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# Being the change you want to see:

The importance of frontline practitioners' stories in understanding the penal voluntary sector

Ella Simpson  
Bath Spa University

## Gap in the Research

‘The penal voluntary sector’s contributions to prisoners... are poorly understood... Indeed, there is a relative dearth of research in the area’

(Tomczak & Albertson, 2016:57-58)

## Relational dimensions

‘The voluntary sector projects and practitioners that we studied were found to offer a distinctive relational experience to prisoners, which has positive enduring effects upon some’

(Tomczak & Albertson, 2016: 67)

# Importance of relationship in studies

- Albertson (2015)
- Bilby, Caulfield & Ridley (2013)
- Caulfield (2011, 2015)
- Cursley & Maruna (2015)
- Di Vaggiani et al. (2010)
- O'Keefe and Albertson (2012)

# Importance of relationship in studies

- 'Practical and conceptual distance from punishment' (Tomczak & Albertson, 2016: 65)
- 'A non-judgemental and person-centred approach towards prisoners' (Tomczak & Alberson, 2016: 65)
- 'The status of project facilitators as professionals' (Bilby et al., 2013: 51)
- 'Excellent positive role models' (Van Maneen, 2010: 24)

# Compassion and rehabilitation

‘a distinctive ‘voluntary sector’ ethos  
of compassion and rehabilitative  
approach’

(Tomczak & Albertson, 2016: 65-66)

# Understanding the practitioner

‘There is little research that describes what arts practitioners actually do in sessions, and more importantly, how they go about doing it’

(Anderson, 2015: 372)

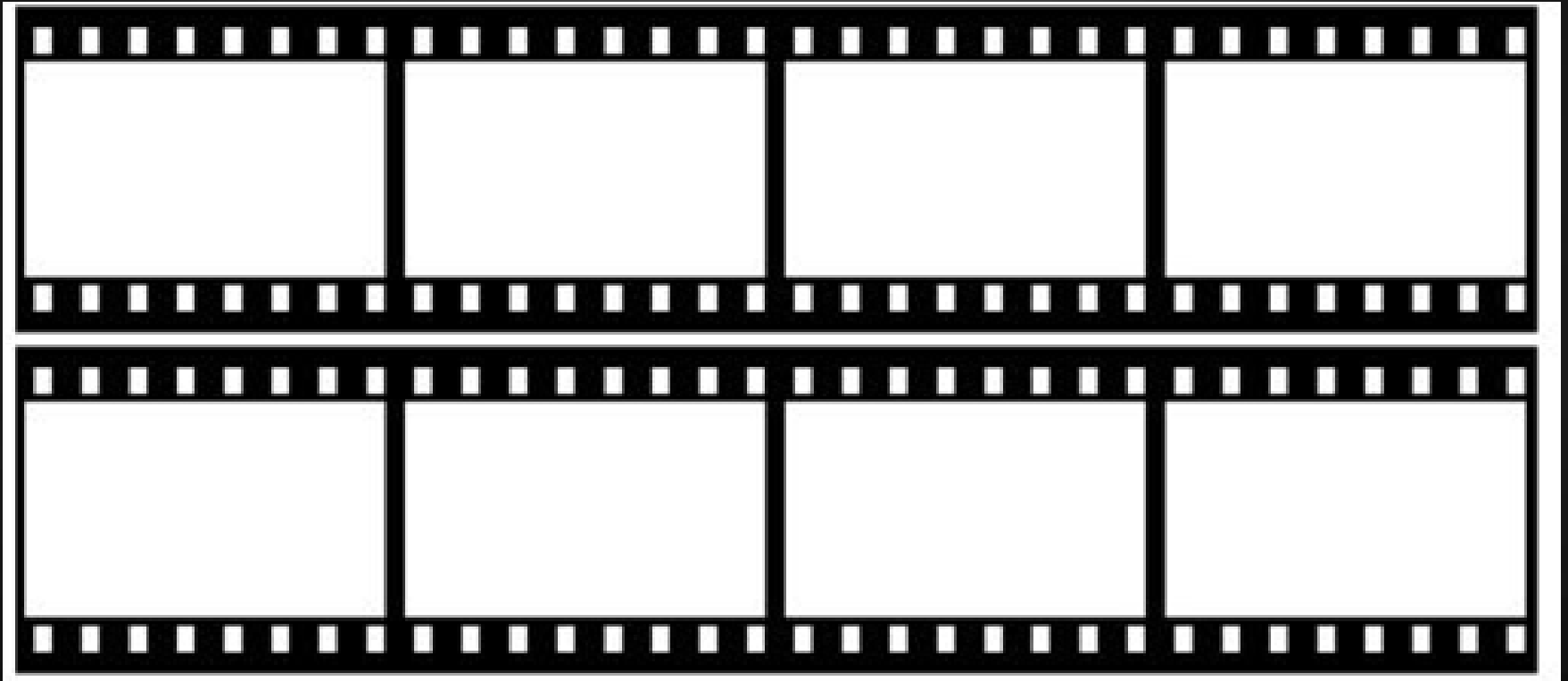


## Research shapes research

‘The struggle for arts programmes to achieve legitimacy, both in the minds of prison administrators and the public at large, ultimately impacts on the shape of the programmes themselves’

(Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2012: 258)

# Creative data collection



# Research sample

- 20 creative writing practitioners/facilitators
- Minimum 1 year experience in prisons.  
7 years average experience
- Aged 32 - 70
- Employed across public, private and voluntary sectors on short-term contracts

# Examples of storyboards

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# Narratology

‘Narratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’.

(Bal, 2009: 3)



# Fabula

‘a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors’

(Bal, 1997: 5)

# Fabula Content

Actor/Personal Pronouns	56
Creativity/Writing	84
Durational Nouns	49
Employment/Work	34
Criminal Justice System	28
Education	22

'When I was at school...more than one teacher  
thought I would end up in prison'

(Participant 1)

# Outsider populations

‘Even on the lowest estimates...it is clear that prisoners of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller backgrounds are **significantly overrepresented in the prison population**’

(HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2014: 11)

‘Broke - flat, stony and regularly - between jobs  
that were one by bloody one breaking me to bits -  
bit by bit’

(Participant 2)

'Valium @ 15'

(Participant 3)

## Collusion not compassion?

‘the roots of the British CSOs are located in charity distributed by the elite and middle classes to the poor (Taylor 2004; Kendall and Knapp 1996)’

Helminen (2015: 75)

## Alternative answers

- A blurring of boundaries between prisoners and practitioners
- Potential to significantly develop the peer mentoring literature
- Illustrates a different form of charity existing in PVS in England and Wales
- Offers an innovative creative-based methodology that gives access to the personal narratives of professional practitioners
- Asks what does this mean for prisons and order within them?