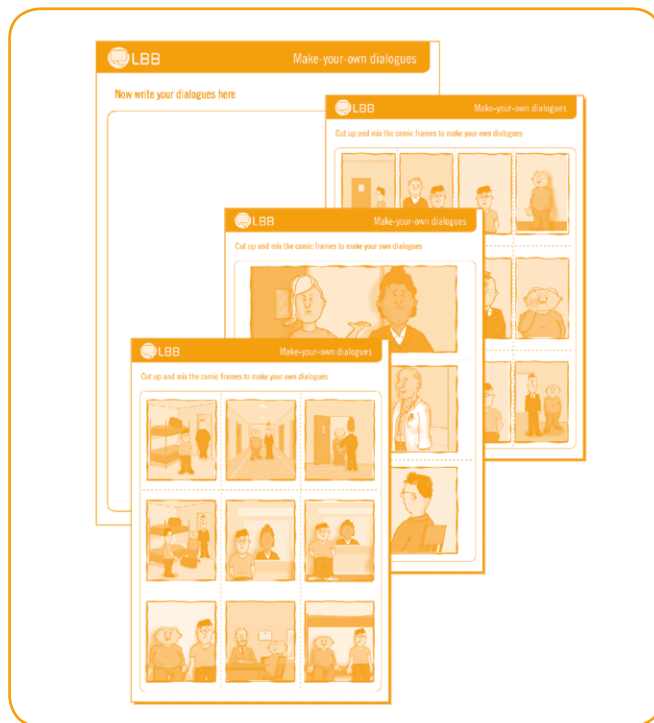
These images can be used to represent objects, people, activities or instructions across a diverse range of topics.



Picture 2: An example of LBB flashcards

Visual Dialogue Builders

The workbook itself is illustrated through various comic-strip style dialogues, showing visually the interaction between prisoners, detainees and various types of staff. All of these individual comic frames are reproduced without dialogue, allowing an infinite number of individualised dialogues to be created and practiced. This affords a huge amount of flexibility and creativity to adapt teaching and training to the unique institutional context. These are made available in full-colour printable A4 format for teachers and trainers to print, cut up and integrate into their teaching resources.



Picture 3: Visual dialogue builders can be used in various different ways


ICT and Audio Tool

The words, instructions and phrases are also made available through a digital platform, where prison staff, inmates and detainees can proceed through a rich series of language acquisition activities, developed to help build up phrases word by word, with

audio support to hear how the words and phrases should sound in the target language. Available currently through an online platform, the tool is suitable to the growing number of institutions offering restricted internet access, whilst also serving the needs of prison staff who can set aside time to listen to the material.

Cell	→ Translation
In the cell	→ Translation
Allowed	→ Translation
Not Allowed	→ Translation
Mobile Phone	→ Translation
Am I allowed to keep a mobile phone in the cell?	→ Translation
You are not allowed to keep a mobile phone in the cell	→ Translation
To keep a mobile phone in the cell	→ Translation
Cigarettes	→ Translation
To keep cigarettes in the cell	→ Translation
Am I allowed to keep cigarettes in the cell?	→ Translation
You are allowed to keep cigarettes in the cell	→ Translation
Am I allowed to keep a mobile phone in the cell?	→ Translation
You are not allowed to keep a mobile phone in the cell	→ Translation
To keep something in the cell	→ Translation
Am I allowed to keep something in the cell?	→ Translation
You are allowed to keep something in the cell	→ Translation
You are not allowed to keep something in the cell	→ Translation

Table 2: Sentence building with the ICT-based Audio tool



The tool allows the user to focus on hearing single words, for example objects in the cell, which are presented in two languages, along with a picture of the item, but it also helps the user to acquire full phrases – the most important phrases they need in the prison context – by gradually exposing the user to the smaller components of the phrase, building up to a full phrase, along with appropriate question forms, and both its positive and negative constructions.

This repetition of words and phrases as they increase in complexity will help users with both visual and audio learning styles, whilst a series of additional practice activities are suitable for those with a range of different learning styles.

Teaching Methods and Trainers' Guidelines

Teachers and trainers using the LBB materials are likely to be experienced in their field, and quickly able to use the LBB materials,

either as stand-alone teaching tools or as elements integrated into existing teaching and training programmes. However, in creating the LBB materials, care was taken to draw upon certain pedagogical approaches, which, when tested during the LBB development stage, proved to be remarkably engaging and conducive to effective participatory learning.

Guidelines for trainers, which accompany the core teaching and training materials, may be useful to teachers and trainers in prison, providing suggested approaches and methods for using the materials in practice with the different target groups (prison staff, prison inmates and detainees), as well as providing a more detailed overview of the materials and their potential applications.

Teachers, trainers and other professionals in the prison sector can learn how to access the guidelines, along with all other training materials on the LBB website, www.lbb-project.eu.

3. Train-The-Trainer: Teaching Languages Behind Bars

The Purpose of the Train The Trainer Programme

The LBB train-the-trainer programme, *Multilingualism in Prison: Teaching Languages Behind Bars*, provides the bridge between the teaching and training materials, and their application in adult learning in the prison context.

Primarily, the train-the-trainer course is on offer to those seeking to employ the LBB materials in their teaching and training settings, either with prisoners and detainees, or with prison staff, helping them to better understand the materials and their effective usage. In doing so, LBB extends a further-education offer to teachers and trainers working in the prison context, and providing them the opportunity to broaden their skills and competences, not only in direct connection to the LBB materials, but generally in the field of multi-lingualism in prison.

Taking part in the LBB Train-the-Trainer Programme

The LBB Train-the-Trainer programme, *Multilingualism in Prison: Teaching Languages Behind Bars* will be made available as a combined face-to-face and online-based programme. Organisations and institutions within the prison sector may be eligible for funding under the EACEA's Erasmus+ programme (Key Activity 1) to send staff abroad as part of European Professional Development Programmes, for which the LBB Train-the-Trainer is perfectly suited.

More information and advice on applying for funding, as well as other information on taking part in the programme *Multilingualism in Prison: Teaching Languages Behind Bars* can be found on the website www.lbb-project.eu.

4. Looking to the Future

New Languages, New Ideas

Languages Behind Bars can never be seen as a complete product, but one with potential to develop, expand and evolve. The current programme is created based on the experience of a consortium of six partners in six European countries, and covers the main language and communication needs in these contexts. However, whilst the use of English as a target language in the programme will perhaps have a broader applicability – as was seen during the LBB development in Bulgaria and in the Netherlands, where English, rather than the local language, was adopted as a common platform for communication – there are a great deal more languages being spoken in European prisons.

Further to this, LBB is a tool that is to be shaped and moulded by the professionals working with it. New ideas, new approaches and new ways of using the material should be shared amongst the community of teachers and trainers using LBB.

With this in mind, LBB developers have created two additional tools for teachers and trainers:

- A systematic translation schedule – LBBx – enabling teachers and trainers, and even bi-lingual prison inmates and detainees in work and education programmes, to systematically provide the necessary translations required to transfer the materials into any other language, which can then be submitted to developers.

- An international online support community for those using the LBB materials, to provide feedback and new ideas and methods for use by others internationally.

More information on both of these can be found on the website www.lbb-project.eu

The EPEA

The project has benefited from support from its associated partner, the European Prison Education Association (EPEA). The EPEA have a strong background in multilingualism in prison, with the publication of the highly-acclaimed Prison Translator (www.prisontranslator.eu) which contributed significantly to the conceptualisation of the LBB materials. The EPEA offers training conferences to its members and organises other network and training events. LBB are happy to rely on the continued support of the EPEA in promoting the LBB materials internationally. More information on the EPEA can be found at www.epea.org.



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