Failed Hopes of Education:
Revisiting the Relevancy of Education as a Method of Diminishing Recidivism

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how, generally, the majority of inmates will recidivate again within five years of being released from incarceration. Recidivism represents cyclical criminality that affects all American communities. Despite substantial expenditures toward the warehousing of inmates within the corrections system, less emphasis is directed toward leveraging vocational and career educational programs as resources through which recidivism rates may be reduced societally. However, in 2015, the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program was announced as an experimental program whereby prisoners may access Pell funding for educational purposes. Given the advent of this experimental program, this article reviews some historical literature and recommends future directions regarding education among corrections settings.

KEYWORDS

Adult Education, Higher Education, Prison Education, Recidivism, Vocational Education

INTRODUCTION

Although little substantive change has affected sanctioning within American society during the preceding two decades, incarceration rates have increased since the early 1980s (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). Modern prison operations, including their corresponding confinement experiences, have ineffectively lowered an almost uncontrolled rate of recidivism (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). Society experiences the financial and economic impacts of criminality resulting from both violent and non-violent crimes. Thus, continuously, society experiences the daunting challenges and negative effects of recidivism while concurrently the justice and corrections systems attempt to forecast and satisfy the needs of inmates.

The justice system is saturated with court matters involving correctional issues, and often process them with egregious slowness (Neubauer & Fradella, 2017). The existences of almost unsustainable case quantities permeate a variety of probation, parole, and corrections programs societally (Neubauer

& Fradella, 2017). It is not uncommon for correctional facilities to experience overcrowding among populations of inmates (Wootton, 2016).

Within American society, the use of confinement and the dependence upon corrections programs among communities (used to oversee the behaviors of convicted persons), are often perceived as merely a bandage that conceals a much greater problem: criminal behaviors and criminality that appear as being nearly uncontrolled, especially among urban areas. Criminal behaviors and criminality are endangerments that undeniably affect lifestyles and cultures within society by diminishing economic capacities and societal foundations. Despite the best efforts of the corrections system and depending upon the type of crime, recidivism permeates and varies within American society. Given these notions, some may perceive that the corrections system is representative of abject failings of public policies (Santos, 2003). Prison inmates come from all walks of life, ranging from juveniles and former housewives to former judges and those who once served the justice system itself (McElreath et al., 2017; Santos, 2003). Regardless of their history, status, or station in life, some commonness exists among many individuals within the prison populace: the potential of eventually returning to society.

Laws delineate specific criminality definitions, characteristics, and punishments. Given the recidivism rate within society and the impossibility of eliminating sanctions for criminal behaviors, one may examine the potential of education as a valuable resource whereby recidivism rates may be abated through time (Santos, 2004). For instance, during 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced the forming of a pilot program for providing Pell grant funding and educational opportunity for inmates (Anderson, 2015). This initiative, deemed the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, represented a changing perspective toward facets of inmate education, rehabilitation, and recidivism (Anderson, 2015). Given the announcing of the program and the importance of education among correctional settings toward returning an inmate to society, this article considers various perspectives of prison education, and recommends future directions.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Higher education is generally considered as the form of education that one experiences after graduating high school or its equivalency. From an economic perspective, higher education represents the allocating of resources for producing "post-secondary educational services," distributing them, and their effectives within a given populace (Begg, 2002, p. 121). For many people, higher education represents an initial opportunity for exploring and defining personal values, principles, relationships, politics, and religion (Bligh, Thomas, & McNay, 1999). Higher education is unrestricted by facets of locations or venues, and occurs among prison settings.

Vocational education also exists among prison settings. It encompasses the training and learning that prepares individuals for occupational trades, but does not represent equivalency with academic education (Gordon, 2014). Economically, such education must satisfy established minimums of costs per capita; otherwise, it should not be undertaken (Gordon, 2014). Within the penology context, vocational education facilitates the teaching of marketable, useful skills among offenders (Cole, Smith, & DeJong, 2016). Typically, examples of vocational education among prison settings include woodworking, welding cosmetology, gardening, carpentry, and so forth.

Life skill training is a necessity for many inmates (Gideon & Sung, 2011; Pollock, 1998). It encompasses many concepts that most folks take for granted within society. Examples include the resisting of various peer pressures, coping with anxiety and stress; developing self-awareness and self-esteem, developing understandings of responsibility and accountability; and so forth (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Many prisoners exhibit varying deficiencies of even the most basic life skills, and must learn them within inmate education programs (Cavadino & Dignan, 2007; Cho & Tyler, 2010).

Approximately 40% of inmates among state correctional facilities dropped out of high school (Koenig, 2011). Similarly, approximately 30% of federal prisoners were also high school drop outs (Koenig, 2011). After the turn of the century, it was estimated that approximately 41.3% of both federal

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