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TITLE:

Prisoners of Neo-liberalism: Incarcerated Students and the neo-liberal project in the digital age

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The provision of higher education to imprisoned students in the new digital age, and against the political backdrop of neo-liberal reform, is a complex and contradictory business. In part because incarceration, like education, has been reorganized in recent years as a global business, or at least as a corporate institution, bound to economic priorities. This paper reflects on the consequences of neo-liberal reforms in both universities and prisons for the most marginalised and vulnerable population of tertiary students, those who are incarcerated. Reform enterprises have potential to both frustrate and enable the further education of inmates, especially in Australia, where most incarcerated students still have no direct access to the internet, despite the recent emergence of 'learn or earn' prisons. In particular, this paper draws on focus group interviews with university students in Queensland prisons to identify the challenges faced by incarcerated students in their own words and experiences. It also explores attempts to overcome some of these challenges through the development of new learning technologies and strengthened relationships between a regional university and correctional centres. Finally, it contextualises these digital learning initiatives against the political economy of the new market 'technologies' of government.