RESEARCH PAPER

What is the Role of the Prison Library? The Development of a Theoretical Foundation

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Abstract: *There has been little examination of how criminological theory may help to inform library practice in correctional settings. This article takes steps to address this deficit by presenting a new and timely approach to prison library research. It suggests that situating prison library research within the disciplines of librarianship, education and criminology can lead to a deeper understanding of the contribution made by libraries to the lives of those in prison. The authors propose a theoretical model which draws on theories of desistance, informal learning theories and critical librarianship. This model can be used by both library and education researchers and practitioners to build a body of evidence on the value of the prison library and may act as a roadmap to good practice. It is an initial framework, intended to be adapted and refined as more empirical evidence is collected in this area.*

Keywords: *Prison libraries, desistance, informal learning, critical librarianship, prison education*

> Much recreational reading is indirectly educational, but the library has possibilities for direct education that have not yet been realised in any penal institution in the country. If one could choose only one of the agencies necessary for a well-rounded program of education in a penal institution, he could do well to choose an adequate library. (MacCormick, 1931, p. 150)

Writing in the United States in 1931, MacCormick's seminal work on prison education recognised the integral role that libraries could play in the education of prisoners. Positive developments have been made in the global provision of prison library services since then, but the standard of this provision remains inconsistent across countries and across individual institutions. While much has been written in this field – both by practitioners and library researchers – there remains a paucity of empirical evidence of prisoners' experiences of using library services. There also remains a lack of cohesion between prison library research, prison education research and broader criminological studies. Without a strong evidence base of prisoners' experiences of the library, and a deeper consideration of relevant theoretical constructs across these disciplines, the full possibilities of the prison library has yet to be uncovered. This article goes some way in addressing this gap in prison library research. It draws together theories of desistance, informal learning and critical librarianship to build a theoretical lens and framework through which the role and outcomes of the library can be better understood (see Figure 1).

Early prison education literature and prison education policies acknowledge the centrality of the library in the educational experiences of prisoners (MacCormick, 1931; Forster, 1981; Council of Europe, 1990). Existing empirical research of prisoners' actual experiences of library services remain, however, within the niche field of prison librarianship. We argue for wider inclusion of the library in contemporary research on prisoners' experiences of learning. The current climate of prison education research – which is strongly influenced by desistance narratives and emphasises the importance of informal learning opportunities – offers a window of opportunity for the fuller realisation of the possibilities of the prison library. Drawing on existing prison library and education literature and insights from ongoing doctoral work being carried out by Finlay, this article presents a new and timely approach to framing prison library research. The framework presented in this article may serve as a foundation for future prison library research and will ideally encourage both li-

brary and education practitioners and researchers to build a much-needed body of evidence in this area. The authors recognise that the framework presented in this article may be challenging to realise in practice, particularly where libraries are not presently equipped to provide the range of services outlined in the framework. Nonetheless, it has the potential to inform praxis and may be useful in helping to persuade stakeholders of the benefits of investing in a well-resourced library service.
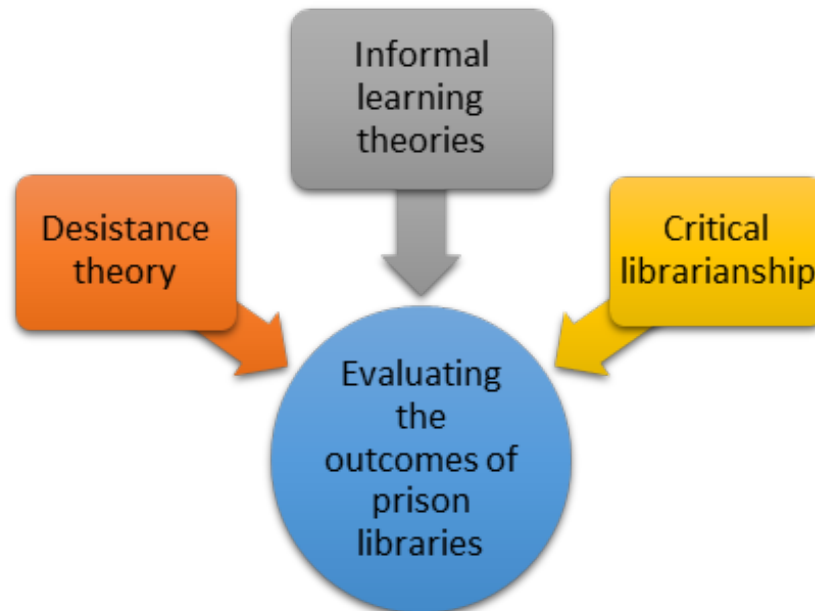

Figure 1. Theoretical contexts for evaluating prison library outcomes

Literature Review

Current knowledge of prison library services exists mostly in the form of policy documents and international guidelines (see, for example, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) *Guidelines for library services to prisoners*, 2005), or publications written by those with experience of working in the profession (Vogel, 1995, 2009; Lehmann, 2003, 2011; Clark & MacCreaigh, 2006). These publications explore the purpose of correctional libraries and provide practical advice on how best to manage and deliver library services. A 2011 issue of the *Library Trends* journal put a spotlight on prison libraries, outlining developments in services across Europe, North America and Japan. These articles provide helpful insights into policies and practices across the world but are mostly descriptive in nature and offer little in the way of theory development or empirical evidence of how individuals in prison benefit from these services. Through an exploration of the history of prison libraries, Rubin's work (1973, 1974; Rubin & Souza, 1989) contends more seriously with the theoretical grounding of prison library services. Her research offers a strong contribution to prison library literature, particularly in unpacking its role and purpose within the prison. It is again lacking in empirical evidence to show prisoners' actual experience of engaging with library services and the impact of these services. Stearns (2004, p. 62) is critical of prison library literature for describing only "how a library functions rather than provide measurable evidence of how well it serves its mission." He called for more comprehensive research with "a coherent philosophical foundation" that would offer more compelling evidence of the value of library services (p. 62).

Evaluations of specific literacy and reader development programmes, along with empirical studies of reading practices in prison (Trounstine & Waxler, 2006; Sweeney, 2010, 2012) arguably offer the most convincing evidence of the positive outcomes of using library services. They look beyond staff expertise and give a voice to library patrons, something which is largely absent from prison library research. Garner's recent study of prison library users in Australia takes important steps in addressing this void. Recognising the necessity of learning from prisoners, her research adopts a phenomenological approach to uncovering the

experiences of those who engage with the library (Garner, 2017). Doctoral research is currently being carried out by the author (Finlay) which seeks to build upon these findings by exploring prisoners' engagement with library services across the UK and Ireland. It situates this empirical evidence within the theoretical framework outlined in this article, in order to better understand the meaning behind these experiences and resulting implications for policy and practice. The findings from this work will be reported in a separate article.

As with many prison-based programmes and services, the provision of library services has changed over time in line with the shifting goals of the criminal justice system. Throughout the 19th century, reading was considered to be part of the cure for a prisoner's sinful nature, and literature was provided to encourage moral reform (Sullivan, 2000). As the penal climate became less punitive, the library was given more of a central role in supporting the rehabilitation of prisoners. Vogel (2009, p. 10) identifies the 1970s in particular as being the "golden years" of prison librarianship in the United States, when an increasingly positive attitude toward prisoners' human rights enabled librarians to separate their goals from those of the prison. European literature also reflects this shift, with prison libraries in Spain, France and Italy all proposing reform to library services in line with a new political direction in the late 1970s and 80s (Costanzo, Montecchi & Derhemi, 2011; Cramard & McLoughlin, 2011; Perez Pulido & DeAngelo, 2011). New prison policy was also developed in the United Kingdom at this time which aligned prison libraries with the public library model (Home Office, 1978). These changes were welcomed by library staff, most of whom favoured Rubin's view that library services should be seen as a "library project and not an arm of corrections" (1974, p. 442). It is now widely accepted that prison libraries should be based on a public library model, and as much as possible should adhere to the professional standards and ethics of the wider library profession. This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing prison librarians, who strive to provide services in an institution whose agenda is almost antithetical to that of a library. Incarceration inherently limits the freedom, privacy and autonomy of individuals – three ingredients that are key to the provision of effective library services. This article considers the possibility that the recent influence of desistance research on criminal justice strategies in the United Kingdom has the potential to help mitigate this conflict between the library and the prison.

Accepting that prison libraries should be based on a public library model, what then is their role within the prison? The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) asserts that all libraries should provide "free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information" (para.1) to all members of society, regardless of "age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status" (para. 6). These services must extend to those cut off from society, for whom access to information and knowledge may be even more crucial. As noted in IFLA's Prison Library Guidelines (Lehmann & Locke, 2005, p. 4), "An incarcerated person has not relinquished the right to learn and access information." Access to the library and library resources is a statutory requirement in all prisons in the United Kingdom, underlining the fact that freedom to access information is a universal human right which should not be left behind at the prison door. The information resources available in the library should meet the legal, recreational and educational needs of prisoners (Wilhelmus, 1999).

Freedom to access information may be considered the ultimate aim of a library, but it is not its only purpose. The prison library should also provide individuals with "the opportunity to develop literacy skills, pursue personal and cultural interests, as well as life-long learning" (Lehmann & Locke, 2005, p. 4). These opportunities are facilitated through a range of literacy and reader development programmes, as well as peer-learning and family literacy schemes. Further to the resources and programmes on offer, the very space of the library is deemed important within the prison. The words "normalcy" and "normalisation" appear repeatedly throughout prison library literature (Vogel, 2009; Lehmann, 2011; Dilek-Kayaoglu & Demir, 2014), as the library is often the only place within the prison that offers a public service and resembles the outside world. Vogel (2009, p. 20) describes the library as an "oasis of equality and respect" in an otherwise hostile environment which often demeans and dehumanises individuals. A participant in Finlay's earlier study on prison-based family literacy programmes noted the contrast between the two environments: "It's peaceful in here. We need that. It's peaceful compared to the craziness of the wings" (Finlay, 2014, p. 38).

This brief overview of literature and policy has outlined the history and purpose of prison library services, and the range of services it offers to incarcerated individuals. At the same time, it has revealed what Stearns (2004, p. 62) calls a "lacuna" of evidence showing the actual benefits of these services. Garner's re-

cent research into prisoner experiences makes positive steps in this direction, but it is clear that a larger body of empirical evidence, grounded in relevant theoretical constructs, is needed to truly understand the role of the library in the lives of prisoners. This article goes some way in addressing this need, by linking central themes found in desistance literature, informal learning theories and critical librarianship to the potential benefits of using library services. The following paragraphs provide an overview of desistance research and how it has already been used by those working in prison education and prison-based arts programmes to better understand the value of their services. This sets the context for how the findings of desistance research may likewise contribute to a deeper understanding of the value of the prison library.

Desistance Research and the Desistance Paradigm

Criminological research has traditionally been concerned with understanding the onset of offending behaviour, rather than how and why individuals turn away from a life of crime. Desistance research focuses instead on the cessation of criminal behaviour, and in particular the cognitive changes that takes place in the lives of individuals in reaching that point. Although there is no one clear theory of desistance, Maruna (2016, p. 289) states that all desistance research involves "the study of how and why individuals we label as 'offenders' break free from this lifestyle." What sets this field of research apart from traditional discussions of reform and rehabilitation is that it turns away from the "what works?" mentality and considers instead *how* change works. In doing so, it shifts the focus from programmes or interventions to individual lives, and to understanding the processes which take place during the journey of desistance. This has significant implications for the criminal justice system and how it might effectively support the natural processes of change taking place in the lives of people in prison.

Most desistance research focuses on the lives of individuals before and after incarceration. Prisons are considered to be detrimental to the desistance process as they are likely to "derail" rather than facilitate "the normative processes of maturation associated with desistance from crime" (Maruna & LeBel, 2010, p. 69). Incarceration removes positive social ties and often generates new negative associations; it removes an individual's autonomy, and can cement criminal identities (McNeill & Weaver, 2010; Liebling, 2012). These are all consequences which directly oppose factors thought to support desistance. For this reason, McNeill (2011) considered the concept of a "desistance-supporting prison" to be a possible oxymoron. He still, however, stresses the necessity of working toward this challenging goal, and there has been a resulting strand of research which seeks to apply the findings of desistance theory to practice, both within prisons and during post-release support. Farrall (2002, 2004), Maruna and LeBel (2010) and McNeill (2006, 2016) have led the way in theorising about what desistance-focused criminal justice practice look like. This turn in desistance research, coined the "desistance paradigm" (Maruna & LeBel, 2010), has influenced recent policy changes and helped to re-imagine the purpose and potential of prison-based programmes and services. This is perhaps seen most poignantly in its influence on strategic planning documents in both the Northern Ireland Prison Service and Scottish Prison Service (Prison Review Team, 2011; Department of Justice, 2015; Scottish Prison Service, 2017).

Maruna (2015) uses the questions below (Figure 2) as a checklist with which to challenge the modern prison, and in doing so paints a picture of what a desistance-supporting prison might look like. These questions are helpful in considering how library services can (and in many cases already do) support the desistance process of those in prison.

Do our prisons:	Provide opportunities for prisoners to find meaning and purpose in their punishment?
	Take fundamental self-transformation seriously?
	Facilate and celebrate such change?
	Allow room for hope?
	Provide opportunities for prisoners to 'give back' and make a contribution, not as unpaid punishment but as good citizenship?
	Allow individuals to be leaders, to take initiative and assist in the overall mission of the prison/programme?

Figure 2. Elements of a desistance-supporting prison (Adapted from a lecture given by Maruna at Cambridge University, 2015)

These questions reflect the "strengths-based approach" to the desistance paradigm proposed by Burnett and Maruna (2006). They suggest that interventions in prisons should not be based on risk assessments, since these can reinforce negative criminal identities. They should instead be based around supporting an individual's potential for positive change and the ability to take control of their lives. This has significant implications for the provision of both prison education and library services, requiring that services be developed from an understanding of an individual's strengths, and that they provide resources and design programmes which cultivate and develop these strengths.

This focus on processes of change and individual transformation is not a new concept to the world of correctional education. Many of the findings of desistance research are in line with existing pedagogical principles, and this strand of criminological research has been readily welcomed by those working in correctional education. Education has historically played a fundamental, if somewhat overlooked, role in prison reform – what Gehring (2017, p. 1) refers to as the "hidden heritage" of prison reform. Duguid's work in particular shows how participation in education programmes enables a natural process of self-transformation. Education offers learners the opportunity to exercise choice and views the prisoner as an individual "subject" rather than an "object" of a treatment or rehabilitation programme (Duguid, 2000). Desistance research and its resulting impact on prison policy is making visible to policymakers what has already been identified in much prison education research and practice.

Informal Learning Theories

The framework proposed in this article has also been informed by informal learning theories, and the move toward providing increased informal, non-compulsory learning opportunities in prisons. The importance of informal learning has long been recognised in pedagogical practice. Researchers and practitioners acknowledge that the goal of education extends beyond simply gaining academic qualifications that enhance future employment prospects. Education facilitates the "development of competent and humane citizens who are proactive participants in social life" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 18). Many of the skills and characteristics needed to be social agents, such as "critical reasoning skills, self-confidence, self-esteem, empowerment, changed perspectives" (Warr, 2016, p. 18) can often be developed through more informal, self-directed learning opportunities. While there are a range of definitions of informal learning, in this context we draw on influential studies by both Livingstone (1999) and McGivney (1999). Their work considers informal learning to be something "which we undertake individually or collectively on our own without externally im-

posed criteria or the presence of an institutionally organised instructor" (Livingstone, 1999, p. 493) and stems from "expressed interest and needs" of individuals (McGivney, 1999, p. v). McGivney (ibid.) adds that it may also include structured short courses, but ones which are delivered in "flexible and informal ways."

What is clear is that informal learning stems from the learning needs and desires of the individual, rather than something which fulfils the purpose of the government or education system. Viewed in this way, it becomes clear why opportunities for informal learning may be so important in a prison. The criminal justice system has long viewed education as merely a rehabilitative tool, or as a "mechanism to reduce reoffending" (McNeill, 2014, para. 4). The thought of education as yet another method of reform imposed upon them can add to the already negative perception of education held by many of those in prison. Literature shows that prisoners are often reluctant to take part in formal education programmes, as they may have had difficult schooling experiences prior to incarceration (Irwin, 2003, 2008; Farley & Pike, 2016; Warr, 2016). Irwin (2008, p. 23) criticises the often "inflexible learning modes" offered in prison as they replicate "the negative learning episodes so deeply embedded in the prisoner's identity." Opportunities for more informal, flexible learning have the potential to mitigate these prior negative experiences. In his research on prisoners' motivations to take part in education courses, Behan (2014, p. 20) concludes that the prison must offer spaces which allow individuals "to voluntarily engage in different types of learning, at their own pace, at a time of their choosing." It is this observation which leads us to draw significant links between the benefits of informal learning and engagement with prison library services.

The prison library offers a space where visitors can pursue their own recreational or educational reading interests. Prisoners are not obligated to visit the library, and so it is unlikely to be viewed as yet another method of government-imposed reform. Informal learning programmes such as book-discussion groups, creative writing classes or family literacy schemes are often offered but rarely compulsory. An evaluation of Turning Pages (a peer literacy programme based in the United Kingdom) revealed the value that participants place on the "informal, non-institutional nature" of the programme (Hopkins & Kendall, 2017, p. 4). A deeper consideration of informal learning activities and engagement with an informal learning environment such as the prison library should help contribute to our understanding of the potential impact of library services. Woven together with recent theories of desistance and critical librarianship, it can help to construct a foundation from which to examine prison library experiences and outcomes.

Critical Librarianship

It is not only the field of prison librarianship which has failed to establish a strong theoretical body of work. The wider library profession is one which has historically valued practice over theory, and as a result has faced criticism for the lack of empirically grounded theories on which these services should be based (Connoway & Powell, 2010, p. 6). Stressing the need for a strong philosophical foundation, Litwin (2009, p. x) states, "Sound ideas about what librarianship is and what its goals are permit us to claim a degree of autonomy in institutions where we might otherwise serve as mere functionaries rather than as the professionals we are." This seems particularly poignant for the prison library, which is often viewed as subsidiary within the wider prison service. One important response to this critique has been the movement of critical librarianship, whose principles we draw upon in this article. Samek (2007, p. xxiii) describes critical librarianship as a movement where "considerations for the human condition and for human rights take precedence over other professional concerns." It is a practical movement which has been informed by critical theories and seeks to bring social justice principles into library practice. While many of its principles have always been present in library work, it is really only in the past decade that researchers and practitioners have grappled theoretically with its concepts and what they mean for "LIS curricula, research and practice" (Schroeder & Hollister, 2014, p. 3). Prison librarianship is arguably the most challenging sector in the profession for librarians to put their patrons' rights above professional concerns. The context in which these services are provided results in restricted access to information, high levels of censorship and little to no access to information technology and online resources. It is surprising then that there has been little discussion about what critical librarianship may mean for providers of prison library services. Taking a critical approach to evaluating prison library services should help to draw the often-neglected field of prison librarianship into modern theoretical advances of the wider profession.

Critical theories tend to focus on marginalised sections of society, with the aim of empowering disenfranchised or oppressed communities. Critical librarianship therefore challenges the library worker to recognise existing structures of power in their place of work or surrounding community, to question who is being excluded or silenced, and to consider the ways in which they might act to redress structural inequalities. Critical theories, when applied to education and librarianship alike, acknowledge and validate the existing knowledge and experiences of the learner and encourages them to pursue knowledge which stems from their own needs and interests. In the prison context, this in line with what has already been noted in relation to desistance and informal learning theories. The prison library offers a rare space for individuals to take part in self-directed learning and can help to mitigate the idea that only those in power know what is best for them. Reflecting on their critical approach to library services in a Canadian prison, Lang and Sacuta (2014, p. 99) note that the best part of their service is that library initiatives "are no longer just presented to the women; they are created by the women." This shows how the library and library staff are in a unique position to disrupt, even on a small scale, the structural inequalities present in the prison service.

Evaluating Prison Library Services

Caution must be taken when thinking about the impact of any service which concerns human experience and development. This is especially true in prison, where complex backgrounds and widely varied demographics make it difficult to find "an appropriate means of measuring outcomes and evaluating change" (Behan, 2014, p. 26). The government has repeatedly sought concrete quantitative evidence of how prison-based programmes work in terms of rehabilitating prisoners and, ultimately, reducing re-offending rates. This is difficult for providers of art-based activities, who are essentially being asked for "objective evidence to demonstrate subjective changes" (Albertson, 2015, p. 280). Albertson raises a further flaw in this method, suggesting that "such interventions will be less effective if their purpose is primarily to gather questionable evidence, rather than support the offender" (p.280). Prison researchers argue that it is more appropriate to conduct qualitative research in order to better understand the prisoner experience and process of change which is taking place during that experience (Digard & Liebling, 2012). In an evaluation of their prison-based arts programme, Cox and Gelsthorpe (2012, p. 265) agree that there is a "fundamental risk of underestimating the importance of *experience*" in such evaluations.

The emphasis on individual narratives, identity development and change processes in desistance research make a strong case for the validity of qualitative prison research. In light of this, various prison-based programmes have begun to re-imagine their role in supporting prisoners and how their services can and should be evaluated. A growing number of creative-arts based activities in prison have begun to use desistance theories as a framework to better understand their value and contribution to prisoners' lives (McNeill, Anderson, Colvin, Overy, Sparks & Tett, 2011; Davey, Day & Balfour, 2015; Albertson, 2015). The impact of the desistance paradigm on prison research is perhaps seen most clearly in the growing number of studies on education in prison. Recognising that many of the concepts key to desistance, such as identity transformation, motivation and self-empowerment, have always been present in pedagogical philosophies, both academics and practitioners have sought to show how learning in prison can contribute to an individual's journey of desistance. A resulting *Theory of Change* was put forward by the Prisoner Learning Alliance (2016, p.1) to "stimulate conversation about the purpose and value of prison education" and to improve the academic rigour of studies which evaluate its outcomes. This theory was informed by key literature in both prison education and desistance research and has been instrumental in informing the direction of both education policy and practice within prisons, particularly within the United Kingdom.

Reconstructing Prison Library Research

This turn toward desistance-focused criminal justice practice has not yet reached the realm of prison library research. This article takes seriously the call of Stearns for the development of a "coherent philosophical foundation" (ibid.) in prison library research and attempts to show how embedding prison library literature within a criminological framework, and more specifically that of desistance theory, does not do a dis-service to the library profession, but instead offers a positive language and framework within which to discuss the existing benefits of library services. Like other arts-based activities, it is difficult and perhaps inappropriate to measure or evaluate the outcomes of a good library service. The framework outlined below is therefore not a list of pre-defined outcomes to measure, but instead offers a way of discussing the potential outcomes of

prisoner engagement with the library and the role of the library in a correctional setting.

This framework is underpinned by findings from existing prison library and education studies, and contemporary theories of desistance, informal learning and critical librarianship. Its layout and approach are largely informed by two already established frameworks in the fields of librarianship and prison education. The first is the Arts Council England's *Generic Learning Outcomes* model, which was developed in 2003 to demonstrate the impact and outcomes of cultural learning in museums, archives and libraries. This model was built on a "broad and inclusive definition of learning" (Arts Council England, 2003), which again draws on the importance of informal learning within a wide range of policy domains (Fodale & Bates, 2011). It acknowledges that the sole aim of learning is not simply to gain academic qualifications or ensure employability, but also to broaden one's knowledge and skills, deepen understanding of ourselves and others, and improve overall wellbeing. The latter framework is the aforementioned *Theory of Change* model posited by the Prisoner Learning Alliance (2016), which explores the value of learning in prison.

Each individual's experience of engaging with library services is unique, as is true of any learning experience. The framework outlined below is not intended to limit these experiences but is instead broad enough to incorporate distinct individual experiences and serves as a guide to examining and understanding the potential outcomes of library engagement. This is similar to the Prisoner Learning Alliance's *Theory of Change* which acknowledges the complexity of learning in prison, and argues that "the only way to summarise it faithfully is at a general level, in which the arguments are set out broadly and which gives scope for application in a range of different circumstances and services" (2016, p. 4). Not all libraries are equipped to offer every resource or programme mentioned, but the figure below reflects the range of services generally available in United Kingdom prison libraries. It is intended to aid qualitative research in this area, offering what we hope is a helpful and appropriate language by which to consider how libraries can facilitate change and contribute to personal development. It will ideally encourage practitioners and researchers to build a stronger body of evidence in this field and is therefore open to adaptation and development as empirical data continues to be collected. As noted by Harries, Hodgson and Noble (2014, p. 2), such models should not be static, "for they improve as our understanding and knowledge is advanced by evidence and observation." The framework is outlined briefly in Figure 3, then unpacked in more detail in Figure 4 and the paragraphs that follow. This discussion will hopefully show that a desistance-based outlook may provide a more appropriate platform for the "evaluation" of prison library services and help to provide a deeper understanding of the experience of those who engage with these services.
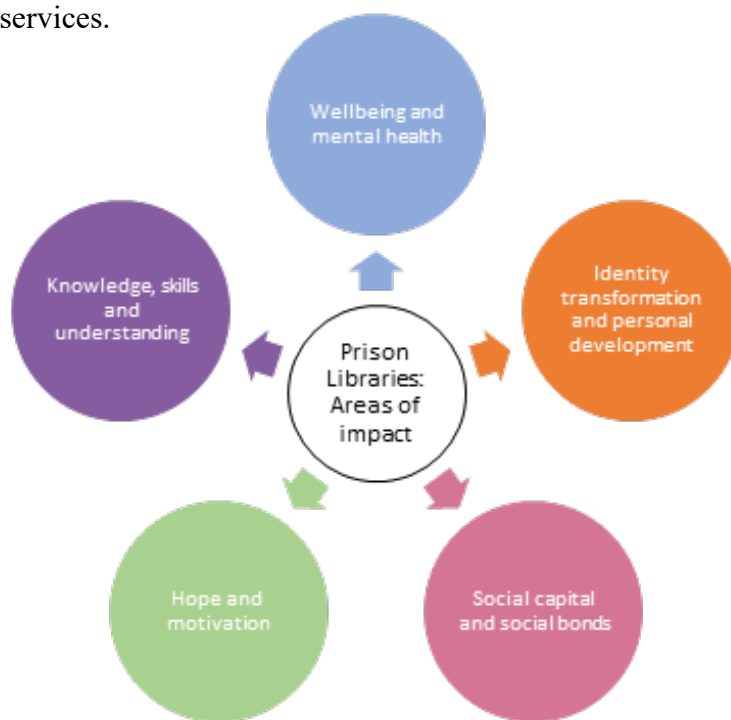

Figure 3. Areas of Impact of Prison Libraries (Prison Library Impact Framework, Finlay, 2018)

Wellbeing and mental health		
Context	**The library offers:**	**Possible outcomes:**
Incarceration can be an isolating experience, and many prisoners suffer from poor mental health, depression and substance abuse. Levels of self-harm and suicide are higher than the general population. Prison can be a volatile and stressful environment in which to live.	• A safe, neutral space in the midst of an unsettling prison environment. • A range of recreational and educational resources that encourage reading for pleasure and informal learning. • A positive means of both mental and physical escape. • Written resources about wellbeing and mental health. • Information about health-related programmes and activities in other prison departments.	• Reduced stress and improved wellbeing. • Better ability to cope with stressful situations. • A constructive use of time whilst incarcerated. • Creativity and enjoyment. • Increased understanding of individual health and mental health needs. • Increased engagement in other prison programmes or activities.

Identity transformation and personal development		
Context	**The library offers:**	**Possible outcomes:**
Prisoners may feel negatively about themselves, their achievements and their ability to change. They often associate with a negative, 'criminal' identity. Incarceration inherently limits an individual's control over their own life, leading to a loss of both agency and autonomy.	• A range of literature, which reflects the background and experiences of the prison population. • Freedom to choose how individuals spend their time, what information they access and what recreational or educational interests they pursue. • Intellectual freedom. • Informal, non-compulsory learning programmes and other recreational activities. • Family literacy programmes. • Peer-led literacy schemes. • Work experience as a library orderly.	• Development of an alternative, positive identity for example, parent, mentor, learner, reader, employee. • New perspectives of themselves, their past actions and their current situation. • The ability to express new ideas and engage with those holding different views. • Increased autonomy and agency in an environment of control and discipline. • Greater self-awareness, and a better understanding of own strengths.

Social capital and social bonds		
Context	**The library offers:**	**Possible outcomes:**
Many prisoners have had negative experiences of education and other social institutions prior to incarceration. They may have poor social skills and the inability to relate well to those around them. Incarceration cuts individuals off from families, friends and communities. Opportunities to build social capital whilst incarcerated are limited, and this hinders successful resettlement into society.	• A positive and neutral informal learning and social space. • Peer-mentoring programmes, where prisoners can help to develop the literacy skills of their peers. • Informal reading and literacy programmes, which encourage participation and engagement with others. • Family literacy programmes. • Opportunities for lifelong learning. • Pre-release support on finding employment and housing. • Training on a range of skills useful for future employment.	• Greater sense of belonging to community. • Stronger social bonds with partners/children, and increased knowledge of *how* to parent effectively and contribute to family life. • Development of pro-social behavior. • A desire to contribute/give something back to the community. • Continued use of public libraries once released.

Hope and motivation		
Context	**The library offers:**	**Possible outcomes:**
The experience of incarceration often limits opportunities for hope and the motivation to change. It is hard for prisoners to imagine a changed future in a punitive environment. Prisoners have little contact with family and friends, who often play a key role in fostering self-belief and motivation.	• Support from professional library staff to develop skills, explore personal interests and encourage learning and creativity. • Celebration of personal achievements, e.g. through participation in reading or literacy schemes, and creative writing competitions. • A range of potentially inspiring literary resources which describe the success and achievements of others. • As a public service, often run by a civilian member of staff, the library provides a window to the outside world.	• Increased confidence and self-esteem. • Increased levels of self-efficacy. • A sense of achievement and empowerment. • Higher aspirations and hope for the future. • An understanding of what skills are needed to achieve desired changes and goals. • A positive and sustained change in both attitude and behaviour.
Knowledge, skills and understanding		
Context	**The library offers:**	**Possible outcomes:**
Many prisoners have had a negative experience of education, and are reluctant to participate in formal education classes. Others may be well-educated, but feel cut off from information and learning opportunities which allow them to explore and develop their interests. Prisoners may also be lacking in essential life skills, social skills and a range of employability skills, all of which are necessary both to navigate daily prison life and life on release.	• Access to educational, legal and recreational sources of information (reflecting the needs and languages of the prison population). • Exposure to new ideas and different worldviews. • Informal, non-compulsory literacy and reader development programmes. • Reading groups (at various levels). • Creative writing opportunities. • Peer-led literacy schemes. • IT and digital literacy training. • Pre-release support in searching and applying for jobs and housing.	• Improved levels of literacy. • Development of new interests and increased love for learning. • Development of critical thinking skills. • Increased tolerance and empathy for others. • Participation in other education or vocational classes and workshops. • Increased levels of digital literacy. • Better equipped, both practically and emotionally, to handle the challenges of incarceration and release from prison.

Figure 4. The Prison Library Impact Framework (Finlay, 2018)

The Prison Library Impact Framework

Wellbeing and Mental Health

While the model shown above has been influenced strongly by the findings of desistance research, it does not propose that prison libraries should only be concerned with contributing to the desistance of prisoners. One of the strengths of desistance research, and perhaps why it has such strong potential to influence

prison library research, is its emphasis on viewing prisoners as individuals, and not simply as offenders in need of rehabilitation. If libraries – and other prison services – also recognise this, they must be concerned with the wellbeing of prisoners during incarceration, and not only with preparing individuals for release and resettlement. The psychological wellbeing of people in prison is repeatedly highlighted as a serious concern. Many individuals enter prison with mental health problems, which are then often exacerbated by "separation from family and friends, boredom and loss of autonomy" (National Audit Office, 2017, p. 14). The issues faced by those in prison are both diverse and complex, and it is not suggested that libraries alone can provide answers to these issues. It is clear, however, that all departments in the prison have their part to play and must work together to create an environment which diminishes the damaging effects of incarceration. A separate article could be written on the impact of the library on prisoner wellbeing, but the following paragraphs will outline briefly the ways in which the resources, space and learning programmes offered by the library has the potential to contribute positively to the lives of its visitors.

Reading and mental health. Librarians from all sectors are often required to fight to show that their service extends beyond that of a simple book-lending service. While this is certainly true – and hopefully reinforced by discussions in this article – the benefits of having access to a wide range of literary resources also necessitate examination. This is particularly true of prison libraries, where the act of recreational reading is considered a positive form of escapism and a constructive way of alleviating the boredom that so often epitomises the prison experience. It is widely accepted that "purposeful activity is vital for wellbeing in custody" (Clark, 2016, p. 8), and reading for pleasure is one form of so-called purposeful activity. A number of studies have been carried out on the experience of reading in prison, both as an individual endeavour and as part of shared reading groups (Trounstine & Waxler, 2006; Sweeney, 2010, 2012; Billington, 2011). Qualitative feedback collected for evaluation reports highlight the relaxing and calming nature of reading, showing it to be an activity which has the ability to relieve stress and take one's mind off current circumstances (National Literacy Trust, 2016; Reading Agency, 2017). In Rubin's theorising on the purpose of prison libraries (1973), she concludes that bibliotherapy is perhaps the greatest contribution the library makes to the rehabilitation of prisoners.

As well as providing books for recreational reading, a well-stocked prison library will also offer resources which focus specifically on issues related to health, mental health and general wellbeing. One particularly successful initiative which began in public libraries in the United Kingdom is *Reading Well: Books on Prescription*, which has now also been implemented in prison libraries across the United Kingdom. This is a scheme endorsed by health professionals, with the aim of helping individuals to "manage their mental health and wellbeing by providing access to accredited self-help reading" (Society of Chief Librarians, 2015, p. 3). Books can either be recommended to individuals by health professionals or are simply available on the shelves for anyone to borrow. An evaluation carried out in 2015 (which included responses from both public and prison libraries) noted that readers found the books helpful both for understanding their condition and for raising their confidence about managing symptoms. Fifty-five percent reported that their symptoms had reduced as a result of reading these books (Society of Chief Librarians, 2015, p. 14). The report also noted improvements to the knowledge and skills of library staff and strengthened partnerships with health organisations (p. 4). This is particularly important in prison libraries, as all departments in the prison should be well-informed and working together to support the needs of this particularly vulnerable population.

The space of the library. It has already been noted that one of the most crucial aspects of the prison library is the "normal" space it provides in the midst of a disruptive and unsettling environment. Beyond simply offering a haven or place of escape, the library can foster an environment based on trust and mutual respect for each other. A participant in Stevens' doctoral research noted that "you're given a little bit more respect" in the library (1995, p. 160). Such a space may be hugely significant for the wellbeing of prisoners. Studies carried out by leading criminologists on the pains of imprisonment stress the need for both trust and respect between prisoners, and in prisoner/staff relationships (Hulley at al., 2012). In her research on the moral quality of prison life, Liebling (2011, p. 532) concluded that "the 'differences that matter' are in the domain of interpersonal relationships and treatments, and the use of authority." She points to the impact that differing "levels of respect, fairness and humanity" can have on the prisoner experience (p. 533). Respect was found to be more than civility or fairness, but rather treating prisoners as autonomous individuals. Her research found

that prisoners considered respect to be "recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of the person, and of differences between individuals" (Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004, p.212). An effective library space – one where mutual respect is encouraged, individuality is recognised and differences celebrated – can serve as a good example of what is possible within a prison and perhaps have a positive impact on the wider prison culture.

Identity Transformation and Personal Development

Underlying many of the discussions around desistance and processes of change is the concept of identity transformation. Maruna's (2001) seminal study on desistance sought to understand the meaning that individuals gave to their own life narratives during their journey of desistance from crime. He found that sustained desistance required a fundamental shift in a person's sense of self. He was concerned specifically with the theory that an individual's identity and self-perception is heavily influenced by the labels applied to them by the rest of society (labelling theory). For an individual to sustain desistance, it is important that they are able to successfully shed the negative label of "offender" and develop a new, pro-social identity (Maruna & LeBel, 2010, p. 78). What role might the prison library play in helping to facilitate this shift in identity? When a prisoner enters the library, he or she is given the opportunity to escape – albeit temporarily – from their identity as prisoner. They become a reader. A writer. A learner. Peer-mentoring programmes offer the role of teacher and mentor. Family literacy programmes remind them of their role as a parent or grandparent. The following discussion will explore these ideas in more detail, and show how the library space, resources and programmes offer incarcerated individuals the means to imagining a new self and new possibilities.

Agency. The concept of agency – the belief that an individual is free to make their own choices and have control over their future – is central to Maruna's findings on identity transformation. In fact, Laub and Sampson (2003, p. 280) argue that "personal agency looms large" in most theories of desistance. The prison environment, with its emphasis on control, security and surveillance, grossly inhibits opportunities for individual agency and autonomy during incarceration. Rehabilitation programmes designed to correct offending behaviour are often imposed upon individuals without their say, leaving little room for choice or self-determination. Prison researchers note the aversion that incarcerated individuals often have toward such programmes and interventions. Harris's research found that prisoners were reluctant to take part in such programmes, which they considered to be designed to fix individuals who are seemingly "deficient, ineffectual, misguided, untrustworthy, possibly dangerous, and almost certain to get in trouble again" (2005, p. 318). Harris's research revealed that, in contrast to these attitudes about rehabilitative programmes, persons in prison embraced the desistance perspective which focused instead on their strengths rather than trying to address their deficiencies.

These negative perspectives are not limited to offender behaving programmes. Even education in prison is sometimes viewed as "an intervention concerned with correcting a prisoner's offending behaviour" (Warr, 2016, p. 21). As noted earlier, one way of overturning this view of education is to increase opportunities for informal, non-compulsory learning in prison. The informal learning opportunities and informal learning space offered by the library could be a vital source of agency for people in prison. Garner's recent research on the experiences of Australian prisoners spoke of a "responsibility for self" that was enabled by the library, where individuals can make choices about how to spend their time in an institution which generally removes this choice (Garner, 2017, p. 113). Referring to prison library visits, one participant in her study noted, "[the library is] something I can do when I want. Not something I'm getting told I have to do if I want to move through the system" (p. 161). As a public institution, whose staff are often employed by a local public library service, the library reflects experiences outside of prison and may enable a heightened sense of autonomy which is not experienced in other areas of the prison. Singer (2000) goes as far as to say that the library is one of the few places that can be approached with the same freedom as one has on the streets.

The experience of recreational reading can also play a role in the agency and identity transformation of incarceration individuals, particularly if they are able to identify with the experiences and characters portrayed in the literature. In Sweeney's comprehensive study of female prisoners' experiences of reading, she found that books could be used as a "tool for framing and making sense of their experiences", and that "readers often become 'agents in and of' their own stories and learn to exercise some control over the meaning of their lives" (Sweeney, 2010, p. 7). Similar attitudes are evident in reflections on a prison-based literature programme – *Changing Lives Through Literature* – which stresses the importance of providing resources where readers will

be able to relate to the characters and their stories. Trounstine (2008), a co-founder of this programme, designed it in such a way that literature could be used as a path to think more deeply about character and identity. If literature can indeed help some individuals to make sense of their own experiences and envision a different future, it has significant implications for collection development in prison libraries. These goals can only be realised if the available literature reflects the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the prison population.

Social Capital and Social Bonds

While developing the human capital of those in prison is important, McNeill (2009, p. 28) makes it clear that "interventions based only on human capital...will not be enough." Desistance research is critical of rehabilitation narratives for focusing too much on the development of knowledge and skills, to the detriment of overlooking the vital need to develop the social capital of individuals. In defining social capital, McNeill (2009, p. 24) speaks of "the resources that inhere in social relationships and networks characterised by shared norms and reciprocal bonds." The findings of desistance research in this aspect are similar to what has already been identified in social learning and social bonding theories. The forming of significant life partnerships, family relationships or even disassociation with negative peer groups can help to increase social capital and support the process of desistance (Warr, 1998). This would suggest that prison policies and strategies should focus more on restoring the relationships that are inevitably damaged by incarceration and that, as much as possible, prison-based programmes should facilitate opportunities for the development of social capital. Beyond developing the knowledge and skills of individuals, libraries must therefore consider how their services contribute to an individual's relationship with his or her family, friends and wider community.

The public library is considered to be an important social institution, where people of all ages, races and backgrounds come together and are exposed to different people, cultures and ideas. The same is true of a library behind bars. Many prisoners, who may not otherwise cross paths, meet in a space which encourages social learning and the development of cultural knowledge. Studies focusing on libraries and social capital view *trust* as being a significant aspect of the library experience. Vårheim's research found that libraries have potential for accommodating diversity in patrons, promoting trusting relationships between diverse people and, as a result of this process, create trust toward people in general (Vårheim, 2009, p. 373). This is also reflected in the *Generic Learning Outcomes* framework for libraries and museums, which highlights opportunities to develop opinions on ourselves and others, and to create empathy and an increased tolerance for others (Arts Council England, 2003). As well as these positive interactions with other library users, researchers have identified the relationship between patrons and library staff as having significant bearings on the social capital produced by libraries. The interactions that occur between staff and patrons have the capacity to build trust, connect people to resources, reduce social isolation and help patrons gain skills in an increasingly online world (Johnson, 2012). Again, these relationships are arguably more crucial in a prison environment where patrons have lower social capital than the general public and greater literacy and information needs. Looking beyond incarceration, it is possible that positive engagement with prison library services could encourage continued use of public libraries when released. This has implications for the role of the public library not only in working alongside prison libraries, but in providing support and resources for those experiencing resettlement into communities.

Family literacy initiatives. The interactions between prisoners and staff members may be said to improve *bridging social capital,* which refers to a wider network of colleagues and acquaintances (McNeill & Weaver, 2010). While this is important, desistance research also looks closely at *bonding social capital*, which refers to close ties with family and friends. Maintaining and building upon family relationships during incarceration is a key focus in recent criminal justice strategies and policies, with prison services working alongside external organisations to help develop these relationships. The Northern Ireland Prison Service Family Strategy document, for example, affirms that "families have a vital role in helping prisoners achieve successful rehabilitation" (2012, p. 4). Family literacy programmes, facilitated by the prison library, help to maintain this family contact with the added benefits of increasing literacy levels, self-confidence and enjoyment of reading. Depending on budget and staff availability, these programmes range from simple book recordings, to parenting workshops or reading groups when the child is present during visiting times (Finlay, 2014). Social cognitive theory suggests that parental involvement early in a child's educational life can lead to long-term academic success, suggesting that these programmes can have a positive impact on both parent

and child. Family literacy programmes can also help to shift an individual's identity from 'prisoner' to 'parent' and provide an element of hope and motivation for participants who are able to play a part in the literacy development of their child.

Hope and Motivation

Alongside discussions of identity and agency, criminologists speak about the place of hope and motivation in a prisoner's desistance narrative. This is linked to the ability of imagining a different future reality, and the belief in the ability to change. Maruna's work in particular deems *hope* as a crucial factor in sustained desistance, and points to the role of others both in sparking and helping to maintain this hope (Maruna, 2001; Burnett & Maruna, 2006). Prison significantly limits opportunities for interaction with those who are best placed to nurture such hope and motivation – the prisoners' friends and families. A desistance-supporting prison must both increase opportunities for these interactions, and provide services that are geared toward fostering hope, self-belief and motivation to change. Figure 4 notes a number of ways in which a well-run library service provides such opportunities, and the potential outcomes of engagement with these services. Prisoners can take part in family literacy programmes, as well as a number of other literacy schemes and events that both develop skills and nurture creativity. Positive interaction and encouragement from library staff can increase self-belief, and celebration of achievements can help to reinforce the belief in the ability to overcome obstacles and be successful in what they are trying to achieve.

One particularly successful example of a programme which helps to encourage prisoners and positively affect levels of self-efficacy is that of Turning Pages, a peer-mentoring programme which takes place in the prison library. Implemented by the Shannon Trust, this scheme enables prisoners who can read well to teach those with lower literacy levels. This kind of programme has a significant impact on both learner and mentor. An evaluation of the programme found that it gave both learner and mentor hope for future attainments, and that learners observed "an increased in confidence in reading, their self-rated reading attainment, enjoyment and reading comprehension" (Hopkins & Kendall, 2017, p. 5). Similar results were found in a separate study of prison-based peer education schemes, where prisoners were described as "untapped resources" who are "capable of having a powerful and positive influence on fellow offenders" (Devilly, Sorbello, Eccleston & Ward, 2003, p. 220). As well as positively affecting their sense of self-efficacy, this pro-social role can assist in providing a new identity as mentor or teacher rather than criminal or offender. Peer-learning opportunities are increasingly being recognised as a positive step in prisoner learning. Roth, Asbjørnsen and Manger (2016, p. 52) note that "the more closely the prisoner identifies with the model, the greater impact on efficacy beliefs."

Knowledge, Skills and Understanding

In unpacking the Museum, Libraries and Archives' *Generic Learning Outcomes*, Hooper-Greenhill (2004) details the myriad of ways in which museums, archives and libraries can impact upon the knowledge, skills and understanding of individuals. She looks beyond simply learning new facts and information, suggesting that such cultural learning experiences can contribute to "the development of a more complex view of self, family, neighbourhood or personal world" (p. 164). Not only can individuals develop what Warr (2016, p. 18) terms the "obvious and evident" benefits of learning (for example, literacy, numeracy and IT skills), but cultural learning experiences can help to develop social skills, emotional skills, communication skills and information management skills (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004, p. 165). The importance of such skills is often overlooked by policymakers, whose main concern is that prisoners are practically equipped with the skills that lead to successful resettlement or qualifications required to improve employment prospects on release. These skills are, however, crucial for individuals who must first learn to navigate daily life in a challenging environment.

The social learning which takes place in a library setting, both through reading groups and literacy programmes, and through interaction with staff and other prisoners, has the potential to change perspectives, and promote understanding of and tolerance toward others. Reading groups in particular are designed to encourage deeper engagement with literature and the development of critical thinking skills, in a setting where these emerging perspectives are shared alongside others. A report of Books Unlocked (National Literacy Trust, 2016, p.6) found that reading groups provided "discussion, tolerance and empathy." This was reflected in the feedback provided from participants. One reader stated, *"It's cool to share opinions and points of view. Helps me to understand other people's mentalities and understanding of life"* (p. 7). Another noted, "I like that

it brought people of different areas of prison, some I've never seen…They have the most interesting things to say" (p.6). This again highlights the importance of the library environment, and how it can be a safe space for individuals to discuss issues without fear of judgment or criticism.

A well-equipped library is able to support a wide range of educational needs. The literacy level of individuals in prison is generally lower than that of the general population. Within the United Kingdom, it is estimated that 46% of prisoners have the literacy level of, or below, that expected of an 11-year old child (Hopkins & Kendall, 2017, p. 3). The library is therefore mostly concerned with encouraging basic literacy development, in ways already outlined in this article. The library is also tasked with supporting the advanced educational needs of prisoners. Writing in 1973 about prisoners undertaking the GED and college courses, Gulker (p. 55) was convinced that a good library could "humanize the environment" and "transform the unbelievably sterile atmosphere into a productive area for learning." As the provision of both secondary and post-secondary education grows behind bars, so too does the need for prisoners to access scholarly information and for an environment conducive to this kind of learning. We are in a "time of revitalization in prison higher education" (DeLano Davis, 2017, p. 690), but students in prison do not have the luxury of using an academic library. DeLano Davis goes on to note that prison libraries focus mostly on general reading and legal resources, rather than specialised academic texts (p. 689). A discussion of the library's ability to support to these academic information needs is outside the scope of this article, but we recommend reading Sorgert (2014) and DeVanos (2017) for contemporary insights on specialised libraries within prisons and partnerships with university libraries.

Conclusion

It is clear from this article's overview of desistance research that, despite the inherent barriers imposed by incarceration, desistance is an ongoing process which can take place during custody and so we must try to facilitate this process in any way possible. It is therefore appropriate to consider the role played by the prison library in this narrative of change, and how library services may enable individuals to "imagine and to embark on that journey" (McNeill et al., 2011, p. 99). Many organisations and professionals working with prisoners have recognised the value of desistance research and the implications it has for the way they approach their services, and it is important for library services to do the same. Prison library literature has long argued that the library should not be dictated by prison goals and policies, which are often directly opposed to the principles and goals of the library. This way of thinking may be challenged if prison policymakers continue to take desistance research seriously. Regimes based upon opportunities for identity transformation and the developments of social bonds, and services built around the strengths of prisoners rather than their deficiencies, have much more in common with library philosophies than traditional prison concepts of control and punishment.

This article has discussed a number of ways in which the prison library benefits its users, based on an exploration of existing literature and policy documents. It has explored many of the services offered by the library and theorised how they may contribute, even in part, to an individual's journey of desistance. The library offers a "positive socialisation experience" (Conrad, 2016, p. 45), where bonds are created with other prisoners, staff members and family members. One of library's greatest strengths is that it is able to facilitate these relationships in a safe, neutral space which offers autonomy and responsibility for self, and opportunities for non-compulsory, informal learning. Similar to what Szifris, Fox and Bradbury (2018) propose in their recent article on a general theory of prison education, the framework presented here acts as a starting point for both practitioners and researchers to consider more seriously the role and outcomes of the prison library. Grounded in library, educational and criminological concepts, it aims to strengthen the depth of theory in prison library research.

We recognise the challenging reality of the prison environment and the numerous restrictions faced by library workers in their day-to-day role of providing library services to prisoners. This original framework is not intended to be an idealistic model but is instead part of a theoretically and conceptually grounded roadmap to good practice. The value of discussing these theories is not only to increase knowledge, but to then "mobilize and transform theory from its abstract and institutional life into concrete ways of everyday practice and being" (Gage, 2004, p. 73). It is hoped that the framework will be a helpful tool for practitioners and researchers both to showcase existing benefits of the library and to develop future services. The next step is for researchers, working alongside prison library practitioners and other relevant service providers, to carry

out empirical research that will refine and strengthen this model. Prison library research cannot continue to be siloed, especially when it has potential significance for the broader areas of learning, wellbeing and desistance of those in prison.

Acknowledgements

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