

**ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMING IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES:
AN OVERVIEW OF ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT,
EFFECTIVENESS IN PROMOTING POSITIVE REINTEGRATION,
AND IMPACT ON RECIDIVISM**

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A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science in Adult Education

By

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2014

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the faculty members with whom I have had the privilege of working during this program, especially my advisor, Dr. Patricia Bromley, and my seminar paper advisor, Dr. Richard Rogers, for their valuable guidance and assistance during this journey.

To my parents, Dean Treutelaar and Danna Treutelaar, who have always believed in my abilities and encouraged my educational endeavors.

To the love of my life, Ronald Spaciol, who helps me to persevere forward to achieve my goals. Your unwavering love, support, and encouragement mean the world to me, and I am so happy to have you by my side as I complete this journey.

And finally, this paper is dedicated in loving memory of my grandmother, Ethel Boegh, whose spirit continues to guide me in everything I do. Nonnie, even though you can't be here, I know you are always with me, and I hope I have made you proud. Thank you for being a wonderful and positive influence in my life and for continuing to be my angel...you will always be my best friend...I love you.

Abstract

Most of the nearly 700,000 state prisoners released each year are ill equipped to meet the challenges of reentering society (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). “More than two-thirds of released prisoners are arrested within three years of leaving prison, and almost half are re-incarcerated because they are lacking marketable skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Approximately 40% of inmates in state and federal prisons and jails do not have a high school credential, compared to 18% of the general population (U.S. Department of Education 2009). With correctional facility operating budgets already stretched thin and public support for additional funding often nonexistent, educational programming for inmates is often significantly impacted by a lack of funding.

The information that was utilized and presented in this paper included empirical and theoretical findings gathered and derived from secondary sources, including accredited, scholarly journals and dependable Internet sources including the United States Department of Education and National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web sites. The data utilized for this paper was analyzed through the application of a variety of theories, and common characteristics of successful programs were compared to determine best practices in regard to the reduction of recidivism rates.

After a review of correctional programming and various sources of data, it can be concluded that recidivism rates can be positively impacted by an offender’s involvement in correctional education programming. While all studies yield varied results, all programs and data reviewed for the preparation of this paper demonstrated positive

results in regard to recidivism rates. Recommendations for improvements relating to adult education in correctional facilities were made, including the creation of a universal definition of recidivism, the need for collaboration among key stakeholders, balancing rehabilitation versus retribution, and the importance of implementing educational activities in manageable increments.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the induction of educational programming in correctional settings in the late 1700s an ebb and flow existed between weighing the benefit of such programming to both the offender and society against the desire of the public to impose punishment on offenders. “During the 1970s, a growing disillusionment occurred among policy makers concerning the effectiveness of prison education programs, especially when research published by Robert Martinson became known as “the nothing works report” (Wade, 2007, p. 27). Following this, the emphasis shifted towards focusing on punishment rather than on rehabilitation, leading to fewer prison education programs (Wade, 2007). At the time of this study, a renewed interest existed in prison education based on escalating rates of incarceration and recidivism, as well as statistics revealing that less educated adults were more likely to be incarcerated than more educated adults (Wade, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

A wide disparity existed in educational attainment between the general and correctional populations in the United States. Especially important to the field of adult education was inmates’ education because these adults may not have had the opportunity to value and embrace education at an earlier time (Wade, 2007). Since a strong correlation was established between a lack of education and one’s involvement in a life filled with poverty and crime, researchers concluded that “prison education programs should be rehabilitative, and should enable inmates to secure employment

upon release, thereby giving them an opportunity to become contributing members of society” (Wade, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

According to Wade (2007, p. 27), three purposes have been identified for instituting educational programs for inmates:

The premise of correctional education is threefold: first, as inmates gain knowledge and skills, they should be qualified for employment upon their release into the community; second, education in prison should serve as a mechanism that enables inmates to learn to think more responsibly; and lastly, this combination should make it less likely that they will return to prison.

The focus of such programs should be to educate, train, and prepare inmates to become successfully reintegrated into the community as law-abiding citizens.

Correctional education programs were intended to break the cycle of “catch-and-release” by providing inmates with more opportunities to develop the skills required to succeed in workplaces and communities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

These programs range from adult basic education and secondary instruction that enable high school dropouts to earn: (1) high school credentials; (2) career and technical education credentials to equip inmates with the occupational skills needed to find and maintain employment; and (3) postsecondary education credentials to provide inmates with necessary skills to keep pace with today’s changing labor market. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Other programs were designed to provide special instruction for inmates with disabilities and limited English proficiency.

Significance of the Study

One major obstacle that often impacted the implementation of educational programming was the sheer volume of offenders in need of such instruction. The rate of incarceration increased dramatically between 1973 and 2000, climbing from 110 per 100,000 to 470 per 100,000 at the turn of the century (Visher & Travis, 2003). “In 2001, America posted a new record of 1.3 million people held in prison” (Visher & Travis, 2003, p. 89). With rare exception the people sentenced to prison come home. Thus, the prison build up from 1980 to 2000 resulted in many more people returning to society who spent time in prison, often with little investment in their educational or vocational skills (Visher & Travis, 2003). “Scholars, policy makers, and practitioners have recently begun to pay serious attention to the issues of prisoner reentry and reintegration” (Visher & Travis, 2003, p. 91).

At the time this research was conducted, most of the nearly 700,000 state prisoners released each year were ill equipped to meet the challenges of reentering society (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). “More than two-thirds of released prisoners are arrested within three years of leaving prison, and almost half are re-incarcerated because they are lacking marketable skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). To make matters worse, these statistics did not account for federal inmates and those incarcerated in jails caught in the cycle of catch-and-release.

The inconsistency of imprisonment lay in society’s expectations of both retribution and rehabilitation (Bayliss, 2003, p.158). Custody could be used as a deterrent to remove offenders from society in order to protect the public and as a punishment itself. “The more controversial function of prison is to provide opportunities

for individuals to reflect on their values and to prepare the 'less adequate' for the outside world" (Bayliss, 2003, p. 158). Quite often, public opinion fluctuated as to which of these equally important goals should be made the priority of prison sentences. Those in favor of the retribution focus may have been reluctant to support educational programs, which often encouraged "negotiation and choice, self-confidence and self-worth," and the development of critical thinking skills (Bayliss, 2003, p. 159).

When considering the potential impact such programming could have, it was beneficial to understand the concept of reentry as well as to examine the data on incarceration rates. "Reentry is not a qualitative term, but simply refers to the process of leaving prison and returning to society" (Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry & Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders, 2002, p. 5). In fact, the cycle of reentry and re-incarceration had social consequences that reached far beyond the immediate social circle of offenders, "the most obvious being the effect on public safety, and an increase in victimization, as well as fear of victimization" (Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry & Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders, 2002, p. 5). The social value of reintegration was measured by a formerly incarcerated person's ability to contribute to the support of their family, provide a healthy environment for their children, and enhance the positive human resources in the community (Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry & Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders, 2002).

Methods of Approach

The information that was utilized and presented in this paper included empirical and theoretical findings gathered and derived from secondary sources, including accredited, scholarly journals and dependable Internet sources including the United

States Department of Education and National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web sites. The data utilized for this paper was analyzed through the application of a variety of theories, and common characteristics of successful programs were compared to determine best practices in regard to the reduction of recidivism rates.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Prison Educational Programming

Although education had been a component of the U.S. criminal justice system from its origins, beginning with a school at the first state-run prison in Philadelphia, it was only in the latter half of the 20th century that educators began to provide college-level instruction to inmates in correctional institutions nationwide (Wright, 2001, p. 11). Few programs existed at the start: in 1965 only 12 postsecondary programs operated regularly (Wright, 2001, p.11). “However, by 1976, there were 237 programs, and in 1982, 350 programs were running in fifty states, districts, Puerto Rico, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons” (Wright, 2001, p. 11). Many experts credited legislation affecting the U.S. system of higher education such as the 1944 GI Bill and the Basic Opportunity Grant of 1972 (later termed the Pell Grant program) as necessary developments for the growth of correctional postsecondary education (Wright, 2001).

The first true American prison was the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia, created by the Quakers in 1791. “The prison had three objectives: to ensure public security, reformation of prisoners, and ‘humanity towards unhappy members of society’” (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 5). In partial order to achieve this goal, the architects added a school to the prison in 1798 to help inmates develop and improve their skills in the principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Since then, education expanded throughout the prison system in the United States – as did the controversy over rehabilitation versus punishment. As early as the 1820s, Samuel Hopkins of the New York Legislature argued that “inmate life had not been sufficiently severe and should produce more terror and suffering” (Coley & Barton,

2006, p. 5). Such views gave rise to the Auburn, N.Y., system, which subscribed to the belief that “too much faith had been placed in the convict’s reformability” (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 5). Thus, education got little attention in the Auburn system.

During the late 19th century, Superintendent of the New York State Reformatory at Elmira, Zebulon Brockway, became known across the nation for his use of education and training in prison (Coley & Barton, 2006). Brockway placed academic programs (and later vocational programs) into the hands of professional, full-time teachers who were drawn from the community. Time served depended heavily on the participation and performance of inmates in the education and training system (Coley & Barton, 2006).

When the rehabilitation approach to corrections was in favor, prison education prospered. When rehabilitation was out of favor, prison education languished. The use of education and training in prisons spread in the 1930s, receded, and then came back into favor in the 1960s (Coley & Barton, 2006). Since the 1980s, tough treatment was the trend. “Correctional education was largely excluded from the main currents of prison reform during the 1980s when prison polls showed that Americans became increasingly hostile and suspect of all rehabilitative programs aimed at reintegrating prisoners into the mainstream” (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 5).

During the 1980s and 1990s, state and federal spending for correctional education programs decreased significantly. At the time of this research because of budget problems, states such as California, Florida, and Illinois cut correctional budgets even further (Coley & Barton, 2006). At the federal level, Congress passed a law in 1994 prohibiting inmates from receiving Pell Grants, effectively defunding

postsecondary education in prisons (Coley & Barton, 2006). The lack of stable funding sources for prison education programming, coinciding with a surge in the size of a nation's prison population, created significant issues related to implementing programming.

Prison educational programming not only was influenced by correctional policy and practices but also was shaped by the historical trends within higher education at large, according to Wright (2001, p. 11):

There are three key areas in which the expansion of the American system of higher education significantly has influenced the growth of prison education: the rise of public and community colleges, the liberal arts curriculum, and the implementation of funding systems such as the Pell grant program.

While these three areas fostered the development of postsecondary education, they also influenced its recent constriction (Wright, 2001).

Limited Funding Resources

With correctional facility operating budgets already stretched thin and public support for additional funding often nonexistent, educational programming for inmates was often significantly impacted by a lack of funding. Basic Education Opportunity grants (later named Pell grants), provided by 1972 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965, was probably the single most important influence on the growth of prison education throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Wright, 2001). The Pell grant program enabled inmates who met certain financial criteria to get aid for their college-level courses. Although estimates of the proportion of Pell grants that went to prisoners were small, ranging from 0.82% to 1.2% in the early 1990s, the impact of the program

on increasing inmate access to education was significant (Wright, 2001). A national study of postsecondary correctional education found that Pell grants were the most frequently named major source of funding (Wright, 2001).

In 1992, those sentenced to death or life without the possibility of parole were made ineligible for awards (Wright, 2001). Pell grants were eliminated in 1993/1994 when Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and the Higher Education Reauthorization Act of 1994, in response to the Clinton Administration's move to get "tough on crime" (Rose, 2004, p. 83). Due to the elimination of these non-repayable federal education grants for prisoners, a noticeable reduction occurred in the number and range of post-secondary educational programs offered in correctional institutions (Rose, 2004). "This trend, of the significant reliance of Pell grants and then the exclusion of inmates from the program, is specific to prison education." (Wright, 2001, p. 14)

Nationally, the impact of the ban on Pell grants for prisoners was significant and had unfavorable effects:

One academic year after the passage of the 1994 Crime Bill, the number of college-level programs in prisons decreased by 40 percent and the number of prisoners using such programs by 44 percent, while prison populations in state and federal facilities had grown by 7 percent over the same period. (Wright, 2001, p. 14)

In 1982, the most commonly cited source of funding for prison courses was Pell grants, but by the 1995-96 academic year this shifted, as students relied upon Perkins or private foundation grants and private funds (Wright, 2001, p. 14).

In order to maximize the educational experience for inmates in a cost-effective manner, most postsecondary education programs in correctional facilities were administered through community colleges. The community college was the higher education institution that most had at the center of its mission the improvement of access to higher education for offenders (Wright, 2001). “The Vocational Education Act of 1963, its amendments of 1968 and 1972, and the 1984 Perkins Vocational Education Act significantly increased funds allotted to community colleges, and consequently, two-year colleges witnessed an enormous growth in the 1960s and 1970s” (Wright, 2001, p. 12). Community extension programs, such as prison education, flourished under this climate of generous state and federal funding for post-secondary education (Wright, 2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009):

Community college fees are far more affordable for prisons because: (1) tuition costs and fees at community colleges average \$2,272 annually, which is less than half of the annual cost at public four-year institutions (\$5,836) and (2) federal funding for correctional education has not kept pace with the growing prison population.

Tuition cost was also a factor for inmates paying for part or all of education expenses. Inmates had little or no access to student aid programs to help with tuition since the removal of Pell grant eligibility and subsequent elimination of many state financial aid resources for inmates. They also generally did not have the personal funds or earn sufficient wages (typically less than \$1 per hour) through prison work to pay for education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Moreover, these wages often had to

first pay for other such expenses as medical services, phone service, food, and supplies.

Captive Students, an Educational Testing Service report published in early 1996, reported a decline in the resources available for education and training in prisons as well as a wide variation of resources among the states. According to the report, at least half of all state correctional institutions had cut their inmate educational programs over the prior five years (Coley & Barton, 2006). Average state expenditures for inmate instruction were often difficult to determine due to the lack of available data. "In 1993-94, the most recent time period when conclusive data was available, the total budget per inmate varied from just under \$2,500 in Minnesota and about \$1,300 in Vermont, down to almost nothing in California, Mississippi, and Wisconsin" (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 17). From 1990 to 2000, the proportion of prison staff providing education fell from 4.1% to 3.2% of the total staff (Coley & Barton, 2006). The decline in educational staff, combined with the large increase in the inmate population, "boosted the number of inmates per instructor during that period from 65.6 to 95.4, or 45 percent" (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 17). In a 2005 interview, Gary Harkins, who started working for the Oregon Department of Corrections in 1980, indicated that an inmate could then learn a vocation or study all the way to a Ph.D. As of 2005, the 2,000-inmate Oregon State Penitentiary had not one teacher on staff (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Research conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy showed that "corrections officials are finding innovative ways to support postsecondary programs in their prison systems" (Erisman & Contardo, 2005, p. v). "Despite the loss of Pell Grant eligibility, prisoners are participating in higher education in record numbers nationwide"

(Erisman & Contardo, 2005, p. v). Additionally, legislation passed from 1995 to 2005 provided supplementary funding resources to struggling correctional facilities for the purposes of education and training. The federal government, as part of the presidential Prisoner Reentry Initiative, provided more than \$100 million to communities to develop programming and training strategies to improve employment and other post-release outcomes of ex-offenders (U.S Department of Education, 2009). The president's Prisoner Reentry Initiative was reauthorized and its programs expanded by the *Second Chance Act of 2007*. Inmate access to postsecondary education opportunities was increased by the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008* (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). As noted by Erisman and Contardo (2005, p. v):

With additional funding and concentrated efforts to reduce the many barriers that still make it difficult for prisoners to gain access to higher education, postsecondary correctional education programs offer the potential to provide incarcerated men and women with a second chance at productive citizenship.

Implementing Education in a Secure Setting

Teaching in a prison posed a series of unique challenges. A lack of financial resources and structural and institutional policies created pedagogical dilemmas for instructors (McCarty, 2006). Prison culture and academic culture were, in a way, completely opposed. Prisons were closed institutions in which control was the primary concern and questioning authority was not tolerated. In academia, colleges, and universities were theoretically open places that encouraged questioning (McCarty, 2006). Operating a college inside a secure institution where safety precautions were the first priority required adaptation, "but the rewards that come from teaching an

engaged group of students, and the benefits to prisoners and society as a whole, make the limitations, both structural and financial, worth enduring” (McCarty, 2006, p. 87).

At the time of the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s survey in 2005, educational programming for inmates “was often offered by public, two-year (community) colleges. On-site instruction was the most frequently utilized instructional method, but some prison systems offered distance education programs using video or satellite instruction (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). “Providing general computer skills is possible, but Internet access is forbidden to inmates to prohibit continuing criminal activity through outside communications” (Case & Fasenfest, 2004, p. 35). This lack of access prevented offenders from receiving a complete educational experience and resulted in a culture shock to those who were released and planned to continue educational programming or apply new skills to obtain employment.

“Designing a college-level class for prisoners requires a different approach than in noncarceral institutions, not just because of the limitations imposed by book options but also because of the limited access to resources” (McCarty, 2006, p. 91). Unlike colleges and universities on the outside, prisons did not have extensive academic libraries. Instructors were often tasked with providing students with the majority of research materials. Creativity was a requirement for those teaching behind prison walls, and it often meant thinking through assignments much differently (McCarty, 2006).

In addition to limited resources, larger pedagogical issues that impacted the classroom varied from traditional dilemmas faced in a classroom outside of prison to challenges that occurred only within correctional facilities (McCarty, 2006). Basic

factors like accounting for attendance became a daily problem. Students missed class not because they were out partying the night before and slept through an alarm clock but because the wing of the prison was on lockdown (McCarty, 2006). Sometimes the entire prison could be placed on lockdown causing the semester to extend beyond the original timeline to make up lost days. Involuntary work assignment changes, transfers to other prisons, and other administrative matters could also interfere with class time (McCarty, 2006).

Educational Demographics of Inmates

General Demographic Statistics. Approximately 40% of inmates in state and federal prisons and jails did not have a high school credential, compared to 18% of the general population (U.S. Department of Education 2009). “Subgroups of state prison inmates who had not completed high school or obtained a GED include: 53 percent of Hispanics; 44 percent of Blacks; 27 percent of Whites; and 52 percent of inmates age 24 or younger” (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 9). While more than one-half of the general population had some college education, less than one-fourth of all state and federal inmates had any postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Given these educational attainment levels, it was not surprising that the literacy levels of prisoners were low as well. On all measurable levels, the literacy level of prisoners was much lower than that of the U.S. population as a whole (Coley & Barton, 2006). “In a 1992 study, about one-third of prisoners scored in the lowest levels of prose, document, and quantitative literacy, and another third performed in the second-lowest level” (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 10).

In totaling the adults who in 2003 were on probation, in jail, or in prison, or on parole, the numbers approached 6.9 million, representing an overall increase of 274% since 1980 (Coley & Barton, 2006). Since 1985 the number of people incarcerated jumped from about 744,000 to almost 1.6 million in 1995, to more than 2.1 million in 2004, totaling an overall increase of 186% (Coley & Barton, 2006). While these numbers were staggering, the relative growth of that population also had to be considered. The rate of persons incarcerated between 1985 and 2004 increased from 313 persons per 100,000 U.S. residents to 726 persons (Coley & Barton, 2006). Various reasons could account for this increase in the prison population, including mandatory prison terms and lengthened minimum sentences for repeat offenders, “Three Strikes” legislation, truth-in-sentencing laws, and an increased amount of parolees returning to prison after committing technical violations (Coley & Barton, 2006).

This lack of education credentials and workforce skills among inmates was a significant factor to consider because 95% of the more than 2.3 million inmates incarcerated in the United States were eventually released (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Based on a 2003 report from the Department of Justice, “the personal monthly income of 63% of incarcerated inmates in state prisons was less than \$1,000 per month before their arrest,” confirming an inability to find stable, sustainable employment prior to incarceration (Wade, 2007, p. 27). Low-skilled ex-offenders faced a labor market that increasingly required post-secondary education degrees or certificates (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Moreover, research demonstrated that incarceration could undermine a person’s ability to find and maintain a living-wage

job. Lacking the skills necessary to function successfully in society and on the job, many ex-offenders returned to criminal behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Special Issues for Female Inmates. While most female prisoners were offered some form of educational programming, the majority did not take advantage of these opportunities. A significant drop (36%) in women's participation in post secondary education occurred between 1991 and 1997, the period in which Pell grant availability was eliminated; however, the removal of Pell grants should not be over-emphasized when examining the impact on women's participation in prison education, as a number of other funding sources remained available (Rose, 2004). Since most women entered prison on public assistance and unemployed, a logical conclusion would be that a proportion of those women who desired to pursue a post-secondary education while incarcerated might have faced problems finding the monetary resources necessary to attend these programs (Rose, 2004).

To complete an explanation of women's participation in correctional educational programming, research identified other characteristics that impacted these rates. One such characteristic was the increasing size of the female prison population. While the prison incarceration rate of men had been increasing, with a 207% increase between 1983 and 1998, the increase was strikingly low in comparison to the 344% increase in the number of women incarcerated during the same time period (Rose, 2004). The escalating numbers put an increased amount of pressure on services provided by women's prisons that were already inadequate and substandard (Rose, 2004).

Female prisoners had fewer available programs from which to choose, and the programs available tended to be of lesser quality when compared to those offered to

male inmates. This circumstance was regrettable as women prisoners were more in need of educational programming, as reported by Rose (2004, p. 86):

Statistical reports of the 1990s clearly show that most female prisoners enter prison uneducated (about 20 percent are illiterate), with few skills (many have only held minimum-wage jobs), from a low socioeconomic status (about 60 percent are on public assistance), and unemployed.

Women who needed to improve proficiency in these areas typically left prison just as they arrived: “unskilled and poor” (Rose, 2004, p. 86). Explanations for the low priority placed on institutional education for women ranged from suggestions of women being incapable of successfully completing educational programming in comparison to male prisoners to more “politically correct” explanations suggesting that budgetary concerns did not allow such inequalities to be addressed (Rose, 2004, p. 86). Whatever the explanation, the result of these inequalities had the potential to diminish a woman’s motivation to pursue an education while incarcerated.

Female inmates, perhaps more than male counterparts, faced considerable apprehension while separated from children and families. Significant differences were shown to exist between the proportion of educational participants receiving visits from children and/or family and those who did not, suggesting a likely importance of family and/or children visitation in women’s participation in prison education programs (Rose, 2004). If, as the data suggests, incarcerated mothers might have been less likely to participate in correctional programming due to the anxieties developed when separated from children, “policy makers may miss out on an opportunity to indirectly promote participation in both educational and vocational programming” (Rose, 2004, p. 88).

The specifics that helped explain why some female inmates broke through the structural barriers limiting their participation in prison education, and why those who did were successful, were often unknown. A number of general themes could be relied on to provide a general understanding and be used to guide future research and policy development. Cultural capital allocation was likely to be one of the most important factors for female inmates who participated in programming as identified by Rose (2004, p. 93):

If an inmate had been exposed to the importance of education, to the linguistic structures and patterns of authority used in educational settings, and to teacher expectations, she is likely to acquire cultural capital resources beneficial to the educational experience.

Inmates with Learning Disabilities. It took many decades for the significance of the mental health of offenders to become acknowledged within the criminal justice system; and learning disabilities, when acknowledged at all, tended to be included under this heading instead of being seen as a separate disability (Hayes, 2007).

Several major issues emerge from both literature and practice as requiring further attention, including: uncertainty about the numbers of offenders with learning disabilities and their prevalence within the criminal justice system; lack of knowledge about learning disabilities on the part of professionals within the criminal justice system; and a lack of services in correctional facilities designed to meet the particular needs of offenders with learning disabilities. (Hayes, 2007, p. 147)

Research conducted in the UK and internationally suggested that individuals with a learning disability were over-represented in the criminal justice system in comparison with their numbers in the population generally (Hayes, 2007). Regardless of the number of offenders with learning disabilities in the criminal justice system, the critical issue remained the implementation of effective services to achieve a decrease in recidivism. Attempts were made in the UK and internationally to institute policies and practices that identified offenders with a learning disability, but identification was often a difficult and sometimes time-consuming task (Hayes, 2007).

Many services linked to the criminal justice system were grappling with the difficulty of screening for learning disabilities. "Accurate identification of an offender's learning disability is rendered even more difficult by the fact that the average IQ of the general prison population tends to be below the population average" (Hayes, 2007, p. 148). Failure to identify offenders impacted by a learning disability ensured a continued inability to make progress in the advancement of educational skills.

Theoretical Framework

In order to develop strong rehabilitative educational programs in institutional settings, it was crucial to first understand some of the reasons offenders might have been motivated to commit crimes in the first place. An awareness of this theoretical framework allowed professionals not only to have a sense of the beliefs and values that could have impacted the choice to engage in criminal behavior but also to understand how participation in a prison educational program might influence both individual inmates and the institution as a whole. The following sections summarize three

criminology theories--Social Learning Theory, Social Bond Theory, and Anomie/Strain Theory--ones that are more applicable as related to the goals of correctional education.

Social Bond Theory. As described by Travis Hirschi, social bond theory operated under the premise that an individual's social bonds and emotional attachments could help to prevent involvement in criminal activity (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). When the opportunity to engage in such activity was present, the potential offender might choose to avoid involvement due to concern over what others to whom they were attached might think (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). Conversely, when an individual was void of such connections, engagement in criminal activity held little social or emotional consequence. Proponents of social bond theory had long contended that people develop bonds to social institutions when they develop "attachments to other people, commitments to conformity, involvement in conventional activities, and beliefs in the legitimacy of conventional values and norms" (Rose, 2004, p. 88).

Promoting participation in institutional programming allowed inmates to bond with instructors serving as positive educational role models as well as to become involved in a mainstream of socially respected activity that served positively not only in the prison setting but also upon release. When inmates developed social bonds to the prison and became involved in the conventional activities promoted by the prison (including educational programming), they were likely to develop attachment to and involvement in other programs offered (Rose, 2004). As a result of such involvement, "their chances of rehabilitation will be greatly improved because they become more motivated to improve their current situation through their stronger social bonds to conventional value systems and conventional pursuits" (Rose, 2004, p. 89).

Social Learning Theory. The modern version of social learning theory, presented by Professor Ronald L. Akers, was adopted from Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory. Differential association theory assumed that criminal behavior was learned behavior and offenders learned specific techniques for committing crimes as well as motivations, attitudes, and rationalizations for crimes (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001). Akers took these principles and adapted them into his own theory, which he used to explain why and how offenders decided to commit crime.

The main basis of social learning theory maintained that criminal behavior was influenced by its consequences; that is, an individual would continue to engage in criminal activity if he believed that the benefits could and will be reproduced (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001). In turn, if the benefits were seen as being worth the involvement, the offender would most likely ignore the negative consequences that might occur from participation in the criminal act. According to social learning theorists, individuals were most likely to become involved in criminal behavior when associating with other criminals and deviants to a greater extent than when associating with others who were non-criminal and conforming (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001).

Social learning theory promoted understanding of why an offender might not have chosen to invest in education prior to becoming incarcerated. If engaging in criminal activity resulted in a greater return on investment than attending school and completing assignments, it would make sense for an individual to choose to have needs met through illegal methods instead of working towards a diploma or degree in order to support themselves and their families. Applying this same logic to institutional programming, unless a clear pathway was established showing inmates the benefits to

engage in educational programming (transition to lower security, early release, ease of transition into the community), participation in such programming might not be viewed as being worth the effort.

Anomie/Strain Theory. Social theorist Robert K. Merton fashioned the Anomie (or Strain) Theory in an attempt to explain how social conditions influence criminal activity. American society was characterized by the goal of material wealth for which all individuals were supposed to strive. Strain theorists argued that all persons were evaluated in our society by the extent to which they were affluent and possessed the objects that wealth brings (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001). In a democratic society that emphasized open competition, the goal of material affluence was a universal goal, which everyone was expected to obtain regardless of position in life or financial resources available. A society that placed a great deal of emphasis on goal attainment without almost any concern for how one attained the goal became malintegrated. In Merton's view American society was malintegrated because goal attainment was emphasized far more than using approved and/or appropriate means to attain goals such as hard work and education (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001).

Anomie was related to crime because it encouraged people to use whatever means necessary to obtain monetary wealth, even violent or illegal means. A majority of the incarcerated population grew up in economically disadvantaged areas with limited access to educational and financial resources, often pushed into activities such as illegal drug sales and robbery to obtain monetary wealth. Similar to social learning theory, the best way to motivate engagement in educational activities was

demonstrating the value of education as it related to the attainment of socially prescribed material possessions.

Prison Educational Programming

Opportunities for Involvement. A lack of uniform and comprehensive data existed relating to the specifics of prison educational programming. This was probably indicative of the health of correctional education, which was affected by surging prison populations and tight budgets (Coley & Barton, 2006). “According to a June 2000 survey of correctional facilities, 89 percent of all institutions offered some type of education program—92 percent of federal, 90 percent of state, and 80 percent of private facilities” (Coley and Barton, 2006, p. 14). Most of these institutions provided vocational training (54%), basic adult education (76%), and secondary education (80%) (Coley & Barton, 2006). Special education services, college classes, and study-release programs were provided by fewer institutions.

Also noteworthy was that 74% of federal prisons offered college coursework, but the percentage of state and private institutions offering these programs was much lower (Coley & Barton, 2006). While most programs increased in number from 1995 to 2000, data showed some decline in the number of federal and state prisons providing adult education secondary education (although there was a substantial increase in such offerings in private prisons) (Coley & Barton, 2006). Vocational training increased in federal and private prisons, but not in state prisons.

Inmate Participation. According to data compiled by Coley and Barton (2006), inmates with the least amount of education were the most likely to be enrolled in education programs—around 60% compared with 40 to 50% of those with more

education—while rates for minorities were slightly higher than for white inmates. “Prison systems with larger postsecondary enrollments tend to have sizeable inmate populations, a focus on shorter vocational degree and certificate programs, and substantial public funding for postsecondary correctional education” (Erisman & Contardo, 2005, p. iv). “It is worth noting that prison inmates are not earning college degrees, even at the associate’s level, in any significant numbers” (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2005).

Eligibility requirements for prisoners to participate in programs varied greatly, as did circumstances and time of enrollment. Incentives to encourage inmate participation also varied and included receiving wages, gaining privileges, accumulating “good time,” or receiving a sentence reduction, and such incentives were critical to encouraging participation and perseverance (Coley & Barton, 2006). Another study found that inmates were more likely to participate in programs if they believed participation could help secure employment after release (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). That same study found that inmates who enrolled in programs while incarcerated had a better chance of maintaining employment and earning slightly higher wages than nonparticipants.

A trend developed toward mandatory participation from 1980 to 2000, a trend that stemmed from the adoption of mandatory education requirements by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in 1981 (Coley & Barton, 2006). At the time of the most recent survey in 2002, 44% of the states had passed such mandatory requirements (Coley & Barton, 2006). This kind of forced education remained the subject of debate. Some

believed it inappropriate or ineffective in getting inmates to learn while others pointed to research demonstrating otherwise (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Overview of Established Programs and Partnerships

Community and Technical College Partnerships. Most correctional programming offered in the United States was delivered by a community or technical college. Community colleges were committed to open access admission and became natural partners for prisons needing support in providing educational programming. In some states community colleges were contracted to provide the full range of correctional education, and a 2005 study conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy found that 68% of all postsecondary correctional education was provided by community colleges (Erisman & Contardo, 2005).

The relationship between community colleges and correctional institutions was mutually beneficial. Providing correctional education to inmates provided community colleges the opportunity to increase student enrollment and revenue and fulfill the mission to make education available to all local residents (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). By collaborating with community colleges, prisons strengthened and expanded educational services to prepare inmates more effectively for transitioning to life beyond prison (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Inmates prepared to reenter society were less likely to recidivate, in turn improving public safety and saving taxpayer dollars (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Prisons also selected community colleges as partners because of convenient locations. Most prisons required education services to be offered on-site, making the location of the education provider an important consideration. In Ohio for example, the

Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections connected prisons with the community college or university in the same education region as designated by the state higher education board (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Virginia utilized a similar approach, where community colleges were responsible for serving students residing in geographical regions established by the state. Colleges were able to recruit faculty to provide instruction to inmates on-site at the prison (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Proximity also enabled college advisors to meet with students throughout the year, administer academic placement assessments, conduct registration and orientation, and provide other support services. College partners helped the Department of Correctional Education stretch grant dollars by driving textbooks from one prison to another to be reused rather than forcing the prisons to purchase new books (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)

Critical to the success of any correctional and educational partnership was the assignment of responsibility for program management. A study published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009 defined the relationship:

In regard to the management structure, factors that determine partnership management include: (1) the emphasis the department of corrections (DOC) and state policymakers place on correctional education and (2) the assignment of responsibilities in the memorandum of agreement between the prisons and colleges.

In general the more decentralized the partnership was between prisons and community colleges, the more likely course work might not articulate from one college to the next or be recognized by business and industry (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Inmates

were often transferred from one facility to another for security and prerelease reasons and might be unable to continue the course or program in which previously enrolled. A similar transfer issue developed when inmates were released from prison because the location of release was generally not the same town where incarcerated and enrolled in college courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The following sections summarize educational programs that four locations--San Quentin; Orange County, FL; the state of Texas; and Bedford Hills Correctional Facility--developed as a result of relationships formed with local educational entities. The findings reported were significant in providing an effective framework other college and correctional partnerships could replicate.

San Quentin. The college program at San Quentin began in 1989 when Patten College (now University) in Oakland, California, established a biblical ministry certificate program (McCarty, 2006). Patten expanded its offerings and in 1993 achieved state accreditation for an associate of arts degree program at San Quentin, but in 1994 the elimination of Pell Grant funding forced Patten to cancel its plans for a college at San Quentin (McCarty, 2006). In 1996 the college program was revived with no budget, relying on volunteer instructors and donated textbooks. The program began with two classes but grew to offer 12 to 15 classes per semester, three semesters per year, with almost 200 inmate students participating (McCarty, 2006). "Between 1996 and 2006, 54 men earned their associate of arts degree through the program" (McCarty, 2006, p. 89).

"The college at San Quentin consists of three components: a college preparatory program, an associate of arts degree program in liberal arts, and a prerelease academic

advising program” (McCarty, 2006, p. 89). Students must have completed high school or earned a GED to enroll, and the majority of students spent at least two semesters in the college preparatory program. Tutors helped students in the preparatory program with remedial math and English to learn the skills needed to successfully complete college-level work (McCarty, 2006).

Once students completed the college preparatory component of the program, they moved into the associate of arts program taking courses in math and science, the social sciences, the humanities, and independent study courses. To facilitate transfer to four-year colleges and universities, the program also offered more advanced math, science, and foreign-language courses. The third component of “the program provides prerelease academic advising to help future parolees with their plans for continuing their education following their release, and supplies college catalogues and applications as well as financial aid information” (McCarty, 2006).

Program staff at San Quentin worked diligently to ensure the program’s continued success:

In 2004, the program director and other volunteers at the college program founded the Prison University Project to raise funds for the college program, to create a model for higher education prison programs in prisons that could be replicated elsewhere, and to expand San Quentin’s program to include a bachelor of arts degree and to raise awareness about prison education and rehabilitation (McCarty, 2006, p. 90).

While all of the sixty instructors, teaching assistants, and tutors teaching each semester were volunteers—largely graduate students or faculty from local universities—the

program now has two paid staff members; a program director and a program administrator (McCarty, 2006). Staff salaries and program supplies were paid with funds entirely raised by the Prison University Project (McCarty, 2006).

Orange County, Florida. The Orange County, Florida, Corrections Division provided educational and vocational programming to most inmates housed in its 3,300-bed jail. Courses were instructed by 70 fulltime instructors and “tailored to the short periods of time that jail inmates are incarcerated and typically run six hours a day, five days a week” (Finn, 1997, p. 2). Educational programming including adult basic education and GED preparation was offered alongside vocational, AODA, life skills, and mental health programming in an effort to meet the multiple needs of offenders (Finn, 1997). Financial backing came from a variety of sources including an inmate welfare fund, county school board funding, a U.S. Department of Education grant, and a matching grant from the University of Central Florida (Finn, 1997). The dedication of several volunteers from the community and correctional officers within the jail also helped the program to run as cost effectively as possible.

After departing the central booking facility, each offender spent five days of orientation in the main jail facility completing several evaluations to determine various needs including current level of education (Finn, 1997). After testing was completed, inmates met with a staff member who reviewed assessment results and explained the various types of programming available (Finn, 1997). Based on program preference and classification status, inmates were transferred to one of four specialized facilities that offered desired courses. Inmates testing below a fourth-grade level or requiring ESL support were provided with specialized instruction to help raise test scores before

being transferred to one of the four facilities providing higher level programming (Finn, 1997).

In addition to the courses offered, two other components were established to ensure the program's success. First, offenders had the opportunity to earn additional credit days reducing the sentence up to 11 days per month if all rules were followed (Finn, 1997). Inmates choosing to participate in programming also accessed many other benefits including air conditioning, television, visits and telephone use, and recreation activities (Finn, 1997). Conversely, those who refused participation in programming or engaged in misconduct in one of the specialized program units were relocated to the main jail facility, void of all comforts and privileges to which other units had access. A direct supervision inmate management system was put in place, allowing staff to have direct contact with inmates without standard physical barriers while also providing behavioral incentives and the ability to place inmates in the least restrictive possible environment based on classification level (Finn, 1997). Such practices allowed jail staff to closely monitor inmates and make adjustments quickly in the case of those who chose not to follow the established rules or actively participate in programming.

The programming offered in the Orange County Jail boasted some impressive accomplishments. The four specialized units had a lower staff to inmate ratio, significant operating cost reductions, construction cost savings, and lower rates of violence and decreased need for use of force (Finn, 1997). Even with shorter-term stays of most inmates, this program resulted in hundreds of inmates earning their GEDs (Finn, 1997). One of the most critical measures of program success was linked to

recidivism rates. A study conducted by the University of Central Florida compared three groups of offenders (those who spent five days or less in one of the four facilities, those who spent six to 45 days, and those who spent 46 days or more) and found the second group had a 34.7% reduction in recidivism compared to the first group, and the third group had a reduction rate of 23.7% in contrast to the first group (Finn, 1997).

Texas. Texas had one of the largest correctional systems in the country, with 109 institutions operating in the early 2000s (Fabelo, 2002). In 1969 Texas created the Windham School District (WSD) to oversee education of its inmates. WSD was funded through the Texas Education Agency, and as of 2002 was operating with a biennial budget of over \$70 million administered by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (Fabelo, 2002). The WSD offered academic/literacy, vocational, and life skills programming, employed over 1,500 professionals, and served almost 60,000 inmates per year (Fabelo, 2002). The Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council conducted a series of studies to “determine the impact of: (a) correctional education on achievement; (b) educational achievement in prison on recidivism; and (c) educational achievement on employment, wages, and recidivism” (Fabelo, 2002, p. 106). The studies evaluated prison education experiences and employment and recidivism rates of 32,020 inmates released from prison for the first time in 1997-1998.

In reviewing data related to educational achievement, one of the main pieces of information used to determine the progress of each inmate are Educational Achievement (EA) scores, which are computed using the standardized Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) (Fabelo, 2002). Due to limited resources inmates in Texas could not participate in educational programming during an entire sentence and were

often only enrolled in courses during the two to three years prior to release. On average, inmates receive 604 hours of instruction allowing an improvement in education level by 1.5 grades (primarily related to reading skills) (Fabelo, 2002).

As inmates were usually only provided two to three years of education while incarcerated, correctional officials were focused on determining which groups would benefit most in terms of reduced recidivism rates based on involvement in educational programming. Regardless of educational level, older offenders had a lower recidivism rate than younger offenders and violent offenders had a lower recidivism rate than property offenders (Fabelo, 2002). The largest decline in recidivism rates was attributed to nonreader property offenders able to achieve a literacy level of “reader” regardless of age. Property offenders less than 35 years of age had a 37% decline in two-year recidivism rates while older property offenders showed a decline of 55% (Fabelo, 2002). In comparing all achievement groups, an average 11% decrease in two-year recidivism rates was linked to educational achievement (Fabelo, 2002).

Inmates with the highest educational achievement scores upon release were most likely to gain employment and earned an average of \$2,442 more per year than inmates who functioned at or below a fourth grade level (Fabelo, 2002). Of the 30,207 inmates tracked after release during 1998, 70% were employed during the first year compared to the state employment rate of 95.2% (Fabelo, 2002). From this study, it can be assumed that inmates with the highest education levels were more likely to obtain employment, earn higher wages, and have lower recidivism rates upon release. The biggest policy implication for administrators in Texas, as was common across the country, was to utilize these findings to determine which groups of offenders should

have access to limited correctional educational resources during incarceration to make the greatest impact on recidivism rates upon release

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. The Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF) was New York State's maximum security prison for women. While the facility had a history of providing programming to inmates, its successful college program of ten years closed in 1995 after the elimination of Pell Grants (Torre & Fine, 2005). Within a few months of its closing a group of inmates met with the prison superintendent and president of Marymount Manhattan College to revive the college program (Torre & Fine, 2005). A consortium of private colleges and universities, each of which contributed faculty, materials and/or dollars, covered the cost of the facility and Marymount Manhattan College offered the degree. To enter the program inmates had to complete and pass the same college entrance exam as outside students, and would work in the prison during the day to pay the \$10 cost of a year's enrollment (equivalent to one month's salary), taking classes at night (Torre & Fine, 2005).

A review of release data indicated that recidivism rates were significantly lower for those able to attain a higher level of education than those not participating in programming. Upon release, it was estimated that 7.7% of the educated group and 29.9% of the non-educated group were reincarcerated for an approximate average of two years (Torre & Fine, 2005). While recidivism rates were often the key indicator of success in any correctional education program, supporters of the BHCF argued that less quantifiable factors such as increased levels of self-esteem and involvement in positive activities post-release were more telling signs of the program's accomplishments. This was especially true when considering the generational impacts

these improvements could have on an offender's family members (primarily children) upon release.

Program Evaluation

Impact on Recidivism. Studies have shown that successfully reintegrating into one's community was imperative to avoid reincarceration (Case & Fassenfest, 2004). "Higher education for prisoners, often the subject of public controversy, remains a crucial strategy in efforts to reduce recidivism and slow the growth of the nation's incarcerated population" (Erisman & Contardo, 2005, p. v). Successful reintegration was dependent upon several factors, including locating stable housing and employment, reestablishing family connections, and being viewed as a productive member of society; increasing one's level of education was a critical component of achieving those factors (Case & Fassenfest, 2004).

The key criteria in evaluating success of prison education programs shown in the literature were recidivism, and less commonly, educational achievement. "Recidivism rates are commonly analyzed by researchers when assessing the effectiveness of prison educational programs because the American public demands accountability for monies spent on correctional education" (Wade, 2007, p. 28). Recidivism was defined in a variety of ways, sometimes relating to the focus of research. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defined recidivism as "a tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior, especially relapse into criminal behavior" (Wade, 2007, p. 28). Sometimes the definition was enlarged to include not only reincarcerations but also new arrests and convictions (Wade, 2007). A new arrest did not necessarily mean a new conviction or reincarceration. Moreover a new arrest could result from a

technical violation of one's supervision, not from a new crime (Wade, 2007). Hence, because of the many definitions of recidivism it was difficult to determine whether prison education programs were successful.

Transitioning from problem behavior was dependent on an individual decision or motivating event, lifestyle changes, and/or new social roles, as reported by Visher and Travis (2003, p. 94):

It has been suggested that an individual's long-term post-prison reintegration is likely to depend on a variety of personal and situational characteristics that are best understood by looking at four key areas: pre-prison circumstances, in-prison experiences, immediate post-prison experiences, and post-release integration experiences.

Former prisoners able to obtain employment were more likely to have successful outcomes after release. "Recent reviews of the impact of correctional programming on post-release outcomes generally conclude that a variety of programs, including those focused on individual improvement in education, reduce recidivism" (Visher & Travis, 2003, p. 95).

During the 1990s when the state prison population increased by over 70%, programming in prisons did not keep pace (Visher & Travis, 2003). Comparing data from 1991 to 1997, the level of participation (among prisoners to be released in the next 12 months) in programming dropped from 43% to 35% (Visher & Travis, 2003). This resulted in a significantly larger number of prisoners being released without educational preparations designed to facilitate successful reintegration (Visher & Travis, 2003).

According to Visher and Travis (2003), prison-based programs, particularly when combined with post-release services, could reduce recidivism. "Prison officials and penal experts considered higher education programs in prison to be a success because they helped to maintain carceral order and reduced recidivism rates" (Visher & Travis, 2003, p. 96). Some studies revealed prisoners participating in higher education programs had recidivism rates as much as 55% lower than those not participating in similar programs (McCarty, 2006).

Educational Achievement. The majority of offenders in correctional settings had very few opportunities to engage in positive educational experiences prior to conviction. This lack of success as related to education could impact an individual's ability to believe in one's abilities or feel connected to society, which may have led to involvement in criminal activity. While perhaps not the most significant factor considered when assessing the success of correctional programs, educational achievement should be taken into account as it could allow those being released from prison to feel a greater sense of pride and accomplishment, having a positive impact on adjustment.

A 2004 study conducted by Messemer and Valentine assessed an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and examined learning gains as measured by the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) through the use of pre- and posttests. Results indicated that inmates who participated in ABE programs made significant learning gains in reading, math, and language (Wade, 2007). The majority of participants in these studies failed academically prior to incarceration. Messemer and Valentine showed that students previously considered at risk could become successful in the classroom. Adult

learners achieved academic success for the first time because these educational programs were structured to meet their needs (Wade, 2007). Advocates of correctional educational programming contended these opportunities helped to provide inmates with the knowledge, skills, attitude, and values needed to succeed in society and avoid future criminal activity (Tolbert, 2002). Those released had an opportunity to utilize this knowledge by obtaining employment, continuing education, helping children with schoolwork, and engaging in socially acceptable activities, some for the first time in their lives. This sense of pride and the ability to contribute in a positive manner might also explain why some chose to not reoffend.

Self-Efficacy. Perhaps the least valued indicator of program success was that of self-efficacy. As defined by Bandura, self-efficacy was “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Golden, 2003, p. 14). Educating adult students needed to focus on developing cognitive skills that address self-awareness and self-efficacy. “If students are self-motivated, confident, and engaged learners, they will be more determined to be persistent and complete their studies” (Golden, 2003, p. 15). Recognizing strengths and weaknesses and setting goals were just a few determining factors for building “self” survival skills. Among other areas discussed, possessing high self-efficacy, self-perseverance, and determination encouraged students to stay on course. Overcoming barriers to learning was necessary and achieved through acknowledging students’ weaknesses and then improving skills in areas that needed attention (Golden, 2003). How students viewed themselves as learners and the opinions of others could play an integral part in academic success. “High levels of efficacy, as well as other

characteristics of cognition, heighten and intrinsically motivate adult learners to be engaged and active participants in their learning” (Golden, 2003, p. 15).

Instructors might consider adopting cooperative, collaborative, and constructivist approaches to learning in classrooms. These approaches allowed students to become active participants in learning and develop as critical thinkers (Golden, 2003). Students learned to become analytical readers, writers, and thinkers. Most importantly, they had the opportunity to identify as something other than criminals and instead as learners (Golden, 2003). They had the opportunity to interact with and be viewed by people from the outside as something other than a criminal as well. Success in school not only helped build inmates’ self-esteem and encourage envisioning a different life than the accustomed one of crime but also gained practical skills used upon release.

Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusions

“Regardless of the nature of the relationship between educational programming and reduced recidivism (whether it is direct or indirect), education is an important element in this mix” (Rose, 2004, p. 86). Despite method of release, nearly all state prisoners will be released from prison at some point, almost 80% to parole supervision (Tolbert, 2002). Releasing individuals with the same lack of skills into communities most likely requiring a higher level of training to obtain employment is not only irresponsible, it is inviting inmates to reoffend based on a lack of other viable opportunities.

To extend educational benefits to all inmates, it is first necessary to understand why some inmates become motivated and some do not. Only then can techniques be formulated to increase the rates of participation in prison education. It is time to move beyond limited methodologies of the past and on to new ways of increasing understanding (Rose, 2004). Prisoners have significantly fallen behind, and the time spent behind bars will likely be the best opportunity for preparing their return to society (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Thinking that higher education will solve the incarceration problem or rehabilitate all prisoners is certainly naïve. If there exists a self-selected group of prisoners who might wish to rehabilitate and reform and society fails to support this desire, then offenders are being set up to reoffend when released back into communities (McCarty, 2006). As McCarty (2006, p. 93) reported:

The tide of public support for tough-on-crime legislation helped to eliminate higher education in prison, and the best hope for returning it to prisons is to make policy makers and the public more aware of the benefits of educating prisoners. Public policy on crime and punishment should be determined by the most effective crime prevention and reduction techniques available through proven research. “There’s a growing liberal-conservative consensus that it’s in everyone’s interest that we provide resources in prison that decrease the chances of recidivism” (Coley & Barton, 2006, p. 18). Wright (2001, p. 14) noted that “prison higher education is shaped by national correctional trends, including changes in philosophies of imprisonment, federal and state legislation and judicial positions on prison and jail programs, and evaluations of modalities of treatment.”

Regardless of one’s philosophical beliefs about crime and punishment or political affiliations, the considerable amount of research available on the positive impact of prison education cannot be ignored. While those sentenced to a correctional facility should be subject to punishment based on the circumstances of the offense, society must also accept that the eventual releases will be shaped by the treatment received in custody and the tools provided to prepare them for discharge. If communities do not begin to invest in educational programs for offenders they will be required to absorb the effects of continued criminal activity and future periods of incarceration, which have the potential to be more costly in ways other than monetarily.

Chapter 4: Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on common themes found during a review of various sources utilized to prepare this paper and represent an overall summary of the researcher's significant findings.

Universal Definition of Recidivism

One issue particularly challenging when evaluating studies is the lack of a consistent definition of recidivism. In analyzing programs based on recidivism rates, of great importance is knowing why ex-inmates reoffend (Wade, 2007). Moving forward, one nationally consistent definition of recidivism as it relates to the evaluation of correctional educational programming needs to be adopted to ensure that programs are being compared using the same criteria. Some evaluators consider a new arrest when calculating recidivism rates, while others wait for a new prison sentence. The lack of a uniform designation leads to confusion not only for the general public but also for correctional policy makers and legislators making challenging budgetary decisions impacting these programs.

While recidivism is an important consideration for policy makers, it should not be the only variable under consideration. Education programs should also be evaluated on the learning gains of inmates (Wade, 2007). Research suggests that offenders who having few educational opportunities previous to incarceration might have turned to crime in order to survive. Hence, if educational programs are correctly implemented, incarcerated adults may enjoy a second chance to become productive members of society (Wade, 2007). Future evaluations need to consider learning gains the inmates may achieve as it is unethical to base the success of a program on recidivism rates

when a lack of marketable skills might be a contributing factor (Wade, 2007). If the purpose of educational programs in prisons is to train individuals to become productive members of society, future research should focus on “measuring inmates’ educational gains, aligning job training with actual employment opportunities, updating vocational curricula, enriching quantitative data with qualitative research, and analyzing statistics correctly” (Wade, 2007, p. 31). In addition, creating a parallel prison information system to track enrollments, achievement, advancement, and the quality of the curriculum and the teachers is an urgent need (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Collaboration Among Key Stakeholders

In order for correctional education programs to work, all involved in implementing the programming must believe in its benefits to ensure success. Federal and state legislators need to provide support to education laws and funding when budgets are being established and bills are being introduced. Without legislative and financial backing most programs in place today would cease to exist, much like those that suffered with the elimination of Pell grants. Local educational partners (technical/vocational colleges and four-year colleges and universities) also need to be active participants. They must view delivery of courses to offenders in these facilities as perhaps even more important than “normal” instruction, as offenders rely on support in order to complete the challenging coursework. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, prison staff need to support inmate involvement in educational programming. “For class attendance to be encouraged and strictly enforced by correctional officers, the education programs need to have strong and constant support from the wardens and superintendents of the prison” (Tolbert, 2002, p. 6). If support does not exist, offenders

will not be encouraged to actively participate or praised for achievements, causing programs to suffer.

Striking an Appropriate Balance

The current focus of most criminal justice systems tends to concentrate on the punitive and incapacitative aspects of corrections. While certainly valid and necessary goals for the system, they often make reintegration difficult to achieve. For offenders re-entering society “to take responsibility for their lives and reconcile with their families and communities, they must feel a sense of positive self-empowerment, a value that is difficult to inculcate in the penal setting” (Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry & Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders, 2002, p. 9).

It is possible to provide inmates with positive educational experiences while also maintaining a sense of order via various levels of consequences for poor behavior, either in the classroom or cell block. The removal of privileges, including participation in programming, provides inmates with the concept that the opportunity to partake in programming must be earned, something perhaps not introduced prior to incarceration. Failure to provide any sort of positive experience to inmates while sentenced will ultimately result in the release of individuals who feel rejected and are void of motivation to improve their circumstances once back in the community.

Incremental Achievement

Often times, offenders were not active participants in education prior to being sentenced, and some may not have attended a formal educational program in several years. In order to ensure a participant’s success, those offering educational programming must do so in a manner that is not overwhelming to the offender. For

example, allowing learners to prepare for and pass the GED exam one subtest at a time can make completing the full test seem more attainable to some learners (Gopalakrishnan, 2008). Enabling learners to experience small successes early and presenting learners at lower levels with a clear pathway to achieve goals can also help to improve learner retention (Gopalakrishnan, 2008).

Additionally, local jails housing offenders for shorter periods of time need to become more engaged in the education of inmates and find ways to offer rehabilitative educational programming even if it is on a smaller scale. Just a few weeks of concentrated effort toward one's GED or the improvement of literacy skills may provide an inmate with renewed interest in continuing those efforts once released. While a successful end result may not be attainable during a short jail term, any exposure to the benefits of education is worth the investment.

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