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Shakespearean play breaks new boundaries

Published: 24 April 2009
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Next week will mark a milestone production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* when it is performed by inmates of the maximum-security

Borallon Correctional Centre.

The performance on May 1 to Borallon staff, prisoners and invited guests is the culmination of an [innovative education program](#) run by the [Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble \(QSE\)](#) and led by artistic director and UQ lecturer Dr Rob Pensalfini.

The production is only the second time Australian prisoners have staged a Shakespearean play, the first being *The Tempest*, which capped off QSE's pilot program in 2006.

"In 2006 *The Tempest's* themes of incarceration, isolation and loss of privilege and freedom were recognised as important and relevant from the prisoners' perspectives," Dr Pensalfini said.

"With *Julius Caesar*, the discussion of the use and misuse of power, betrayal, loyalty and violence has proved pertinent.

"The heart of the program's philosophy is that violent behaviour often comes out of an inability to express negative thoughts and emotions in words, so it's been important to be able to discuss and dramatise violent situations in a safe environment, a task made easier by the passion and precision of Shakespeare's language."

Dr Pensalfini said a crucial part of the program is that the themes have been identified by the prisoners themselves, teased out by using improvisational theatre games and exercises.

"Shakespearean speeches such as 'Tomorrow and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day' are also given extra gravity and truth when spoken by someone who spends much of his day in a cell," he said.

"The theatre games and exercise have been great, but it's the words of Shakespeare that have been the real transformer. Speaking this stuff automatically causes the speaker to reflect on how it might apply to him."

Dr Pensalfini said a performance was an especially effective way to develop prisoners' social skills and assist with their rehabilitation, because the players worked as a team to successfully produce the show.

Approximately 20 inmates have been working with Dr Pensalfini and three of his QSE colleagues who have been leading weekly theatre games and rehearsals since February.

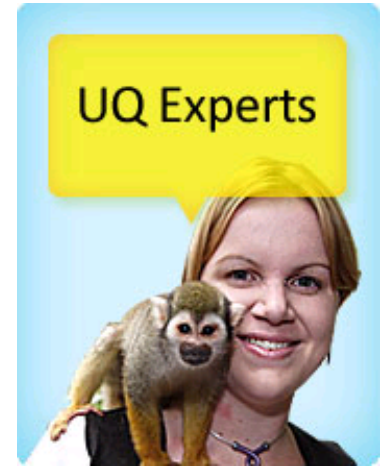
Called Arts in Community Enhancement (ACE), the project has been made possible by support from Borallon staff and UQ,



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and has also received financial assistance from the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

Media: Dr Pensalfini (r.pensalfini@uq.edu.au), Anne Pensalfini (pensalfi@bigpond.net.au) or Cameron Pegg from UQ Communications (07 3365 2049, c.pegg@uq.edu.au)

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