

LICOS Pedagogical Concept

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1 Introduction

This document describes the pedagogical concept of the LICOS system. The concept has been created in parallel with the development of the technical system. The guiding questions were: Which didactical methods are useful in prison education and how can they be supported by e-learning? But also the other way around: Which advantages provide digital media for enhancing the learning process, particularly in the prison environment?

The concept is the result of a European learning process. Project partners described the pedagogy of prison education in their respective countries. The project discussed good practices, and in the course of time elaborated a didactical framework for e-learning in prison – the LICOS method box. In this way, the functional framework of the system – the LICOS tool box – has been complimented and interwoven with the pedagogical concept and the corresponding variety of methods. Prisons can choose appropriate functionality from the *tool box*, considering the relevant constraints within a given penitentiary institution, e.g. security requirements. Prison teachers can choose appropriate didactical methods from the *method box*, taking the educational needs of the individual inmates into account.

2 Prison education

Education in general plays a key role in human development. It helps to develop the personality and character of the individual. Moreover, especially in prison it supports the process of reintegration of (ex-) offenders into society and in finding a job after release. The goal of the penal system in most European countries has changed in the last decades from expiation and punishment to re-socialisation and prevention of further criminal acts. According to international conventions and recommendations the prisoners have the same right to education as other citizens¹. Therefore, restrictions which constrain education in prison should be avoided as far as possible.

Education in prison often is limited to general and basic skills (primary school level). Vocational training in many cases comprehends only traditional jobs, for example painter, brick layer, carpenter or mechanic. Training of modern professions from areas like business administration, ICT, engineering, caring professions etc are mostly not available for prisoners because of a lack of budgets and teachers.

The traditional prison learning environment often is characterised by disruptions, e.g. lock-downs, head counts, or inmates' meetings with lawyers. Education is mostly organised as classroom teaching, even though there is a huge need for individual promotion.

3 Characteristics of the learners

Prison population is characterised by several disadvantages considering education. At least three different subgroups can be identified which need special treatment: inmates with drug problems, foreign inmates, and inmates with negative school experience.

¹ European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950 entered into force on 18 May 1954, and was signed by member state governments of the Council of Europe
Council of Europe: Recommendations on Education in Prison (Recommendation R (89) 12 1989)
Council of Europe: The European Prison Rules (Recommendation rec (2006) 2)
Council of Europe: Recommendation No. R (84) 12; concerning foreign prisoners
UNESCO Recommendations for adult education (UNESCO 1985)

Learners with drug problems

The percentage of (ex-)drug addicts is much higher in prison population than among the population in general. Drug addicts often show attention deficits, lack of perseverance, lowered level of consciousness, marked by listlessness, drowsiness or apathy and – caused by this – a lack of structure in their daily life. In several cases they have additional (mental) health problems (co-occurring disorder). These deficits often cause problems in concentrating on the learning subject, the ability of systematic acquisition of knowledge, the capacity of memory etc.

Foreign inmates

The average number of foreign prisoners in European member states is about 19% with a variation between 7% (Finland) and 73% (Luxemburg). Typical values are 26% (Germany), 30% (The Netherlands) or 35% (Spain). [Hofstee-van der Meulen 2009]. She cites an EU study which declares: “Foreign prisoners are ... often excluded from basics like work, education, contact outside world, release, aftercare” [Hofstee-van der Meulen 2009]. The reason is that there are many different nationalities represented in prison, e.g. in Sweden 26% of all prisoners in 2004 were foreigners coming from 69 different countries (including Nordic countries) [Johnson 2007]. It is obvious that it is not possible to provide teachers with appropriate language skills for such a diversified foreign prison population. (See also [Walmsley 2009])

School dropouts

A large number of prisoners did not finish their primary school. They failed to get the final exam and have no or only few chances to get an apprenticeship or job position. In many cases they are illiterate, often combined with innumeracy and a general lack in basic education. Because of their traumatic experience in formal education they hate schools (and teachers). The challenge is to motivate these often demotivated, disaffected learners and let them enjoy learning, often for the first time.

In many cases the above mentioned types of problems appear in combination and thereby enlarge learning difficulties even more.

4 Pedagogical principles of LICOS

Considering the mentioned learning difficulties of inmates it is clear that traditional teaching methods from public school practice can solve the problem only partly. On the other hand, the aim of prison education is to provide teaching opportunities to all inmates which are almost the same as those outside the prison. The problem has been discussed in the LICOS project and the following approaches were considered to be worth trying out:

Constructivism: the basis for action-oriented learning

Being instructed by teachers, who provide traditional lectures, forcing students to only perceive predefined knowledge and try to memorise it, is not a very effective way of educating people. Educational psychologists found out that reading and listening contribute to sustainable learning only in a quite limited way. A better way to gain knowledge is to learn while performing an action while solving a given problem. Exploring a problem, trying out alternative methods of problem solving iteratively, and learning by one's own or other people's mistakes (i.e. “constructing” your knowledge largely by yourself), lead to a competence that enables students to successfully act in

complex situations. This approach is called “action-oriented learning”. There are different ways to implement this approach in prison curricula. One method is project-oriented learning where a group of learners jointly work on a given task aiming at a systematic working procedure from problem analysis through to the final product.

The use of computers differs from using text-books by providing an interactive learning environment. Users input information, get results from the computer (which operates as a digital medium) and react on this output in an appropriate way. The LICOS project has to answer the question, how action-oriented learning can be supported by ICT and especially by using an e-learning platform.

Cooperative learning: from group work to peer teaching

Learning together has a more sustainable effect on the achievement of knowledge than learning alone. Learning together means communicating about the subject to learn, explaining things to the cooperation partner, and by this experiencing what one did understand and what still remains unclear. So, discussing the subjects opens up the chance to enhance knowledge in an iterative way. For prisoners who are living in an isolated situation most of the time, this kind of cooperative learning is particularly important.

In many cases classes in prison schools are not homogeneous considering the level of qualification. In addition, prisoners often join a class after entrance assessment at any time of the school year. What normally would be considered as a problem could be used as an advantage: The learners, who already stay in a course for a while and achieved advanced knowledge of the subject already, could be asked to be a tutor for those who just started. This can enhance their self-esteem. In the long run, this could contribute to a social psychological change in prison population, considering hierarchy among prisoners: from the primacy of physical strength to respecting the value of knowledge.

E-learning platforms enable users to communicate and cooperate by using communication tools like messaging, forum, wiki, or even by using selected pages from the Internet etc. The challenge will be to meet the security requirements of the prison.

Motivation enhancement: coping with “distance to learning” by distance learning

Particularly juvenile inmates can be motivated to learn by using computer-supported learning environments. This can help to overcome the “nightmare of school” and re-enter the pathway to education. Experiences from national e-learning projects in prisons show that juvenile inmates are proud to become an “ICT specialist” by using learning platforms and thereby enhance their social prestige among young people inside and outside the detention centre. Even though they actually do not become an ICT specialist, they will become computer literate and thereby achieve the knowledge needed to persist in modern working life.

Stimulating curiosity: informal learning

Prisoners who are not ready to systematically learn in the framework of a school organisation might anyway be interested in becoming acquainted with topics of their concern. None-institutional, informal learning could be an alternative to participating in classroom teaching. Stimulating curiosity is the first step back to learning.

Browsing through an electronic library, visiting selected web pages, e.g. from newspapers, or playing learning games are examples of informal knowledge acquisition. These forms of learning can contribute to the inmate’s personal development beyond an economic viewpoint. But informal

learning becomes more and more recognised as a “second way” of knowledge acquisition, also in working life in general.

5 Advantages of e-learning in prison education

There are many advantages of e-learning in general: flexibility of time and place (“learning anywhere, anytime”); individualisation of learning; chances of using a broader range of educational providers (content, learning methods); mobile learning (learning on the move); reducing costs by reducing travels to seminars etc. But particularly prison education can benefit from e-learning even in a more sophisticated way:

- Support of individualised, personally tailored learning

The prison population normally is very heterogeneous, considering the level of qualifications, the learning ability and motivation, or the awareness of social behaviour. Therefore, traditional classroom instruction which treats every student in the same way is not very effective. In LICOS each learner will get his own learning programme and schedule which are adapted to his precognition, his own pace of learning and his interests.

- Enlarging the scope of innovative professional skills

In many cases prison education focuses on traditional professions like painter, carpenter, bricklayer or mechanic. But job offers in these areas are decreasing. By using computer-supported learning, modern job profiles, asked for in today’s labour market, can be offered to inmates, e.g. ICT specialist, media designer, call centre agent, office communication specialist and other service occupations.

- Facilitating short term qualification and further education

The duration of sentences, particularly in the case of young offenders, often is comparatively short. Therefore, complete training courses, e.g. a three-year apprenticeship, in most cases are not applicable. E-learning platforms are able to offer modularised content appropriate for offering short term qualification measures. A good example is the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) which consists of seven modules, where each module is being examined and certified separately. Modules which were completed within prison are recognised outside the prison, too. Missing modules to gain the complete ECDL can be accomplished after release.

- Through-the-gate training

E-learning is able to expand learning beyond prison walls: First, during imprisonment inmates can be connected to outside learning facilities, e.g. secondary schools and training centres as well as web sites with valuable training material. Second, inmates can communicate via e-learning with tutors and teachers outside their prison, e.g. with special trainers in other prisons or even in publicly-maintained schools. Third, if an inmate is transferred to another prison the e-learning network allows further access to the inmate’s files stored in the database, and the support by the former teacher could be continued. Fourth, after release ex-offenders can continue their study outside the prison, particularly if it is modularised like the ECDL, providing the chance for lifelong learning. Of course, all these measures have to be set up in accordance with the prison’s security rules.

- Improving ICT and Digital Media competencies

The LICOS e-learning platform functions not only as a learning tool but also as a learning subject in its own. By using the platform students get familiar with Digital Media, ICT, portable

devices and – as far as allowed – the Internet. They achieve computing competencies which are needed at today's work places and in daily life.

- Motivating learners, particularly young prisoners

Last but not least, using computers for learning purposes comprehends a strong motivational impact. Especially young inmates are very proud if they are allowed to use computers. In many cases their self-esteem is strengthened and their social prestige in the prison community is being increased. In one sentence: Learning no longer is primarily associated with “teacher”, “textbook” or “school” but with “computer game”, “portable device”, “advanced technology” or “reputation as a specialist”. This extrinsic motivation can be used to overcome former negative school experiences.²

LICOS implements methods and tools to support this kind of advanced learning: interactive learning facilities, self-directed learning spaces (personal learning desktop), support structures for teachers, modularised learning objects, serious games etc. The next paragraph describes some of these features in more detail.

6 The LICOS learning platform – tool box plus method box

The LICOS learning platform is based on the open source Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle³. Moodle is a very popular LMS⁴ which had particularly been developed with a constructivist philosophy in mind. The platform consist of a set of modularised functions which prisons can choose from, combined with a set of methods the teacher will use in his pedagogical work. The description is following three steps: organisation, activities, material.

Learning organisation

From an organisational point of view we consider three different levels: areas of education, learning environments and teaching collaboration.

Areas of education

The LICOS concept aims at four *areas of education*:

- Basic education: This includes literacy and numeracy courses as well as support for improving social behaviour. Even though the main effort in improving social behaviour of inmates has to be done in direct teacher-learner relationship, there are learning materials which can support this process, e.g. computer games for anti-violence training or videos showing un-social habits in groups of youngsters as an introduction to an intensive discussion about the reasons, impacts and alternatives of such behaviour (method of video confrontation).
- General education: Many prisons aim at providing courses to catch up on basic school graduation. There is a lot of learning programmes supporting this goal, but there has to be put special attention on the material being well suited to adult learners.

² For proposals to make more use of mobile learning devices and game technology in prison education, see [Lokitt 2010a]; [Lokitt 2010b]

³ Abbreviation for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

⁴ As of October 2010 Moodle had a user base of 49,952 registered and verified sites, serving 37 million users in 3.7 million courses (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moodle>).

- Vocational training: For reintegration into society it's especially important to get a job. So, vocational (further) education is indispensable. LICOS can manage simulation programmes for learning mechanics or provide video clips to explain handling processes.
- Higher education: Students in prisons who already studied several semesters before they were convicted are in a particular situation. They normally have no chance to participate in courses within the prison but prisons can be connected to (open) universities in a secure way. Some European projects had been carried out to address this special group of inmates [Callejo/Viedma 2007]; [Education 2009]; [Pike/Irwin 2008]. LICOS offers the technology to establish a secure connection to Higher Education institutions, in cooperation with appropriate universities.

Learning environments

LICOS supports different *learning environments*. First, it has to be decided if learning should take place in a classroom-oriented or a personal environment. Second, we have to deal with the question if learning will be exclusively done by e-learning or if it will be a combination of computer-supported and “teacher-supported” learning (Blended Learning).

The teaching can be organised in *Virtual Classrooms*, which have to be configured by the teachers considering aspects like course structure, appropriate learning material and the intended learning activities of the students. He can decide if the learning process takes place in the whole class or in sub-groups of learners, e.g. to foster cooperative learning and social behaviour. On the other hand LICOS offers a *Personal Learning Desktop* facility which supports individual, self-directed learning. This learning space contains those documents and activities which are actually needed by the learner while studying a special subject or solving a special problem or task. Material and activities are personally tailored.

For prison education *Blended Learning* is recommended as the dominant form of learning. In almost all cases, inmates need personal advice from the teacher considering learning goals and methods, commitments, learning style etc. But in addition there could be organised self-directed learning sessions in PC classrooms after school (homework) which could be supervised by a prison officer. Even self-directed learning on the cell could be considered. This is already in use in several prisons [Pike 2007].

Teachers' collaboration

Last but not least, a meta-organisational aspect should be mentioned, not directly aiming at the teaching process itself: the organisation of prison teachers to exchange experiences and e-learning teaching material, report about good practices or support each other by advice giving. The LICOS project provides a separate teachers' network which is a clone of the original LICOS network. It contains all learning material from LICOS but is located in the Internet so that teachers can use it from home while preparing their lessons. In addition, this “Teachers' LICOS” can be used for communicating with other teachers in a forum or chat, for uploading material for exchange, or for cooperating in exploring the LICOS system and its facilities and methods itself. On a European level there already exist experiences in setting up a teachers' cooperation web site, the Virtual European Prison School (VEPS) which will be inspiring for LICOS. The system has been developed by the European Prison Education Association (EPEA) [European Prison Education Association 2008]. It aims at exchange of penitentiary teaching materials, good practices, organisational and pedagogical approaches and tools

Learning activities

Micro-level activities: dynamic platform services

Following the constructivist approach, the LICOS platform supports action-oriented learning by providing various learning activities. The term “action” is used here in a broad range:

E-learning can complement “physical actions” in vocational training measures where manual work is still prevailing but systematic “theory-based” knowledge is increasingly necessary. To give an example, a quite popular qualification measure in prisons is related to commercial cleaning. Traditionally, one would assume that this is hand work only. But actually, workers in this area nowadays have to have a lot of knowledge about cleaning chemicals (efficient use, toxicity), cleaning equipment (mechanics, safety), cleaning standards in special areas (hygiene in hospitals) etc. Installing simulation games on the LICOS system would make theoretical knowledge more “visible”. In the example: Chemical processes could be visualised by variation of parameters like process speed, concentration of substances, etc. and demonstrating their effects in simulation results.

Action-oriented learning also applies to “cognitive actions”, e.g. analysing problems, abstracting from single events, applying knowledge to given tasks. LICOS supports these actions by providing special “cognitive containers”. Analysis processes in most cases need discourses to evolve; such strategies can be supported by a systematic application of the LICOS *forum* facility. Abstraction tasks are supported by the use of the LICOS *glossary* tool. Applying knowledge to given tasks is supported by the *assignment* facility etc.

Finally, in linguistics the term “speech act” [Searle 1969] is used to illustrate that speaking out something in many cases has a direct impact in the world, just like “real actions”. If a marriage registrar pronounce someone husband and wife, this has a definite effect in real world. Austin, founder of the speech act theory, named his famous book “How to do things with words” [Austin 1962]. If a teacher gives some information to a student, the student might perceive the information but in many cases he will not acquire the respective knowledge. If a student explains the issue to a colleague this in many cases helps himself to actually understand the issue better. The act of communicating enhances the learning process and improves learning results. Therefore, LICOS supports communication in various ways, by providing a chat function, a messaging facility, the forum etc. Of course, the communication functions have to be modified and made configurable according to security needs in penitentiary institutions (*moderated* forum, *restrictable* messaging). But nevertheless, remaining communication functions can strongly support action-oriented learning.

The action-oriented approach corresponds to the concept of *interaction* in computing and especially in e-learning. The user not only acts by inputting data or clicking on buttons but also – after reflecting the situation – reacts on an output of the computer; the constant flow of actions and reactions leads to complex interaction structures. Learners thus learn to cope with complex working processes.

Macro-level activities: cross-country e-learning

In chapter 2 we mentioned that a major part of the prison population are foreigners. To improve their opportunity of participating in education, the LICOS project developed the idea of cross-country e-learning: A prison with a considerable number of foreign inmates could aim at an agreement with a prison in the home country of a single foreigner or a group of foreigners asking for teaching support by a teacher from that prison. To realise this, the LICOS system is prepared to establish a secure connection to that foreign prison. This method has several advantages:

- Foreign inmates can be supervised by teachers of their *mother tongue*, using the communication facilities of the LICOS system.
- LICOS enables conveyance of *native language learning material* stored in servers in the home country to the prison of the foreign inmate.
- Contact between the teacher and the foreign inmate can be used to keep *cultural relations* alive and thereby facilitate life and employment after release to the home country.

There might be some questioning about this proposal. Concerning security, foreign teachers can be approved (security checked) on the basis of a mutual agreement by the national prison authority, if necessary. One could argue that the costs are unevenly distributed – the home country has to pay for a teacher working for a foreign country. But thinking ahead, one could argue that education-induced reduction of recidivism after release to the home country is of major interest to the home country itself. Beyond this, there might be the possibility to follow this concept on a mutual basis if both countries have prisoners from the other country respectively.

Learning material

It is not the task of the LICOS project to develop, select or install learning materials in the system. But considering the types of materials which are used in prison education is needed to implement the right servers and to configure the LICOS application (LMS) in a way that these materials actually can be used.

Server-based learning objects

One basic goal of prison education is to achieve an equivalent of the high school diploma (public secondary school level). Therefore, learning material for general and basic education is needed. Besides traditional subjects like mathematics, physics, biology, history etc. prison education in addition needs special efforts to reduce the degree of illiteracy and innumeracy as well as enhance social skills (capacity for teamwork, adequate social communication, giving-up violent behaviour etc.). Considering the high percentage of foreign inmates (see above) there is a special need for “XX as a second language” courses and learning materials.

Nowadays, there exists a new form of illiteracy in the digital age, called computer illiteracy (digital divide). Media competence and basic ICT knowledge is no specialty anymore but is needed in almost every job. Prison education should comprise appropriate measures to target this modern kind of illiteracy. The European Computer Driving Licence is an appropriate means to cope with this goal.

All mentioned educational areas can be supported by CBTs (computer-based training programmes) as well as WBTs (web-based training programmes) which are part of the LICOS server farm. As mentioned, the creation of learning material in general is not a task of the LICOS project, but it should be considered

- which kind of material could be used in which formats (text, graphics, audio, video files),
- which compatibility requirements should be fulfilled (e.g. SCORM⁵ compatibility),
- which licence models should be taken into account (e.g. open content/creative commons).

⁵ SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model), a group of standards for creating content for e-learning systems. If a LMS is SCORM compatible that means that it can use SCORM compatible content. In this way, learning content can be transferred (shared) between learning platforms.

Learning resources from the Internet

The World Wide Web, which is part of the Internet, provides a huge number of valuable educational materials. Most of this material is created by teachers, school networks or open content communities. In almost all cases the material is free of charge and copyrighted by special licences which aim at free distribution of knowledge worldwide, e.g. the creative commons licence⁶. In addition, it is very interesting that web resources became more and more interactive during the last decade, thereby supporting the pedagogical concept of action-oriented learning. Supplemental, the Web turned out to become a social network, where communication and cooperation is very common (Web 2.0) and which could be used to promote project-oriented work in prison schools.

On the other hand, the Web implies possible risks of abuse, theft (of identity data), illegal content, etc. This is generally true in daily life as well as in business applications of the web. But these and many other risks are even much more relevant in the detention situation. Major risks comprise:

- Prepare escaping from prison by means of ICT use in e-learning;
- Performing forbidden communication within or between the prisons or with the outside world;
- Destroying and/or manipulating of user data, learning material, or computers;
- Gaining access to prohibited services etc.

The LICOS security concept copes with all these risks and is able to block all illegal actions. It is not the right place in this pedagogical paper to describe the various technical and organizational measures, but it can be said that a secure use of educational Web resources proved to be possible. Full details are described in the paper "LICOS Security Concept", 28.12.2010).

7 Changing role of teachers

The traditional understanding of the role of teachers is that of an instructor. The learning model behind this assumes that teachers have to tell the students the facts ("the truth") and students then are able to comprehend them and apply the "transferred information" to problem solving. As explained above this simple model does not work.

Teachers in modern learning in general and particularly in prison education and e-learning have to change and extend their role. Instead of simple instruction, imparting knowledge in a problem-oriented context will characterise the teacher of the future. Teachers will become "facilitators" who support students' individual learning styles, and tell them more about how to learn instead of what to learn. They will become "moderators" in cooperative learning processes performed by students. They will try to encourage thoughts and reflections of the students. Their task is "advice giving", what is much more challenging than presentation of solutions.

It is obvious that this "new teacher" himself needs further education to cope with his extended role in modern prison education. Therefore, in LICOS there will be training courses for prison teachers. These courses start with imparting an understanding of the LICOS educational principles by discussing present shortcomings in the methodology of prison education (critique phase), creating ideas to overcome these deficits (fantasy phase), and finally developing practical solutions which take the actual (prison) conditions into account (implementation phase). Methodologically this will be done in the framework of the "future workshop" concept (Zukunftswerkstatt, [Jungk, Müllert 1987]). On the base of the developed pedagogical understanding the LICOS toolbox is examined

⁶ See: <http://creativecommons.org/>

for suitable functions to support the chosen teaching methods. Finally the handling of the LICOS system is demonstrated and then trained hands-on by the teachers at LICOS workstations. In this training teachers work on given tasks (creating a course, uploading material, setting up learning activities like learning forums or assignments, etc.) The whole LICOS training is divided into two or three parts taking place at different times. The first part is described above and ends with a joint discussion of the tasks which the teachers need to introduce LICOS in the context of their courses. Teachers then perform these implementation tasks in a certain period of time, e.g. three or four weeks. Thereafter, teachers meet in a second (and maybe third) workshop, discussing their initial experiences and clarify remaining questions about the methodology and handling of the system. The third phase consists of providing a hotline where special questions can be asked, being answered by “key users” or platform administrators.)

Finally, the question is: Who is a teacher? Besides the formally certified teachers it makes sense to include other people in the teaching process. As mentioned above – in the case of peer teaching – advanced students can take over the role of a tutor helping novices in a course. Even further, prison guards and officers without formal teachers’ qualification can support the learners. In many cases the motivation of prison guards goes far beyond pure surveillance. They are interested in the development of the inmates’ personality and successful re-integration. So, they might take the role of a “learning advocate”, encouraging inmates in daily life communication to go further on the educational path. They also can provide practical support, e. g. by supervising the use of the computer classrooms outside formal teaching hours to enable students to use the system for homework and personal learning off-time.

8 Conclusion

Prison inmates have special deficits which impede education and training. The LICOS system has to cope with these problems. The action-oriented approach of “learning by acting” is further developed in LICOS to become an appropriate set of didactical methods and tools for prison education. The constructivist approach is already supported by the basic LMS used by LICOS, the open source system Moodle. LICOS constitutes a further development of Moodle with respect to the special needs of learners in penitentiary institutions.

LICOS has to cope with the specific detention-related contradiction between the freedom learning needs and the demand for a security-oriented prison regime. Nevertheless, even within the limits and constraints of a prison regime, the e-learning scenario with LICOS as a flexible toolbox which can be adapted to the special needs of the various types of prisons is going to support prison education in an innovative way and thereby plays an important role in reintegration of (ex-) offenders into society.

The pedagogical concept and practice are developed on a European level, with European partners who contribute to the result in a substantial way. After developing, introducing and evaluating the LICOS system in the pilot prisons, the way to distribute the methodology, the system and the experiences from piloting is open for further dissemination work. This has to be done on prison level, and even more important by spreading the LICOS recommendations about e-learning in prison education in Europe which resulted from a common discussion process to the political level.

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