

Teaching College Courses in Selected Correctional Facilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia

Charletta Barringer-Brown, EdD

Department of Middle Grades
Secondary and Specialized Subjects
Fayetteville State University
Fayetteville, North Carolina 28301

Abstract

Numerous research studies have focused on recidivism rates ignoring education to inmates as a technique of reducing recidivism. This qualitative study investigates the faculty perception of teaching in selected correctional facilities. A sample of fifty-three faculty members teaching within four selected correctional facilities within a 60 mile radius of the metro Richmond, Virginia area are surveyed on their perception of correctional and prison education. Questionnaires are provided to the faculty for the collection of primary data and the facilitation of an informed analysis on the perspective of the faculty regarding these particular programs in comparison to traditional college programs. Teaching in these correctional facilities brings new challenges to the faculty members, which are also surveyed. Finally, suggestions by the faculty on enhancement of the correctional and prison education programs are considered.

Introduction

According to Bosworth (2002), the prison population is instruct growing at a worrying trend especially in the United States. A lot of research has taken place over the years on the outcomes of education in prison both to the inmate and the tutors with divergence both in range and analysis. Teachers play a central role in the education of prisoners. Why do we teach in prison? According to Medders (2010), teachers in correctional facilities are somehow related to teachers in any other sector. She believes that teaching is done in a correctional facility to make a difference. It is done with an aim of trying to make the world a better place. Although this is the case, the biggest challenge remains as to who is going to fund the education program. McCarty (2006) outlined the challenges of teaching in prison which include limited financial resources and prison procedures and protocol that generate pedagogical predicaments to the faculty. She says that during her first class in the San Quentin Correctional facility they had to beg for books to be used in class. The facility only managed to acquire some books through donations from individuals and corporations.

Beyond the teacher perspective, economists have also investigated the feasibility of prison education. Gaes (2008) argues out that prison education leads to a growth in human capital. Teachers refer to this growth as achievement gains which are presupposed to provide the students the skills such as literacy which is the capacity of comprehending and executing written instructions. Other skills include computer skills and mechanics amongst others. These skills are properly documented through the issuance of certificates such as the General Education Development that serve as an indicator to would be employers that the individual has the capacity of working in respective areas. Jones (2012) states categorically that it is economical to educate an inmate and reduce the rate of recidivism. The New York State spends approximately \$ 60,000 per year on an each and every inmate. In one of the most comprehensive review of the efficacy of the prisons education program, Esperian (2010) gives the impacts of teaching in the prison facility. The education of inmates has gains which are not taken into consideration by many. It simplifies the running and control of the prison. Dolan (2012) argues that the physical lockdown of the human body does not necessarily translate to mental lockdown. Esperian (2010) asserts that the mind of the inmate is free. The rate of recidivism to the general population stands out at seventy percent while to those who have received college education the figure drops drastically to 6%. In 2010, Esperian outlined clearly the challenges faced by both the faculty and the prisoners.

Meyer & Fredericks (2010) outline the challenges faced by inmates, which include scarcity of quiet rooms to read, lack of cooperation on the side of the prison staff and accessing current information in electronic formats. This will negatively impact on the work of the teachers. According to Harlow (2003), forty one percent of convicts lack high school diploma in comparison to eighteen percent of the general population. Literacy and work experience of prisoners is low compared to that of the general population. Low motivation and participation is also a challenge both to the teacher and the students. Most of the inmates don't value education at all. Irwin (2008) says that the general perception of prisoners is that they are egoistic and manipulative which might also be the perception of the faculty. Crawford (2003) argues that psychological assessment and treatment of inmates is very important. Inmates are an ignored lot when it comes to psychology services because most professionals are not willing to work with them. Services that are essential to the inmates include basic mental health services. Though it is not aimed at reducing recidivism, it is helpful in managing life behind bars. For instance, some of the inmates require helping hand in coping with the duration of their incarceration. Managing the separation with family and loved ones is very difficult for the inmates and therapy is required. Coming to terms with the fact that the correctional facility will be the next home for some time or for the rest of their lives is not a downhill task. Some of the inmates need some basic lessons on how to survive in the correctional facility environment. Lack of psychological help can have detrimental outcomes to this lot. Some might choose to shorten their lives by committing suicide as a result (Crawford, 2003). Psychological therapy can assist an inmate in changing their attitudes and lifestyles towards an array of issues including changing from a life of crime in case the inmate's behavior was triggered by psychological factors such as low self esteem as a result of negligence by parents in childhood.

From the concise review of the related literature, what emerges are the obvious effects of correctional facilities educational program. Evaluation of the outcomes of the program can be gauged in numerous ways which include recidivism whereby the rate of recidivism can determine its success. Psychological changes also can be used in gauging the educational program whereby improved self esteem and self concept amongst the inmates can be witnessed. Faculty perception may also be assessed in this measurement. The chief objective of this study is to carry out an organized examination of the perception of the faculty on teaching in correctional facilities education programs with the selection of four facilities. For the reason that the effectiveness of education program in a correctional facility has not been explicitly investigated to the degree in which the educators offer an education to the inmates that is corresponding to the education obtained beyond the correctional facility. The opinion of the educators on the comparison of correctional facilities college program to college programs was evaluated. The sample choice for this study was exclusive in that most of the faculty participants held multiple positions both at the correctional facility and at institutions of higher learning. Most of the previous researchers who have studied the similarity issue amongst university and prison education have mainly focused on the huge sums of cash awarded to prison education in relation to the universities. Jamison (2002) found out that prisons were being awarded more money on education in relation to the university. Faculty comparison of prison education to that of the traditional university education is a vital element. This study also evaluates the levels of satisfaction amongst the faculty and their opinions on numerous personal qualities of inmate students in contrast to traditional students.

The study also evaluated the origin of motivation to educate in correctional facility programs. The educator's perception of barriers to successful and their proposals on methods of improving prison education. Information collected on the motivation factor is important in informing us the underlying reasons of teaching in prisons by teachers by the faculty which is important in this study. The prospect of educating in a correctional facility program studied is broadened to numerous colleges faculty, where only a small number participate. Findings in this paper are comparable to Gonzales, (2011) who outlined some of the rationales behind attending school by prisoners. Recognizable obstacles and proposals for improvement have been evaluated as a result of the faculty awareness on this matter. An outline of the faculty perceptions would go a long way in the provision of relevant information to the correctional facility administrators and stakeholders which could be critical in the enhancement of the current education program.

Method

The subjects for this study were fifty-three faculty members. Thirty seven of them were male, while sixteen of them were females. They are currently teaching in four correctional facilities that are in the vicinity of Richmond, Virginia which are the Powhatan Correctional Center which is a maximum security prison for male inmates in Virginia (Virginia Department of Corrections, 2008).

The Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women is located in Virginia and serves women inmates. The Greenville Correctional Center located in Virginia and is managed by the Virginia department of corrections is a medium security facility (Virginia Department of Corrections, 2012). The Virginia Correctional Center for women serves women inmates and is also located in Virginia. Fifty nine semi-structured Questionnaires were emailed to the faculty members of the education program whereby the ultimate sample is a representative of ninety percent response rate. Quite a number of the faculty working with the inmates came from local educational institutions such as the J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Virginia State University, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University and Wytheville Community College. There were a small number of educators in the faculty who only teach in the facilities and nowhere else. In the analysis of perceived similarities of the correctional facility education program to traditional college programs, only data from the faculty members who held positions at the local institutions of higher learning was taken into account. Questionnaires are advantageous in that they are economical in terms of money and resources. They give the respondents confidentiality and can be filled whenever the respondent is free. The mailed questionnaire contained open ended and closed- ended items devised to intercept the individual assessment of interest. To evaluate the perception on similarity, the members of the faculty were asked to rank if the correctional facility education program provides education similar to the traditional education on a scale of one to five whereby one symbolizes far inferior and five symbolizes far superior. The members of the faculty were asked to equate correctional facility students to traditional college students in terms of intelligence, interest in education, effort in learning, motivation, disputing ideas, organized for class, autonomy and tolerance to others ideas where by a scale of one to five was used with one representing much less and five representing much more. Three open-ended questions evaluated the faculties views on the grounds for teaching in a correctional facility education program, the specific challenges faced when teaching within a prison and the proposals and recommendations on enhancing prison education program. The faculty was asked to record at least five answers to each of the open ended question.

Results

Observed Similarity of Correctional Facility Education to Traditional College Program

A critical gauge to the effectiveness of correctional facility education program is the degree in which it offers quality education similar to education acquired from traditional colleges or beyond the walls of the correctional facility. The perception of the faculty offers one instrument for the measurement of such similarities. The following table summarizes the faculty responses in relation to similarities.

Table 1: Perceived Similarities of the College Programs at Each of the Four Facilities Studied

	Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women	Greenville Correctional Center	Virginia Correctional Center for Women	Powhatan Correctional Center
Extremely lower than traditional college	7.3%	6.2%	4.1%	1.2%
Somewhat lower than traditional college	23.6%	28.4%	31.1%	30.5%
Equivalent to traditional college	53.1%	50.3%	52.7%	55.0%
Higher than traditional college by a small margin	12.0%	12.2%	11.1%	11.2%
Higher by a great margin to traditional college	4.0%	2.9%	1.0%	1.2%

Note: some of the faculty responded twice as a result of teaching in more than one facility.

From the above table, one can see some flow in the trends of that is unique in any particular question across the group. A large percentage of the faculty participants in each facility felt that correctional facility education program is equivalent to the education programs in the traditional college. This is important because once the inmates are out they compete with individuals from the traditional colleges for similar jobs. An average of 28% of the faculty participants perceived correctional facility education programs to be lower to the traditional colleges compared to an average of 11% of the participants who felt that it is slightly higher than the traditional college.

An average of 6% perceived the correctional facility education program to be extremely lower while only 2% of the faculty perceived it to be higher by a great margin.

Faculty Satisfaction

Faculty satisfaction offers another tool for assessing the faculty perceptions in teaching selected correctional facilities. The following table represents data collected from the four facilities.

Table 2: Satisfaction Table

	Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women	Greensville Correctional Center	Virginia Correctional Center for Women	Powhatan Correctional Center
Very dissatisfied	2.9%	2.2%	3.4%	7.8%
Dissatisfied	3.2%	5.1%	15%	8.2%
Satisfied	32.1%	31.8%	24.4%	27.2%
Very satisfied	62.1%	61.1%	56.5%	57.5%

From the above table, it is clear that members of the faculty are satisfied with being part of the educational program of the various correctional facilities. The average percentage of satisfied teachers in all the facilities is 80%. The average percentage of the disgruntled educators across the board is less than ten percent. This is impressive.

Faculty Perception on how Correctional Facility Students Compare with Traditional College Students

The perception of the faculty on the comparison of inmate students with students in the traditional college is important. This will establish the fitness of the faculty in teaching in these facilities. It will also help in understanding whether prison education is important. The following table is a summary of how correctional facility students compare

Table 3: Faculty Perception of Inmate Students to the other Students

	Mean	S.D
Motivated	3.91	0.75
Inquisitive	4.1	0.82
Autonomous	3.41	0.61
Career oriented	2.01	0.65
Attentive	3.62	0.81
Intelligent	3.01	0.75
Prepared for class	3.51	0.62
Challenging of ideas	4.1	0.65
Tolerant of others ideas	2.61	1.01
Scale: 1. much less 2. Somewhat less 3. About the same 4. Somewhat more 5. Much more		
A mean of 3 is a pointer of the two groups being near similar.		

From the above table, it is notable that the faculty perceives the students in correctional facilities to be above the other students in many areas. For instance when it comes to challenging ideas, they are given a 4.1 by the faculty amongst the four facilities. This is somewhat more than the student in the traditional school. There were no observable changes differences across the four facilities. In numerous facets, correctional facility students were perceived to be similar with the traditional college students in intelligence, autonomy, motivation and preparedness for class amongst others whereby the faculty gave them an average of 3. The only areas whereby they scored less than the traditional students where in career orientation and tolerance of others ideas, they were given an average of 2 in each.

Open ended Answers on Motivation to Educate, Obstacles of Effectual Teaching and Proposals on improving correctional Facility Education

There were numerous answers from the faculty members on motivation to educate the prisoners, obstacles to effectual teaching and proposals to the enhancement of the prison education program. A three-stage method of analyzing the responses was applied to the data. The initial stage comprised reading of the answers and developing different categories that could best fit the answers. The next step comprised the determination of the dominant categories from the select few. This was achieved through the consolidation of similar categories. The final stage was the coding process. The outcomes of the analysis produced 6 groups of answers to the question motivation to teach, five groups to the question obstacles of effectual teaching and five groups for the proposals of the enhancement of the teaching programs. This made it possible to code over eighty percent of the responses. The following tables show the results in this category.

Table 4: Grounds for Teaching in Prison by the Faculty

	Percentage
Characteristics of the students	25.1%
The pay	18.7%
Rehabilitation/Helping	18.3%
Self-improvement	14.3%
Rewarding or satisfying	10.2%
Quality of Program	6.2%
Enjoyment of Teaching	3.0%
Challenge	4.2%

From the above table, it is notable that characteristics of the students rank highest as one of the motivator of teaching in prison. This is followed closely by the remunerations and the process of rehabilitating then inmates. The challenge of teaching in the facility ranks lowest at 4.2% followed closely by the enjoyment of teaching at 3.0%. This is a strong indicator that the faculty does not enjoy teaching in the correctional facilities.

Obstacles to Effectual College Teaching in Correctional Facilities

Teaching in a correctional facility is expected to present to the faculty numerous challenges. This does not mean that traditional college teachers don't face any challenge. The difference is the scope of these challenges. The following table shows the obstacles to effectual college teaching in correctional facilities.

Table 5: Obstacles to Effectual College Teaching in Correctional Facilities

Limited teaching Aids	27%
Negative Students Characteristics	25.1%
Limited Out of Class Time	20%
Problems Relating to Prison System	18.1%
Inadequate Class Time or Teaching Time	6.6%
Poor Conditions	4.2%

From the above table, one can notice that limited teaching Aids is one of the greatest challenge facing the faculty in the correctional facility education program which include access to the library and internet amongst others. This is closely followed by negative characteristics of the students in the facility which includes negative attitudes and lack of social skills. Only 4.2 % of the faculty raised the issue of poor working conditions as an obstacle to effectual teaching.

Discussion

This study was carried out to establish the perceptions of the faculty in teaching inmates in a correctional facility. The main areas covered are the comparison of teaching in a correctional facility to traditional college, motivation in teaching in a correctional facility program, the obstacles of effectual teaching and proposals for enhancement the education program. In a nutshell, it was established that quite a number of the faculty perceived education in the correctional facility to be similar to that of traditional colleges. A small number of the faculty perceived the correctional facility education to be substandard in relation to traditional colleges. Faculty satisfaction was a great tool for determining the level of satisfaction amongst faculty members whereby more than eighty percent of the faculty was satisfied by their job. The findings in this paper have added to the information banks on the effectiveness of prison education.

Williams (2012) argues that the success of correctional facility educational programs may differ with the meticulousness of the program. Comparison of correctional facility students to those of traditional college showed that they are similar in numerous fronts such as intelligence level, autonomy hardworking and attentiveness amongst others. The correctional facility students have been ranked higher when it comes to motivation and challenging of ideas amongst others. They were also perceived by the faculty to be further impulsive and less career oriented. This shows that inmate students are not clear on where they want to land in relation to careers. They are also less tolerant when it comes to other people's ideas which can be related to the correctional facility setting and their mindsets. The open ended questions posed to the faculty also brought about new insights on the motivations, obstacles and proposals of enhancement of the education. Inmates have special characteristics which have been known to motivate teachers all along which include enthusiasm to learn and keenness in engaging in education discussions (Schenck, 2005). From the study, a large number of the faculty is motivated by the remuneration package received. Although this is the case, there is a remarkable percentage that is motivated by the rehabilitation itself and assisting the less privileged. In relation to the obstacles and proposals for improvement of the education program the answers from the faculty show the experienced challenges of student inmates in the pursuit of education and a better life. The challenges include lack of adequate facilities, limited contact time with the students and numerous interruptions by the facilities policies. Joe (2012) argues that the education in correctional facilities is the last stronghold of rehabilitation. Unless identified as a life changing mechanism and adequate investments made, there is modest optimism in decreasing the horrifying recidivism rate.

References

- Bosworth, M. (2002). *The U.S Federal Prison System*. California: Sage.
- Crawford, N. (2003). Helping inmates cope with prison life. *American Psychology Association Journal*, 34 (7), 61-75.
- Dolan, S. (2012). My Prison Education. *US Catholic*, 3 (2), 33-38.
- Esperian, J. H. (2010). The Effects of Prison Education Program on Recidivism. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 61 (4), 316-336.
- Gaes, G. (2008, February 18). The Impact of Prison Education Programs on Post-Release Outcomes. Retrieved October 21, 2012, from Cuny: <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/GaesTheEffectivenessofPrisonEducationPrograms.pdf>
- Gonzales, R. (2011, June 20). Inside San Quentin, Inmates Go To College. Retrieved October 22, 2012, from NPR: <http://www.npr.org/2011/06/20/137176620/inside-san-quentin-inmates-go-to-college>
- Gordon, H., & Weldon, B. (2003). The Impact of Career and Technical Education Programs on Adult Offenders: Learning Behind Bars. *A Journal of Correctional Education*, 54 (4), 200-213.
- Harlow, C. W. (2003). *Education and Correctional Population*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Irwin, T. (2008). The 'Inside' Story: Practitioners Perspectives on Teaching in Prison. *The Howard Journal*, 45 (5), 512-528.
- Jamison, R. (2002). Is Maryland's System of Higher Education Suffering Because of Prison Education? Retrieved October 22, 2012, from Justice Policy: http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/03-06_rep_mdhigheredprisonexpend_bb-md.pdf
- Joe. (2012). Prisons need to be geared for success. Retrieved October 22, 2012, from The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2009/jan/26/prison-education-erwin-james-outside-view>
- Jones, D. R. (2012, March 7). Strengthening the Mind while Strengthening New York's Economy. *The New York Amsterdam News*, pp. 5-6.
- McCarty, J. H. (2006). Educating Felons: Reflections of Higher Education in Prisons. *Radical History*, 5 (96), 87-97.
- Medders, K. (2010). Why do We Teach in Prisons. Retrieved October 21, 2012, from California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/OCE/docs/Why%20We%20Teach%20In%20A%20Prison%20PDF.pdf>
- Meyer, S. J., & Fredericks, L. (2010). Implementing Postsecondary Academic Programs in State Prisons. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 61 (2), 148-186.
- Schenck, L. (2005). *Nordic Prison Education*. Denmark: Nordic Publications.
- Virginia Department of Corrections. (2012). Greensville Correctional Center. Retrieved October 22, 2012, from Virginia Department of Corrections: <http://www.vadoc.state.va.us/facilities/eastern/greensville/>
- Virginia Department of Corrections. (2008). Powhatan Correctional Center . Retrieved October 22, 2012, from Virginia Department of Corrections: <http://www.vadoc.state.va.us/facilities/central/powhatan/>
- Williams, R. (2012, January 30). Is prison education working? Retrieved October 22, 2012, from <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/jan/30/prison-education-failures>