

Chapter 6

Issues in Prison Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter evaluates higher education within a correctional set-up. The relationship between education and crime, and how education can shape (facilitate) or curb crime are explored. Education as a prevailing tool in offender self-development and rehabilitation forms the focus of this chapter. Furthermore, incarcerated learners' access to Information Communication Technology - the dire need hereof, as well as the disadvantages linked to internet access - is scrutinized. Research findings that are related to incarcerated learners' perceptions, experiences and obstacles with regards to tertiary education illustrate their stark reality with education in prison. The chapter concludes with thoughts that more correctional and community financial and emotional support are needed to ease incarcerated learners' educational journey in prison.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most powerful tools to change lives. In prison terms, education can curb reoffending and assist with the self-development and rehabilitation of inmates. However, the opposite hereof is also true, namely that a lack of education and limited educational attainment can push people to criminality (Amos, 2013; Cornwell, 2009; Herbig, 2014). Cornwell (2009, p. 29), a criminologist, well-known author on penal and reform matters, and an ex Governor of a maximum prison in the United Kingdom (UK), states that “Prisons used as warehouses can do little to change

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the attitudes to offending, personal characteristics or circumstances of offenders, or give them the educational or practical skills to encourage law-abiding lives: such places merely ‘contain’ offenders for the period of time specified by the courts that sentenced them.” Cornwell’s (2009) statement relates to the risks of imprisonment when prisons are not equipped to rehabilitate and educate inmates. In this regard, factors such as overcrowding, unstable and violent prison environments, idleness, and pressure on available resources such as education and recreation, contribute to reoffending behaviour (Cornwell, 2009; Johnson, 2002; Siegel, 2016).

Education is a basic service that should be provided to all prisoners on a global scale (Siegel & Bartollas, 2016). Taking advantage of educational opportunities in prison is a proactive measure to rehabilitation, personal growth, spending time in prison constructively, orientating oneself towards a better and positive future, and of course, having something to show for the time spent in prison in terms of educational achievements (Siegel & Bartollas, 2016; Taylor, 2016).

Hence, it is clear that education has far-reaching benefits for offenders. Education can assist in personal development, a non-criminal mind-set, rehabilitation, employment abilities, desistance from crime; and education can assist in producing a person who can contribute positively to society again (Champion, 2013; Herbig, 2014; Pyrooz, 2014; Taylor, 2016; Webster, 2016a).

This chapter focuses on education in a prison environment. The author evaluates incarcerated learners’ access to Information Communication Technology and the pivotal role this medium plays in education, the self-development of offenders, rehabilitation and work preparation. The relationships between crime and education, and education as a risk factor for offending behaviour are unpacked to illustrate the complex and reciprocate cycle between these phenomena. Lastly, empirical research pertaining to South African incarcerated learners’ who are enrolled for higher education qualifications at tertiary institutions is presented. The incarcerated learners’ own experiences regarding the prison as a learning environment, challenges experienced to study in prison, the reasons and choices for enrolled qualifications, choice of tertiary institution, and payment and guidance in terms of learner-lecturer contact and access to the internet are discussed below.

BACKGROUND

According to Taylor (2016) the term ‘education’ with reference to a correctional environment, should be expanded to include the manifestation of a culture of learning, life skills, good relationships, trust, and a culture that encourages vocational and academic learning. Conditions conducive to a correctional learning environment include peer-to-peer learning, e-learning, a safe and spacious environment to learn,

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