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- ↳ [Alumni news](#)
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**Community Services & Facilities**

**Events & Activities**

**Supporting UQ**

- [About us](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [Home](#)

[Home](#) » [Newsletter](#) » [The Connector - Winter 2009](#) » Community project providing breakthroughs with inmates

## ➔ Community project providing breakthroughs with inmates

[print this page](#)

A breakthrough community project teaching inmates to express themselves through Shakespeare has had its first encore performance.

A group from the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble led by Artistic Director and UQ Linguistics Professor, Rob Pensalfini rounded off their 2009 program with a prisoner performance of Julius Caesar.

The performance which featured a dozen inmates and used retractable knives was eagerly watched by fellow inmates and family members.

The group's 2006 performance of The Tempest was an Australian first, combining the ensemble's extensive Shakespeare experience with theatre principles developed by recently deceased Brazilian actor, Augusto Boal.

Known as Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), the principles are used to humanise the oppressor, which according to Professor Pensalfini lends itself perfectly to Shakespeare.

"Shakespeare humanises everyone in his plays, from the clowns to the kings, the monsters to the maidens," he said.

Professor Pensalfini reasons that inmates often find themselves incarcerated because they are "unable to see the humanity in their adversary".

According to prison employees, outcomes have been good with participants generally becoming more cooperative after the program.

"The guys pull together in ways that are inventive and show solidarity that is uncommon even among professional actors," he said.

"One prisoner said that as a result of the project he began to feel the hurt that he had caused – to his victims and to his family."

While Professor Pensalfini suspects the effects of the program could only be short-lived he is hopeful it will be adopted full-time as part of

the facility's list of activities.

"Theatre and Shakespeare performance in particular has been very powerful in my life," he said.

"If I can share that with other people, particularly people in marginalised communities where possibility seems limited or absent, then that's what I would like to do."

*Jane Furnas, Intern Journalist – UQ Advancement Office*

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