



Application of the Literacy Training Service component of the National Service Training Program in New Bilibid Prison (Philippines)

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Abstract

In 2000, the government of the Philippines launched its National Service Training Program (NSTP), a compulsory 2-semester course component for all the country's Bachelor and technical vocational students. There is a choice of three subject areas, one of which is the Literacy Training Service (LTS) module. This is designed to train students in teaching literacy and numeracy skills to schoolchildren, out-of-school youths and other citizens in need of their services, including prison inmates. This article looks into the application of NSTP-LTS at New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City, Metro Manila. The author's study involved 24 students (13 female, 11 male) from the University of the Philippines teaching 40 male inmate learners incarcerated in the national penitentiary's medium security compound over a period of two months. Many of the inmate learners (aged 14–61) had very low literacy and numeracy skills, and some had never been to school at all. The university students were immersed in an environment entirely unknown to them and performed roles from which they obtained a different perspective and understanding of society. The inmate learners were eager to avail of this opportunity to participate in second-chance education. Despite the many benefits of this learning process for all participants, in her conclusion, the author points out several challenges which still need to be overcome to optimise the application of NSTP-LTS in correctional institutions of the Philippines.

Keywords teacher training · National Service Training Program · Literacy Training Service · Alternative Learning System (ALS) · New Bilibid Prison · prison education · inmate learners

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Résumé

Application du module Service de formation à l’alphabétisation du Programme national de service de formation dans la prison de New Bilibid (Philippines) – Le Gouvernement philippin a lancé en 2000 son programme national de formation, module didactique sur deux semestres obligatoire pour tous les élèves en formation professionnelle technique et les étudiants en licence du pays. Ils peuvent choisir entre trois domaines, dont le service d’alphabétisation. Ce dernier a pour but de former les étudiants à enseigner les compétences de base en alphabétisme et numératie aux écoliers, aux jeunes déscolarisés et à d’autres citoyens nécessitant ces prestations, dont les personnes incarcérées. Le présent article analyse l’application de ce module dans la prison de New Bilibid de Muntinlupa-Ville, Metro Manila. L’auteure a impliqué dans son étude 13 étudiantes et 11 étudiants de l’université des Philippines, qui ont dispensé pendant une période de deux mois un enseignement à 40 apprenants masculins incarcérés dans le centre pénitentiaire national de sécurité moyenne. Un grand nombre d’entre eux (âgés de 14 à 61 ans) avaient des compétences de base très succinctes, et quelques-uns n’avaient jamais été scolarisés. Les étudiants ont été immergés dans un environnement qui leur était entièrement inconnu, ils ont assumé des tâches qui leur ont ouvert une perspective et permis une appréhension différentes de la société. Les détenus apprenants étaient très désireux de saisir cette occasion de suivre un enseignement de la seconde chance. Malgré les nombreux bienfaits de cette démarche d’apprentissage pour tous les participants, l’auteure relève dans sa conclusion plusieurs défis qui restent à surmonter afin d’optimiser l’application de ce programme dans les établissements pénitentiaires des Philippines.

Introduction

In 2001, the government of the Philippines launched the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a Department of Education programme (RoP 2001a) which provides opportunities for the acquisition of basic literacy and livelihood skills to specific groups of disadvantaged learners, including out-of-school youth, adults and differently-abled individuals, particularly in remote areas of the country, as well as prison inmates. The government of the Philippines stands firm in its commitment to prison education and lends further support to the relevant guiding principle from the United Nations’ *Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners*:

All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and *education* aimed at the full development of the human personality (OHCHR 1990, section 6, emphasis added).

Thirty-five years earlier, the United Nations’ *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* already stated that

[to establish in prisoners the will to lead law-abiding and self-supporting lives after their release and to fit them to do so], all appropriate means shall be used, including religious care in the countries where this is possible, *education*, vocational guidance and training, social casework, employment counselling,

physical development and strengthening of moral character, in accordance with the individual needs of each prisoner, taking account of his [*sic*] social and criminal history, his physical and mental capacities and aptitudes, his personal temperament, the length of his sentence and his prospects after release (UN 1955, Part II, section 66[1], emphasis added).

The Philippines currently has a total of seven correctional facilities located all over the country which take charge of the confinement and rehabilitation of inmates. These facilities include the country's main correctional institution, *New Bilibid Prison* (NBP) in Muntinlupa, National Capital region; as well as the *Correctional Institution for Women* (CIW) in Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila; *Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm* in Palawan, and *Sablayan Prison and Penal Farm* in Mindoro Occidental (both in Mimaropa, Luzon region); *Leyte Regional Prison* in Leyte (eastern Visayas region); *San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm* in Zamboanga del Sur; and *Davao Prison and Penal Farm* in Davao del Norte. The last two are both in the Mindanao region.¹ All are operating prisons and all offer ALS as part of their educational programmes. But it must be emphasised here that it is only in NBP (the focus of this article) that the educational system extends up to college level.

The educational forms of assistance utilised in the treatment of prisoners incarcerated at all-male New Bilibid Prison (NBP) include education programmes offered at five levels: ALS (Levels 1, 2 and 3); elementary; secondary; vocational; and college (the extension school is handled by the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA).² There is a sixth unit, the School of Fine Arts (SOFA), which, albeit recognised by the Bureau of Corrections, is not yet officially affiliated with an educational institution or art association.

Just before introducing ALS in 2001, the government of the Philippines had already launched its National Service Training Program (NSTP), a compulsory 2-semester course component for all the country's Bachelor and technical vocational students (RoP 2001b). There is a choice of three subject areas, one of which is the Literacy Training Service (LTS) module.³ This is designed to train students in teaching literacy and numeracy skills to schoolchildren, out-of-school youths and other citizens in need of their services, including prison inmates.

NSTP aims to instil civic consciousness in university students and involve them in worthwhile pursuits as Filipino citizens serving their nation. The purpose of including prison education in NSTP-LTS was to find another opportunity for students to experience personal growth as well as enabling them to develop a new civic

¹ Short historical portraits of each of the seven facilities are provided on the website of the Bureau of Corrections at <http://www.bucor.gov.ph/facilities.html> [accessed 8 July 2019].

² The formal education system in the Philippines has three main sections. Elementary education comprises kindergarten and Grades 1–6 (with the language of instruction up to Grade 3 being one of 12 local mother tongues, before switching to English in Grade 4); Junior high (lower secondary) school comprises Grades 7–10, and Senior high (upper secondary) school comprises Grades 11 and 12. ALS Levels 1, 2 and 3 correspond to elementary Grades 1, 2 and 3, but are only taught in Filipino (sometimes complemented by English), and not in provincial local languages.

³ The other two are Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS) and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC).

consciousness. Preparations involved (1) determining the selected prison's current ALS needs relative to their education programme; (2) developing appropriate teaching materials that could respond to those needs; and (3) integrating the use of these teaching materials into their curricula.

The Asian Institute of Tourism (AIT) of the University of the Philippines in Diliman (UPD), Quezon City, Metro Manila already practised a suitable teaching methodology. Created in 1976 to respond to an increasing demand for professional managers, planners, educators, researchers etc. in the tourist trade, AIT-UPD had built up experience in teaching students how to identify where their competencies are weak and familiarising them with techniques which can be adapted to what they actually need for their knowledge acquisition to be successful. This methodology was transferred to the application of the NSTP-LTS component in the medium security compound of New Bilibid Prison.

This also served as one of the means by which AIT can comply with the provisions of Republic Act 9163 (RoP 2001a) or the National Service Training Program (NSTP) Act of 2001 (RoP 2001b), according to which "LTS" is a programme designed to train students to become teachers of literacy and numeracy skills to a variety of learners.

The implementation and delivery of NSTP-LTS was specific to Level 1 of the ALS implemented in the medium security compound, with ALS Level 1 corresponding to Grade 1 in Philippine formal elementary schooling. Being the basic level, it represents the beginning of the low end of the continuum of inmate learners' literacy skills. Hence, the university had more leeway and options in terms of providing education to the inmates and fulfilling its social responsibility.

I volunteered to handle the literacy component of the programme in UPD's Asian Institute of Tourism in view of my previous work experience at the national penitentiary. I was already familiar with New Bilibid Prison's Education Section from my term of office (2001–2007) as Dean of the School of Business Administration of the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA (UPHSD),⁴ which supervises tertiary level education inside the prison compound. During regular weekly visits in my spare time, I had also extended my services by teaching mathematics for beginners at ALS Level 1 as a volunteer. However, up to the initiation of this study, I had never had any working relationship with the Department of Education as an academic. ALS is one of the Department of Education's programmes.

This article looks into the application of the Literacy Training Service component of the National Service Training Program (NSTP-LTS) at New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City, Metro Manila. The 24 participating students from the University of the Philippines chose the school inside NBP's medium security compound for their teaching experience, since its location in Muntinlupa City is still within the metropolitan region of Manila and as such is more accessible to them than any of the country's six other correctional facilities. Furthermore, NBP is the country's largest penitentiary.

⁴ DALTA stands for Daisy and Antonio Laperal Tamayo, who founded this university in 1975.

Brief background on the Alternative Learning System

As mentioned earlier, the government of the Philippines launched the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in 2001 (RoP 2001a). According to the website of the Department of Education, the country's need for ALS alongside the regular formal education system was (and still is) due to various circumstances:

Many Filipinos do not have a chance to attend and finish formal basic education (Grades 1 to 6 and Years 1 to 4) due to many reasons. Some drop out from schools while some do not have schools in their communities. Since every Filipino has a right to free basic education, the Government establishes ALS to provide all Filipinos the chance to have access to and complete basic education in a mode that fits their distinct situations and needs (DepEd n.d.).

The legal bases of ALS are the 1987 Philippine *Constitution* (RoP 1987) and *Republic Act 9155* (RoP 2001a). The Constitution provides for the recognition and promotion of other forms of education aside from formal education. Article XIV, Section 2, paragraph (1) mentions that the State shall “establish, maintain and support a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society”; and paragraph (4) encourages “non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems as well as self-learning, independent and out-of-school study programmes particularly those that respond to community needs” (RoP 1987).

This is complemented by *Republic Act 9155*, also known as the “Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001” (RoP 2001a), which mandates the Department of Education to “provide a viable alternative to the existing formal education instruction. It [ALS, as a parallel learning system] encompasses both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills” (ibid., section 4[a]). The Basic Literacy Program (BLP) within ALS is intended for out-of-school children, youth and adults who need basic and functional literacy skills, knowledge and values. Throughout the Philippines, ALS courses are taught in community learning centres, libraries, multipurpose halls and in learners' homes by specially trained ALS facilitators. Learners include elementary and secondary school dropouts; youth and adults who are over-aged for elementary Grade 6 and secondary Year 4; unemployed adults; street children; members of cultural minorities or Indigenous people (IP); persons with disabilities (PWDs) or those who are physically challenged; rebel returnees or soldier-integrees; industry-based and domestic workers; prison inmates; and other disadvantaged people. This article focuses on inmate learners.

Prison education in the Philippines since the 1950s

The forerunner of today's Alternative Learning System was the Non-Formal Education School (NFES). It was founded around 1955, as the Adult Education Class. As I have pointed out in an article published elsewhere,

Education programs at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP), the national penitentiary, started in the 1950s merely as part of prison orientation for inmates.

Their main goal was to enhance immediate rehabilitation and not just eradicate illiteracy among the inmates. The establishment of the education programs inside the prison compound was met with stiff resistance. Opposing parties thought that by providing education, the criminals were being spoiled and were not accordingly punished. The concept of effective rehabilitation through education eventually won its rightful place and became the flagship of the rehabilitation program after much debate and heated discussions. The NBP has placed the education programs at the forefront of the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders (Lopez 2015, p. 107).

NFES was originally housed at the maximum security compound of New Bilibid Prison, where basic literacy courses were taught. These included reading, writing and arithmetic. Due to the lack of suitable rooms, the Roman Catholic chapel within the compound served as classroom initially. However, the recurrence of prison riots caused disruption of classes, so to ensure the safety of the teachers, the school was finally transferred to the medium security compound in the 1960s.

NFES earned its independent status as a school in 1980. The majority of the programme enrollees were entirely unable to read and write. In 1959, the Bureau of Corrections issued a mandate requiring all inmates with low literacy skills to go through a literacy class, since approximately 60–70% of the inmates could not read or write. In 1985, the school linked up with the Department of Education's Muntinlupa Non-Formal Education Literacy Program to improve its own literacy programme. In 2004, NFES changed its name to the Alternative Learning System.

The national ALS literacy programme is extended to prison inmates to enable and encourage their development of an appreciation for learning in preparation for their becoming reformed citizens once they are released. This is also in compliance with the Bureau of Corrections' above-mentioned mandate. The programme provides marginalised learners who have not completed basic education for a variety of circumstantial reasons with the opportunity to finish basic education. These are adults who have missed out on school as a result of overage and/or economic restraints like poverty. For many of them this is the first time they have a chance to really engage in learning. ALS parallels other Department of Education programmes as an institutional programme and its practical approach is characterised by flexibility to meet individual learners' needs and the integration of functional literacy skills. In addition, its nature is participatory and transformative as an equaliser within Filipino society.

The school is housed in a one-storey building which contains an office, a library and a multi-purpose hall. The latter is convertible into five classrooms separated by wooden foldable dividers which may also function as blackboards. These classrooms are furnished with tables, chairs and ceiling fans. The library has a collection of books ranging from nursery level up to the elementary grades. These books are largely donations.

A dormitory with cubicles functions as the inmate learners' living quarters. Some may have their own cubicles while others share with fellow inmates. The dormitory has a communal toilet and shower room. Electricity is available on schedule from dusk and turned off in the morning. However, on special occasions, for example

when inmates' spouses, families or other visitors are present, it may be turned on until 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

The Bureau of Corrections is in charge of physical facilities like chairs, tables, blackboards, school supplies, as well as the salaries of both civilian and inmate teachers. However, to sustain its operations, the school needs to tap both governmental and non-governmental organisations for additional funding to cover inmates' other needs like materials, additional school supplies, etc.

ALS is supported by the Department of Education's Division Office of Muntinlupa City and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). The Department of Education supervises the academic aspect by providing instructional guidance and support in programme planning, implementation and teacher training. TESDA, on the other hand, takes charge of the other school activities and awards certificates of completion to students who have satisfactorily acquired the prerequisite technical skills.

While the Bureau of Corrections requires all inmates with low literacy to enrol in ALS, not all apply for admission. After being classified as medium-risk inmates, those interested may already apply and be admitted for the June enrolment.⁵ Applicants are initially screened and interviewed by the officer in charge and other school staff. They are also given a test to determine their literacy levels. As part of their orientation upon admission, they are informed about school rules, regulations and policies, the Bureau's own rules and regulations and other pertinent information on the Bureau of Corrections, the Department of Education and education officials involved in the programme.

Programme levels and content

Corresponding to elementary Grades 1, 2 and 3 in formal education, ALS second-chance literacy classes are also staged into Levels 1, 2 and 3. Level 1, which is the focus of this article, represents the lowest level in terms of literacy skills.

Level 1 is further subdivided into two clusters. Those who are entirely unable to read and write are grouped separately from those who can read and write simple words. This is done to enable instructors to pick up and meet learners' needs more effectively.

According to the non-formal education system's entry conditions for the annual National Literacy Award, it is expected that upon completion of Level 1, inmate learners should have acquired the following basic skills

- *Reading skills:* being able to read a newspaper headline and sub-headlines; read and understand posters and simple printed paragraphs; read and recognise figures from 1 to 1,000;

⁵ While the Philippine school year starts in June, ALS enrolment may coincide with that, but being module-based, admission to ALS is possible year-round.

- *Writing skills*: being able to write their own name and address; communicate in writing simple sentences; write simple letters and numerical figures from 1 to 1,000;
- *Numeracy skills*: being able to count and recognise numbers from 1 to 1,000; add and subtract up to three digits; understand the principles of simple multiplication and division; and
- *Other skills*: being able to communicate clearly and apply literacy skills in their daily lives (RoP 2000).

The emphasis of ALS is not limited to the teaching of basic literacy skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. Topics around agriculture, practical arts and livelihood skills are also on the agenda to encourage inmate learners' productivity while they are incarcerated. Environmental protection, land and water pollution, music and physical health are likewise included in the curriculum. This approach is based on the perspective that there are various ways to become educated and this could take place in many types of structures and surroundings.

More importantly, citizenship, values and spiritual formation are integrated into the lessons by instilling among inmate learners the ideals of patriotism, nationalism and faithful adherence to the Philippine Constitution. The lessons serve to remind inmates of the importance of respecting the rights of others and inculcate among them the moral values needed for their harmonious coexistence with other people under varying circumstances. These components of the curriculum aim to facilitate a holistic rehabilitation of inmates to foster their sociopolitical awareness, civic consciousness and sense of responsibility, preparing them for post-release, when they re-join the mainstream of society and participate in their own way towards contributing to nation-building.

Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities are conducted with the objectives of instilling discipline, developing the inmates' social relations skills, promoting and maintaining physical health and imbibing the spirit of sportsmanship. They participate in literary and musical programmes as well as sports activities, which include the school's intramural tournaments. The latter are meant to encourage healthy competition and develop camaraderie and teamwork among inmate learners. Special occasions like Christmas in December, Valentine's Day in February, *Buwan ng Wika* (Month of the National Language) in August and National Correctional Consciousness Week (NCCW) in October are also cause for celebration.

Teaching staff

The teaching staff are classified into two types, there are civilian teachers and inmate teachers. Civilian teachers come from free society. Some are employees of the Bureau of Corrections and are appointed as correctional educators. In addition,

they are given the authority to enforce prison policies, rules and regulations. Other civilian teachers are volunteer teachers from both private and government agencies, non-profit organisations or the civilian society sector. Inmate teachers (who are also called resident teachers or resident inmate instructors) may have graduated from college before they were put in prison or may have earned their degrees on site (e.g. a Bachelor's degree in marketing) from the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA (UPHSD)-Bilibid Extension School in the same compound. In coordination with the prison staff, they check on the needs of inmate learners and receive a minimal monthly salary from the Bureau of Corrections.

The civilian teachers, particularly the employees of the Bureau of Corrections, guide and supervise the inmate teachers. In terms of academic course content, they take the lead in conducting the classes and the coverage of topics for particular subjects. Inmate teachers, therefore, function mainly as assistants to the civilian teachers. However, just like the civilian teachers, inmate teachers can teach inmate learners who are prisoners just like them at all levels since they are college degree holders. Therefore, inmate learners accord them the same respect they give to civilian instructors.

Services

Most important among the services is counselling, which covers all aspects of the inmates' life other than their education, and is handled by the civilian teachers. Inmate learners are also provided with visits from outside schools or organisations, and with postal services. Likewise available are the television set and the "videoke"⁶ machine for their entertainment. Finally, albeit not on a regular basis, inmates are offered medical and dental check-ups.

To meet the various spiritual needs of inmates, churches under different denominations were constructed inside the compound. Prisoners are allowed to practise their own religions which include Roman Catholic and Protestant faiths as well as other denominations such as *Iglesia ni Cristo* (Church of Christ), Islam, Born-Again Christian, Aglipay, Seventh-Day Adventist and Baptist. Civilians from outside the prison walls are allowed to conduct catechism classes to enhance inmates' academic education. In addition, prisoners are also given permission to hold celebrations according to their respective religion, thus enabling them to express their faith freely.

⁶ *Videoke*, which is popular particularly in the Philippines, is a derivative of karaoke. A *karaoke* machine, invented in Japan in the early 1970s, plays popular songs with the singer's voice tuned out and the lyrics shown on a screen. Participants using the machine sing along, microphone in hand, following the lyrics. A *videoke* machine has the added features of video recording and rating of performers, enhancing the competitive aspect.

Related literature

One of the starting points for this research was my own unpublished dissertation entitled *Management of Prison Education: A Model* (Lopez 2006). Its focus was on how education provides coping mechanisms for inmates while in prison and upon their release. However, other studies will also be referred to in the course of the discussion below. The aim of this article is to evaluate the effectiveness of the application of the Literacy Training Service component of the National Service Training Program (NSTP-LTS) in New Bilibid Prison. Using a theoretical model originally devised for change management in companies and organisations, my aim is to identify some of the challenges which still need to be overcome to optimise its implementation in correctional institutions of the Philippines.

Theoretical framework

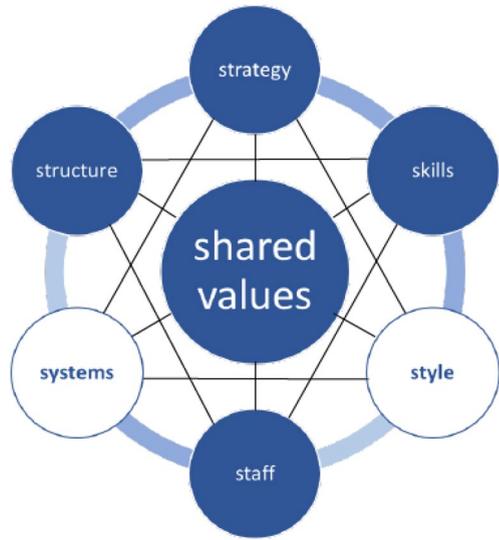
The McKinsey 7-S model

A major part of the theoretical framework for analysing the current situation of prison education, specifically ALS, in the medium-security compound of New Bilibid Prison was the so-called *7-S model*, often referred to as the “McKinsey 7-S model”.⁷ Its seven elements all begin with an s: strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills and shared values. It can be used to help identify what needs to be realigned to improve performance or to maintain alignment during other types of change. The framework is particularly useful in the context of correctional education, since the government is resolute in striking a balance between the sociocultural and economic aspects of investing in the provision of education, hoping that the return on this investment will be successful reintegration of inmates into society as well as a reduction of recidivism. The potential of applying the 7-S model in this context is that it can guide correctional officers and educators in further strengthening reformation of offenders through pedagogical means.

The 7-S fall into two categories (Jurevicius 2013). *Strategy, structure and systems* comprise the “hard” elements of management. These are tangible activities and reflect hierarchy and procedure. They can be termed the “hardware” of success, covering both formal and informal procedures, processes and routines which describe how important and relevant scheduled work is to enabling a company or an organisation – or, indeed, an institution – to function effectively. This hardware is complemented by the “software”; the four “soft” elements, i.e., *style, staff, skills and shared values*. These are less tangible and give substance to organisational culture in the long run. They include knowledge and information sharing, innovation

⁷ The model was developed by four people, Richard Tanner Pascale and Anthony Athos (Pascale and Athos 1981), and Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (Peters and Waterman 1982), with the latter two being former consultants at McKinsey & Co, an international management consulting company, hence the name. For more information, see Peters (2011).

Fig. 1 McKinsey's 7-S Framework. *Source:* Peters and Waterman (1982)



and creativity, teamwork and project orientation, diversity, and strong core values (Tetenbaum 1998). These seven factors are essential for strategy implementation and successful change management in a company, organisation or institution.

The model comes with two distinguishing features. First, shared values are placed at its centre. This is particularly appropriate for a values-driven service such as prison education. Second, the model's interconnecting lines (see Figure 1) indicate that a change in one of the 7-S will have repercussions on the other six. It is important to note this for an organisation or institution which must remain adaptable in order to sustain its operations in a fast-changing environment.

Applications of the 7-S model

Being very flexible, the McKinsey 7-S model can be applied in a number of ways (Simister 2011). First, the framework can be used as a diagnostic tool more particularly when there is an issue on performance wherein things are not as they are supposed to be. Second, the company, organisation or institution may be audited through the framework in current terms, and the strategic change to be implemented will be evaluated in terms of how the model should be. This will show the differences which need to be resolved. Lastly, the model will enable those involved in the strategic implementation of change to look back and review why said change has not met expectations and identify gaps or areas that have been overlooked in the process.

The model can also be applied to a programme, a project or the elements of a team. A study carried out by Juma Ghailani and Sami Khan (2004) recommended a model based on McKinsey's 7-S designed to enhance the effectiveness of the secondary school programme in the Sultanate of Oman. They evaluated the challenges confronting it to determine the desirable system and structure to impart learning. Their study also took into consideration the sharing of information, teaching

methods and experiences among concerned parties to make secondary education more relevant and of better quality.

In an article about Management Education in India written by V. L. Mote (1985), the general management programme for current and future practitioners focuses on organisational problems as a whole and is not just limited to one specific function. Mote recommends that management development programmes for the government should apply the 7-S framework. In the article, only three of the 7-S dimensions are discussed, namely *shared values*, *systems* and *styles*. It also suggests that as an innovative organisation, the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) group should take the lead in designing new programmes for other groups which have not participated. Finally, Mote recommends that IIMs should devise educational programmes which will reach a wider audience and enhance the existing programmes in management education.

Another application of the framework is in tourism management. In the course of my own research, I have been involved in several studies on prison tourism as part of “dark tourism”⁸ and the management of correctional institutions (Lopez 2006, 2015). Since the 7-S model can describe how an organisation or a company can function holistically, it touches on four conventional managerial areas: *planning*, *organising*, *leading* and *controlling*. But despite indeed being a management evaluation tool, so far, it has not been applied in studies investigating educational programmes in prisons. Moreover, most of the research undertaken in prisons by psychology students of various schools and universities in the Philippines deals with inmate behaviour (e.g. Morales 2003; Ayala 1996), rather than learning outcomes.

Shared values, the seventh of the 7-S at the centre of the model (see Figure 1), comprise the superordinate goals which form the organisation’s (or institution’s) central beliefs and attitudes which it imparts to its members – in other words, its philosophy. *Staff* refers to groups of people within the institution which make up its pool of resources. *Skills* are core competencies of personnel within the institution which differentiate them from others and are needed for them to carry out the institution’s objectives. *Strategy* is the articulation of the institution’s vision which is integrated in the direction it desires to take. *Structure* describes the interconnection of the separate entities in the institution as well as the patterns of control. *Systems* cover both the formal or informal procedures, processes and routines on which the institution operates. *Style* refers to unwritten norms of behaviour and thought and common traits of the organisation as a whole.

The two S which were given most emphasis in the study I am presenting here are *systems* and *style*, since NSTP-LTS participants can only do so much in view of the restrictions imposed by the prison administration and the limitations of the environment itself. These two S are open to wider margins of variation than the other five.

Systems in this case refer to processes for meeting inmate, quality and performance requirements within the school. Hence, systems determine what drives the institution, what controls are in place and how inmate learners’ progress is tracked.

⁸ The term *dark tourism* refers to visiting travel destinations which are historically associated with death and tragedy.

The systems element includes internal rules and processes utilised by the teaching teams to maintain the course.

Style as used here refers to the specific cultural environment of New Bilibid Prison and the way work gets done in the school premises. Cultural issues involve informal rules of conduct within the prison compound and the school itself. Thus, the institution's characteristics may cause it to reject inmates who do not embody the requirements set forth by the management of the school. However, style does not apply to the prisoners alone. It extends to staff and other employees, including the supervisors, who must be reliable and capable of exerting positive influence on their subordinates who, in turn, must help create a work culture aimed at attaining the institution's set goals. Also, as a team, their cooperation and collaboration with their supervisors is expected. Leadership style assumes paramount importance, and the response of the staff and the inmates themselves to the leaders' style must be considered.

Concerning terminology, it is useful to add here that the term *inmate* as used here refers to a national prisoner more generally or to someone sentenced by a Philippine court to serve a minimum term of imprisonment of at least three years, or to pay a fine of more than PHP 1,000 pesos (BuCor 2000).⁹ NBP's medium security compound (called Camp Sampaguita) is the security level inmates are assigned to if they cannot be trusted in less-secured areas and their conduct or behaviour requires minimum supervision. Inmates in the medium security compound fall under the categories defined in the *Bureau of Corrections Operating Manual* (BuCor 2000): Those whose minimum sentence is less than twenty years imprisonment; remand inmates or detainees whose sentences are below twenty years; those who are eighteen years of age and below, regardless of the case and sentence; and those who have two or more records of escapes can be classified as medium security inmates if they have served eight years since they were recommitted (*ibid.*). Those with one record of escape must serve five years. Also included are first-time offenders sentenced to life imprisonment. They may be assigned medium security status if they have served five years or less in a maximum security prison upon the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Methodology

The research team, led by myself, included 24 UPD students (13 females, 11 males) engaged in the National Service Training Program (NSTP) component of their regular university degree studies in a variety of subjects, both directly (e.g. elementary school teaching [basic literacy skills, i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic]) and not directly related to teaching (e.g., practical arts and livelihood skills [arts and crafts], environmental protection, and health sciences). As mentioned in the introduction of this article, they had opted for the Literacy Training Service (LTS) module, one of

⁹ At July 2019 conversion rates, the amount of PHP 1,000 equals roughly USD 19.56.

three choices on offer, and found an accessible research site to engage in literacy training for prisoners in NBP's medium security compound in Muntinlupa City.

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach including participant observation; non-formal interviews, which were more of the conversational type; and focus group discussions, recorded by note-taking, since tape recorders, video cameras and mobile phones are not allowed to be brought inside the prison compound. Note-taking was done mostly to capture more important highlights of the discussions. Understandably, the focus group discussions were expected to be a more efficient method to get insights from ALS Level 1 inmate learners than distributing questionnaires, especially since they were just beginning to read and write. Asking them to fill in a questionnaire would have been tedious, if not burdensome, for them.

On separate occasions, discussions were held with the Chief of NBP's Education Section, the Officer-in-Charge of ALS, the teaching personnel (4 civilian and 14 inmate teachers) and 40 inmate learners who were in ALS Level 1 at the time this research was conducted. The demographic profile of the inmate learners is described in a separate section below. The total number of respondents who participated in the study reached 60, with orderlies included among the 40 inmate learners. Orderlies are prisoners who render volunteer service in the office and assist in the basic school operations. The 14 inmate teachers were prisoners who had earned their degree through the tertiary level NBP programme supervised by UPHSD.

We also examined existing teaching materials, both those in current use as well as previously utilised ones (e.g. easy reading books designed for children). Since inmate learners are adult learners, children's books had gradually been replaced by more appropriate reading, writing and mathematics books and other materials suitable for adult literacy learning. From my own experience, I was already aware that inmate learners' age ranges from 16 to 61, and the significant age gap between teenagers and elderly people adds on to another diversity of the group, namely the numerous languages and dialects spoken. It is important to be aware that while English and Filipino (Tagalog) are the official languages of the Philippines, the total number of languages is actually 185,¹⁰ and some provinces/islands have their own dialects. Unsurprisingly, this circumstance also contributes to low literacy rates among inmates who never had the opportunity to learn to read and write in their own mother tongue, especially in communities with no local elementary school. Moreover, there are some inmates who do not speak either Filipino or English, which presents challenges not only in NSTP-LTS classes, but also in terms of communication more generally.

The interviews and focus group discussions (conducted in Filipino) were based on questions designed to elicit information on systems and style (as defined above) from the three groups of respondents, i.e., inmate learners, teachers and administrators, with the objective of improving programme delivery and application. The

¹⁰ "Of these, 183 are living and 2 are extinct. Of the living languages, 175 are indigenous and 8 are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 39 are institutional, 67 are developing, 38 are vigorous, 28 are in trouble, and 11 are dying" (Ethnologue 2019).

research team later summarised and collated their responses to validate them against each other.

The inmate learners were asked to discuss freely on the following: (1) their expectations from their mentors; (2) how happy or satisfied they were with the programme, i.e., if they had encountered any problems related to their schooling; and (3) their suggestions for improvement of the programme in any areas they felt they needed help both while they were incarcerated and as soon as they re-joined free society.

The teachers, both inmate and civilian ones, were asked to share their insights on the following: (1) how the ALS programme might be better appreciated by inmates in terms of being made more relevant or applicable to meet the prisoners' needs; (2) whether they felt that the administration of the Bureau of Corrections was supportive of the educational programme; and (3) whether they had any suggestions and/or recommendations to address problem areas, if any, they had encountered.

Lastly, the following aspects were taken up with the Chief of NBP's Education Section and the Officer-in-Charge of ALS: (1) whether there was any evidence that the programme made a difference in the lives of the inmates who were unschooled when they enrolled; (2) the extent to which they felt that the Bureau of Corrections supported ALS; and (3) which areas of the programme they felt needed their immediate attention.

Demographic profile of inmate learners

Collecting data about the 40 participant ALS Level 1 inmate learners' educational career would not have been useful, because it would only have resulted in finding that they had either never attended school or had dropped out of elementary level at a very early stage. However, there are other relevant characteristics which vary across a wider range, such as age, marital status, religious faith and region of origin (shown in Table 1); crimes committed and length of sentence (Table 2); and number of years already served/still remaining to be served (Table 3). The corresponding frequencies and percentage distributions are listed and computed for each category in the respective tables.

It can be gleaned from Table 1 that 20% (8 out of 40) were in the 26 to 29 age bracket; 62.50% (25) were not married; and 75% (30) were Roman Catholics, while the remaining 25% belonged to various other denominations. In terms of regional origin, the largest single group of 20% (8) hailed from the administrative region of Southern Tagalog. Table 2 shows homicide (at 35%), to have been the most frequently committed crime, followed by murder and robbery-related cases (both at 10%). As to the sentences meted out to the prisoners, the most frequent length is 8 years (at 17.5%), followed by 12.5% for 6, 10, and 12 years, and 10% for life imprisonment. As to number of years already served in prison, Table 3 shows that while 12.5% of the respondents had been incarcerated for 3 and another 12.5% for 5 years, the largest group (20%) had served 4 years at the time of research. With regard the number of years remaining to be served, one group, at 12.5%, had 2 years left; and three groups, each at 10%, had either 3 or 4 years

Table 1 Demographic profile of ALS Level 1 inmate learners ($n=40$)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>	58–61 years	1	2.50
	54–57	1	2.50
	50–53	1	2.50
	46–49	2	5.00
	42–45	3	7.50
	38–41	3	7.50
	34–37	6	15.00
	30–33	7	17.50
	26–29	8	20.00
	22–25	6	15.00
	18–21	1	2.50
	14–17	1	2.50
		Total	40
<i>Civil status</i>	Single	25	62.50
	Married	12	30.00
	Separated	2	5.00
	With common-law wife	1	2.50
		Total	40
<i>Religious faith</i>	Roman Catholic	30	75.00
	Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ)	2	5.00
	Born Again Christian	1	2.50
	Christian	1	2.50
	Islam	1	2.50
	Balik Islam (Returned to Islam)	0	0.00
	Seventh Day Adventist	2	5.00
	Baptist	1	2.50
	Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ	0	0.00
	Aglipay	2	5.00
		Total	40
<i>Region of origin</i>	National Capital Region (NCR)	4	10.00
	Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR)	1	2.50
	Region 1 (Ilocos)	2	5.00
	Region 2 (Cagayan Valley)	1	2.50
	Region 3 (Central Luzon)	3	7.50
	Region 4 (Southern Tagalog)	8	20.00
	Region 5 (Bicol)	4	10.00
	Region 6 (Western Visayas)	4	10.00
	Region 7 (Central Visayas)	3	7.50
	Region 8 (Eastern Visayas)	5	12.50
	Region 9 (Western Mindanao)	1	2.50
	Region 10 (Northern Mindanao)	1	2.50
	Region 11 (Davao)	0	0
	Region 12 (Central Mindanao)	1	2.50
	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)	1	2.50
	Caraga Region (Northeastern Mindanao)	1	2.50
	Total	40	100.00

Table 2 Crimes committed and length of sentence

Categories	Frequency	Percentage	
<i>Crimes committed</i>	Homicide	14	35.00
	Double Homicide	1	2.50
	Frustrated Homicide	1	2.50
	Other homicide-related cases	2	5.00
	Murder	4	10.00
	Murder-related cases	1	2.50
	Robbery	1	2.50
	Robbery with homicide	1	2.50
	Robbery-related cases	4	10.00
	Theft & Qualified Theft	1	2.50
	Rape & rape-related cases	2	5.00
	Acts of lasciviousness	1	2.50
	Carjacking (carnapping)	2	5.00
	Illegal possession of firearms & related cases	1	2.50
	Drug-related cases	2	5.00
	Others, not classified elsewhere		
	Total	40	100.00
<i>Sentence (in no. of years)</i>	1 year	1	2.50
	2	2	5.00
	3	0	0.00
	4	3	7.50
	5	1	2.50
	6	5	12.50
	7	1	2.50
	8	7	17.50
	9	0	0.00
	10	5	12.50
	11	1	2.50
	12	5	12.50
	13	0	0.00
	14	2	5.00
	15	0	0.00
	16	0	0.00
	17	1	2.50
	18	1	2.50
	19	0	0.00
	20 years	0	0.00
Life	4	10.00	
Double Life	1	2.50	
Total	40	100.00	

left, or were serving a life sentence. Three inmate learners (7.5%) responded that they did not know how many years they still had to serve. The reasons for this are likely to be that (a) counting may be a difficult task for them to perform and (b) they do not wish to be saddened by the fact that they are separated from their loved ones because of the crime they committed.

Table 3 Number of years already served and number of years remaining to be served in prison

Categories		Frequency	Percentage
<i>No. of years already served</i>	Less than 1 year	0	0.00
	1 year	1	2.50
	2	2	5.00
	3	5	12.50
	4	8	20.00
	5	5	12.50
	6	4	10.00
	7	3	7.50
	8	2	5.00
	9	2	5.00
	10	3	7.50
	11	2	5.00
	12	1	2.50
	13	0	0.00
	14	1	2.50
	15	1	2.50
	16 years	0	0.00
	Total	40	100.00
<i>No. of years still to be served</i>	Less than 1 year	3	7.50
	1 year	3	7.50
	2	5	12.50
	3	4	10.00
	4	4	10.00
	5	3	7.50
	6	3	7.50
	7	1	2.50
	8	2	5.00
	9	2	5.00
	10	1	2.50
	11	1	2.50
	12	0	0.00
	13	0	0.00
	15	0	0.00
	16	0	0.00
	21 years	1	2.50
Don't know	3	7.50	
Life	4	10.00	
	Total	40	100.00

Findings

Results and insights obtained from the non-formal interviews, participant observation and the review of teaching materials were collated. The next two sections sum up some of the salient points which emerged in terms of *systems* (the formal and informal procedures, processes and routines on which the institution operates) and *style* (unwritten norms of behaviour and thought and common traits of the institution as a whole).

On systems

Reflecting their aim to support inmate rehabilitation, responding administrators stated that they had developed systems with an emphasis on the *values* of prison education which are incorporated in both academic instruction and non-academic activities. We found that when explicitly taught, said values were not just recognised but accepted by the inmates. These values included, among others, inmates' relationship with their God, discipline within their ranks, respect for persons in authority, camaraderie and sportsmanship, good study habits, a positive outlook in life and a better perception of themselves. There was evidence that all these values helped to reduce their aggression level. Realisation that they can be better versions of themselves is greatly facilitated when these values are integrated into activities initiated by the school.

Established guidelines were also evident in NBP's Education Section. The *quality of education* provided to inmate learners was guided and monitored by the concerned government institutions, more particularly the Department of Education. The areas of subject delivery and programme implementation were given special emphasis to ensure that the learning process would be on a par with that of civilian learners. Since the guidelines stipulate standards to be followed, a sense of accountability to persons in authority becomes a given.

We also identified *planning* and *resource allocation* systems. Planning with the Officer-in-Charge revolved around day-to-day activities and programmes both for the inmate learners and the teachers themselves for the school year. These activities and programmes were, however, limited by the budget allocation from the Bureau of Corrections, hopefully supplemented by donations (in terms of money or time) from the external sector like volunteer groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious associations and other schools, mostly private ones. NBP school officials, however, found themselves unable to definitely state that they had already come up (in cooperation with the Bureau of Corrections) with a comprehensive planning system featuring details as to how they envisioned at least the next three years of the programme for Level 1.

The school's operational system is designed to ensure equitable and fair distribution of *work assignments* among inmate learners and that other tasks are fairly allocated. Depending on inmates' intelligence quotient (IQ), which is determined at the Reception and Diagnostic Center (RDC) upon their arrival, activities can be varied. We found that those who learn fast were given additional work to accomplish, while slow learners were given more and closer supervision as well as more time to complete their assigned work. The intervention provided by the teachers was thus shown to be adjustable to match the learning style and pacing of the inmates. Assessment instruments were used to determine whether ALS Level 1 inmate learners could be promoted to the next level, and appropriate awards and certificates of recognition were given to those whose performance was commendable. Inmate learners were given the chance to harness and put to optimal use their individual talents and competencies, irrespective of whether these were academic, artistic or athletic pursuits, and demonstrate their skills when appropriate occasions arose.

Having a *funding* system in place that would cover all educational services extended to the prisoners has been a long-standing concern of NBP's Education Section. We found the inadequacy of the available funding in terms of supporting spending for prison service to be a major problem for the school's administrators and teachers. They were forced to seek substantial financial support outside of the prison fence from people or organisations who/which were fully aware of their plight. There should be no need to get NBP's Education Section involved in fundraising to solicit money from advocacy groups which are not profit-oriented, but are meant only as additional support to their activities or to a certain extent, their operations.

Facilitating *the dissemination of information* in ALS is led by the Chief of NBP's Education Section with the able assistance of the Officer-in-Charge. The inmate learners' Student Body Council¹¹ transmits the information to the inmate learners. Communication lines are always open in the Education Section, which makes the assignment of work and responsibilities easier and clearer to everyone, i.e., to teachers, staff or inmates. A potential hindrance to communication to and among the inmates themselves we discerned was the use of different regional or provincial dialects or languages, which on occasion results in ambiguity or indeed a different interpretation of what might have been said. Civilian volunteer teachers had expressed their belief that proficiency in the Filipino language as well as in English would work to the advantage of the inmates. There were inmates who could not speak Filipino and therefore used their own provincial dialect, potentially leading to problems in communication. In class, they had to rely on other inmates from the same province who could speak their dialect and translate lessons for them until such time that they learned to understand Filipino. In addition, being able to read, speak, write and comprehend the English language would also be a big help to the inmates. It would enable them to read simple signs and follow instructions. There were even a number of inmate learners who planned to work abroad upon their release to be able to support their families.

NBP's Education Section also tries to obtain relevant information about released inmates or ex-offenders from prisoners who are still incarcerated. By "relevant", I mean information about *long-term learning outcomes* (e.g. how they fared in putting to use the knowledge they acquired by participating in NBP's education programme). They may still be in touch with former fellow inmates who came from the same province or were previously affiliated with the same gang or religious community. Some ex-offenders keep in touch with their civilian NBP teachers, whom they still regard as their guardians or surrogate parents. The difficulty lies in communicating with those who have returned to their respective provinces, most especially if these are smaller islands, where signals for mobile phones are either weak or simply not available, and landline telephones are hard to come by. One advantage of being able to contact one another is that prisoners and ex-offenders may be able to assist each other in finding gainful employment, become entrepreneurs themselves or even

¹¹ The Student Body Council is the inmate learners' representative body. It is comprised of inmate learners' duly-elected batch mates, also referred to as "batch officers" (a batch, in this context, is a class).

business partners. If a database was to be made available as reference, this would enable them to seek each other out more easily.

Inmate teachers are able to give their *feedback* on programme changes and other areas in the prison service which could affect them. The Chief of NBP's Education Section relies on them and the inmate learners' Student Body Council representatives to voice their opinions or suggestions. However, inmates are more careful when they speak because there is still that fear that whatever they say may be held against them, potentially landing them in solitary confinement or what is termed the "*bartolina*",¹² especially if their comments are unfavourable or "unpalatable" to the officials.

On style

To be effectively implemented, *inmates' education* must be prioritised by prison management, i.e. at the top of the institution. We found that while both NBP teachers and inmate learners believe that education is at the top of corrections officers' agenda, NSTP administrators feel that this is not in fact the case. As an important rehabilitation tool, the NSTP-LTS programme should be fully supported, and if one day the Bureau of Corrections should have sufficient resources, education should be made a requirement for all inmates. In the present circumstances, limited resources do not in fact allow the acceptance of as many students as the administration would like to enrol. Evidence shows that prisoners who have experienced even small successes in prison education see some flicker of hope, and since ALS is module-based, inmate learners are accepted year-round to the limit that resources allow. It has always been the dream of education officials to make all inmates literate and attain their highest possible level of education.

In terms of *cohesiveness* among the five education units (ALS Levels 1–3; elementary; secondary, vocational and college), we found they worked in coordination with one another as a team. The sixth unit, though not yet, as mentioned earlier, formally identified with any educational institution or art/artists association worked hand in hand with the other five. Delivered by a cohesive group supporting one another and with proper guidance, both academic and co-curricular activities are thus carried out seamlessly. This observation was made by both the ALS Officer-In-Charge and the Chief of NBP's Education Section who comprise the administration group. Inmate learners' responses reflected the same perception.

There was also a consensus among respondent administrators and teachers that being the "least" educated, learners enrolled in ALS courses need *closer monitoring* to avoid setting their group too far apart from the other levels. Moreover, it was deemed very important to keep them interested in their studies since many of them have either been out of school for a number of years or indeed had never attended a school at all before being imprisoned.

¹² *Bartolina*, the Filipino word for dungeon, refers to isolation dormitories.

We found that administrators did take *insights and suggestions* proffered by other people on education-related prisoner welfare into consideration if they seemed reasonable. Such other people included NBP teachers and staff, the inmates themselves as beneficiaries of the programme, volunteers and benefactors. NBP teachers, irrespective of whether they were staff of the Bureau of Corrections, civilian volunteers or inmate teachers, contributed to the enrichment and fine-tuning of the educational programme.

In terms of optimising *mutual understanding*, the effective delivery of prison education depends on the one hand on administrators and NBP teachers understanding prison culture and inmate learners. Our respondent administrators expressed their belief that there were still some idiosyncrasies about prison culture, the school and offenders which needed to be explained to NBP teachers. On the other hand, they pointed out that familiarising inmate learners with the culture of their fellow classmates' regions or provinces of origin would slowly lead to acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, and foster mutual respect among inmates.

Life in prison is a totally different experience from life prior to imprisonment. This aspect leaves its mark on any offender, whom free citizens may not really be able to empathise with. Moreover, contact of administrators and civilian NBP teachers with inmates is limited to class hours and extracurricular activities. While administrators and teachers may reside near or around the prison compound, some live within the compound itself and co-exist with the inmates in the same environment, which does make a considerable difference.

The value system which supports the rehabilitation of the prisoners is incorporated in all the subjects taught in the education programme itself. Administrators and NBP teachers expressed their view that this system should be imbibed by the inmates on their part while administrators and NBP teachers worked from the other end towards understanding the prison culture.

Inmates participate to a limited extent in *decision-making* when it comes to matters concerning their education. We were told that their suggestions in relation to various activities were passed on to the administrators either through the batch officers or the Student Body Council. In this context, it is also important to take into account the existence of the prison school culture, both in terms of the restricted circumstances the school has to operate in and in terms of the chances that an inmate risks being placed in solitary confinement if he says something unacceptable (though maybe true) to the administrators. However, any complaints regarding NBP teachers are normally not disclosed, because of potential repercussions and chances of not being objectively listened to. The final decision on any education-related matter still lies with the administrators.

We heard that efforts of both administrators and NBP teachers to initiate *partnerships and liaisons with external agencies* were believed to enhance the personal and social development of inmates as well as providing other learning opportunities. Administrators explain to co-workers what the services of partner organisations are. However, we were also told that the bureaucracy involved in affiliating with partner organisations could be discouraging, thus nipping access to better opportunities for teaching and learning in the bud.

Personal and social development of inmate learners was strongly supported by the management of NBP's Education Section. There was a consensus that personality development is of utmost importance alongside the academic instruction which the school provides. The educational programme allows them to socialise or re-socialise towards public acceptance and adapt to social norms. Their self-confidence is strengthened by the ability to verbalise their thoughts and communicate with others.

Those who have already progressed to being an *inmate teacher* or *peer educator* get involved in the literacy programme, enabling them to give something back to the institution by helping fellow inmates who lack the education. At the same time, ALS Level 1 inmate learners are more comfortable – an important aspect feeding into the effectiveness of the scheme – when they are taught by teachers or teacher aides who are inmates like themselves. These findings match observations made by Claire Seppings, who studied the rehabilitative role of ex-offenders in reintegration models in the UK, Ireland, Sweden and the United States (Seppings 2015). She found that giving inmates the chance to lead and support other prisoners as mentors can help them to stimulate their good attributes and serve a useful purpose. Peer mentors can identify better with the mentee than outsiders in terms of dealing with discrimination and the challenges they face as they return to the outside community.

In terms of *cooperation with extramural schools*, NBP's Education Section is already affiliated to one local school, Itaas Elementary School, which was established by the then Director of New Bilibid Prison in 1943 for NBP employees' children. Today it also accepts pupils whose parents are not NBP employees. But we were told that NBP's Education Section was also open to assistance from other schools and universities visiting to assist in the delivery of ALS. The idea is that accommodating student teachers from outside the prison walls would enable inmate learners to update themselves with what is happening beyond the restricted compound. In their responses, inmate learners said they welcomed interaction with other learners who sometimes bring them updated reading materials or references, which are hard to come by since internet access is strictly prohibited.

The *people-centred style* practised by NBP's Education Section supports its strategy of providing education to inmates in line with the rehabilitation process. Inmate learners comprise the clientele of administrators and teachers, and how they perform in the ALS programme reflects on both the administrators' and the teachers' own job performance. Their professional efforts centre not only on fostering intellectual growth, but are also concerned with the prisoners' overall well-being as persons. This includes their emotional, moral, physical, social and spiritual well-being.

Effective and results-oriented *partnerships with volunteer groups* support NBP's administrators and teachers in their aim to hone the skills of inmate learners when it comes to working cooperatively and interacting with civilians or organisations from the outside. The Chief of NBP's Education Section and the Officer-in-Charge of ALS both see to it that NBP's teachers are likewise equipped with the skills necessary to work effectively with volunteers or outsiders who may or may not be familiar with the specific features of working in a prison environment. In cases where these

groups are not well-versed in prison work,¹³ they are given an orientation on the prison environment, subject content and delivery and what to expect.

Areas of concern

From these findings, we extracted the following problems and weaknesses that need to be addressed in NBP's implementation of ALS.

- (1) On the part of inmate learners, it is vital that their *interest in schooling* is awakened or restored and sustained, since they may have not ever have attended a school at all or if they did, this might have been a long time ago. Motivation by NBP's teachers will be necessary.
- (2) Second, the students are heterogeneous in terms of age brackets, cultural and regional backgrounds, dialects and intelligence quotients. Thus, to facilitate the learning process, there needs to be a strategic move towards *designing the curriculum for adult learners* and not using books or materials suited to children.
- (3) Inmates could be introduced to the *culture* of other provinces or regions and learn the *Filipino language* aside from using their own dialects.
- (4) Depending on their completion rate, *fast and slow learners* may be tasked with varied activities suited to them and at their own pace.
- (5) Also, *counselling* in relation to behaviour modification needs to be kept up continuously.
- (6) In terms of *teacher training*, NBP's teachers and administrators expressed the need for seminars and training programmes, especially since not all teachers are education graduates.
- (7) There is a need for more *teaching materials* like books, reference materials and even sporting equipment, which are not readily available in required amounts.
- (8) There is also the lack of *support* for NBP's educational efforts, be it moral, emotional or financial, from the top administration of the Bureau of Corrections. Regular dialogue sessions may be the venue to express the problems and needs of NBP's Education Section. These may also be an opportune time to exchange views, opinions and ideas on various issues relating to correctional education.

Insights of university students who participated in the programme

Apart from being members of the research team, the 24 UPD students from various colleges of the university who joined the NSTP-LTS scheme to teach inmate learners were immersed in an environment entirely unknown to them and performed roles from which they obtained a different perspective and understanding of society. In

¹³ This also applied to the NSTP-LTS students involved in this study. Their experiences of their first encounter with the prison environment are reflected in their statements presented in a separate section of this article.

other words, they underwent two months of experiential learning themselves. Here are some of their common observations (quoted verbatim), grouped by keywords:

On basic skills

“To be honest, I did not really have enough sympathy to those who were convicted on different crimes before my visit to the NBP. I have met a few prisoners but I did not think much of the difficult lives they have inside the prison. However, stepping my feet on one of the biggest camps, if not the largest, in the Philippines awakened my mind about the community that was denied access to the world outside their fences. The basic skills that each one of us knew, and even sometimes neglected, are things that they were longing to have. For example, I have learned that there are prisoners who just wanted to learn how to read and write just so they could send letters to their loved ones. This touched my heart in a way that there are institutions inside the prison willing to help them like the Alternative Learning System. Aside from this, they were also given the privilege to learn about other things on livelihood, entrepreneurship, and more – things that can help them earn money when they get out of Bilibid” (male student of engineering).

“It will be helpful if we give them handouts/pointers which they can review later on (or modules that they can work on)” (female student of philosophy)

“The day that we finally got to teach is one that I found personally refreshing. Though I probably could have done better in regards to public speaking, the students [inmate learners] there were genuinely happy to learn new things, listening attentively and asking questions if they don’t understand. Something I noticed in my own classes is that the responses the teachers tend to get are lacking – the class doesn’t speak or doesn’t want to speak, and so on and so forth” (female student of social work).

On positive psychology¹⁴

“Introduce the inmate students [learners] to positive psychology. I personally think this type of psychology will help them see the world and themselves in a more positive light, banish their notions that they are ‘*basura ng lipunan*’ [in English, garbage of society]” (female student of psychology).

“I feel sad that the inmates call themselves ‘*basura-ng-lipunan*’. I think this mindset of theirs should be changed” (male student of architecture).

¹⁴ Positive psychology refers to “the scientific study of what makes life most worth living” (Peterson 2008).

On games

“Other than just creating and presenting learning materials, I suggest that future CWTS [Civic Welfare Training Service]¹⁵ students also prepare various activities (such as games) for the students [inmate learners]. Not only does this help gaining the attention of the students [inmate learners]; but it also helps them see the value of cooperation and unity (male student of human kinetics).

“As observed, the students [inmates learners] were receptive and participative to and in the class games, so it may be a good idea to conduct more games during class” (male student of anthropology).

“Lessons combined with games seem to be an effective approach. The inmate [learners]s seem to like the challenge and competition brought about by games and they seem to enjoy the games” (male student of geology).

“Maybe the students and the prisoners could engage in a sports fest together” (male student of physics).

On surprises

“A few of the shocking things I learned: After an entire school year, some students [inmate learners] still don’t know how to write their own names. It’s difficult to concentrate because of constant hunger. These inmates worry more about their families than education. It’s normal to sign-up for classes at the beginning of the school year with the benefit of jail time being reduced a certain amount of time, based on how long you’re enrolled. It’s also normal for the total number of students [inmate learners] to be reduced to less than half by the end of the school year. Inmate teachers are constantly hungry, too, and so when their students [inmate learners] complain about it and ask for classes to end, it’s difficult to say no” (female student of mathematics).

Another student thought otherwise and said

“The ALS programme of the New Bilibid Prison was something I really appreciated since I did not know anything about having a school inside inmate camps. The efforts of the people behind this programme are really reflected in every aspect of the system from the classrooms to the teaching materials to the students [inmate learners] themselves. Having experienced reaching out to the Level 1 students [inmate learners] from the previous school year made me have more respect to the ALS team. During our meetings with the inmate teachers, our group was informed that incoming Level 1 students[inmate learners] are yet to be taught on the alphabet. They say that teaching these students [inmate learners] who have their own lives inside the cells is never going to be

¹⁵ The CWTS [Civic Welfare Training Service] is one of the other two NSTP modules university students can opt for.

easy, but we were really surprised when we faced the Level 1 students [inmate learners]. They learned how to write words both in Filipino and English, meeting the expectations of the teachers on what they should have already known by the end of the year” (female student of engineering).

The next lines from a male student struck me most. He stated:

“Is Bilibid just a prison? Is Bilibid the place where dreams die? Bilibid isn’t a prison. It may have been a very scary place to be in and actually it may still be now, but a lot has already changed. It has now become a place of correction rather than just a prison – actually maybe even a second home for most of its ‘residents’, especially those who’re sentenced to longer periods. Is it where dreams die? It is actually where dreams start anew. For, in a couple of years’ time, if Bilibid actually worked on them, it will be as if they’ve pressed life’s reset button – and I do believe Bilibid did” (male student of political science).

Conclusion and recommendations

NBP’s inmate learners admitted that being incarcerated had done them a lot of good. Being unschooled prior to imprisonment, their reading and writing skills were either non-existent or very limited, and numbers gave them phobia. They considered it an accomplishment to have learned how to spell and write their names as well as those of the members of their respective families. Counting money and realising its worth was similarly deemed a feat to be proud of. It may sound ironic, but these inmate learners acknowledged the fact that if they had not been convicted and put in prison, they might have remained unable to read and write up to the time of our study.

Filipino inmate learners are extended the biggest opportunity when it comes to correctional education. It is a sad fact that there are even some prisoners who admit that they had to be criminals in order to take advantage of education up to the tertiary level. Being in a correctional institution provides more time to study. It was a new learning experience that enabled them to enhance their intellectual skills and form values in life that will help them reintegrate into society upon their release.

As change agents, inmate learners educated through ALS will develop themselves and are equipped with lifelong learning as their coping mechanism. Understandably, this will not be solely in academic subjects but also in areas that will enable them to survive once they are granted their freedom and re-join the mainstream of society. The implementation of the programme should also provide avenues by which to connect both civilian and inmate learners, drawing in the community and other independent sector organisations, both public and private, getting all of them involved in adult learning so that in the end, the lives of inmates may be transformed for the better. It is worth noting here that even NBP prison guards are trained to become teachers. In the end, participation in ALS moulds new identities wherein both inmate learners and facilitators become not just learners but achievers as well in their own right.

Looking at *style*, one insight all of our respondents brought up was that cooperation is a vital ingredient in order to attain the objectives of the school which include personal and social development. It is, however, important that the Bureau

of Corrections gives its full support and prioritises education as the cornerstone of the rehabilitation programme.

Outside help, especially when it comes to funding, cannot be always relied upon one hundred per cent of the time. However, suggestions from external parties with regard to prisoner welfare may be looked into. Thus, partnerships with selected agencies may be initiated, for example for the purpose of conducting trainings and seminars, not just for inmates but also for NBP's teachers and administrators.

Prison culture is something that needs deeper understanding on the part of both administrators and civilian teachers. Accepting the diversity of inmates' cultures, regional idiosyncrasies and even differences in dialects bodes well for their peaceful coexistence. Effective interventions could include a multicultural teaching strategy that could be tested and later applied to prisoners with varied backgrounds.

With regard to the school's *systems*, values are given topmost consideration; followed by established guidelines on curriculum, co-curricular activities and programme implementation. The latter is always considered with the kind of culture in mind within which it functions.

The findings of this applied research study may help introduce innovative approaches that could be implemented as learning opportunities for the economically disadvantaged and the socially ostracised. Five learning strands or categories, couched according to their functionality and not according to their disciplinary base, seem conducive to enabling the inmates to earn a living:

- (1) *communication skills*, which include listening, speaking, reading and writing both in English and Filipino;
- (2) *problem-solving and critical thinking* in the areas of science and mathematics;
- (3) *productivity and sustainable use of resources* for technical and livelihood education to be able to earn a living through self-employment, outside employment or entrepreneurship;
- (4) *development of self and a sense of community*, personal identity, cultural pride and recognition and understanding of both civil and political rights; and
- (5) *expanding one's own world vision* to develop respect and appreciation for diversity while at the same time promoting peace and non-violent conflict resolution alongside global solidarity.

The implementation of NSTP-LTS in the Alternative Learning System was a first for both institutions, i.e., the University of the Philippines in Diliman and the Education Section in New Bilibid Prison. The endeavour marks the beginning of what could be a long-standing and fruitful relationship between the two.

All penal institutions in the country have their respective Alternative Learning Systems. Thus, similar studies might be undertaken there, taking into consideration the geographical location of the respective provinces and their predominant means of living, e.g., farming, fishing etc. Tourism is also gaining attention in Iwahig, Palawan and even in Davao in Mindanao.

On the part of the government, it is hoped that initiatives will be taken towards an employment programme designed for ex-offenders. To date, the country has one for

rebel returnees and another one for displaced or returning overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), but none for released prisoners.

Moreover, tracer studies might be done on ex-offenders who availed of the educational programmes they were offered during their imprisonment. Finding out if they have succeeded in finding gainful employment, have become entrepreneurs or are still experiencing the difficult process of finding means to be productive as they mainstream with their respective communities will help to fine-tune prison education. Released prisoners can also seek assistance from the Alumni Association of the extension school operated by UPHSD whose members have completed the tertiary education programme and may have outside linkages.

Dedicated budgetary allocation is extremely necessary to effectively administer the educational programme, especially for the improvement of infrastructure and facilities, the acquisition of equipment, and the training of manpower in new trends in correctional education. Currently, a portion of real estate taxes goes to the Special Education Fund (SEF) intended for the operation and maintenance of public schools. It would be a big help for schools inside prison compounds if they were given specific allotments from SEF. Running prison schools relying solely on hand-outs from philanthropists or civic organisations is by definition unsustainable and, ultimately, not in the public interest.

The belief that the surest method of preventing crime is to perfect the educational system is not new; it was already promoted by Italian criminologist Cesare Bonesana-Beccaria, Marquis of Gualdrasco and Villareggio more than 250 years ago: “Do you want to prevent crimes? See to it that enlightenment accompanies liberty” (Beccaria 1986 [1764], p. 76, at the beginning of a chapter headed “Knowledge”). Indeed, there is evidence that education does lead to better outcomes.

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