

Discussion for Panel Presentation: Education in
Prison

Discussant - Stephen J. Steurer, PhD

Understanding Educational Aspiration Among People in Prison – Delaney and Smith

- **Importance of Paper**

- Demonstrates how improving literacy and numeracy skills may lead to more educational interest for inmates
- Discusses how high school completion affects and improves personal aspirations
- Provokes thought about assessing cognitive skills as better motivator than academic and vocational skill assessment

- **Issues and Implications**

- From 1800s until mid-1900s reading to understand Bible strongest educational aspiration
- Late 1900s literacy becoming most important.
- Need for educational resources far outstripping resources, more so than 20 years ago
- High school completion not enough for success after release
- Prisons lacking little beyond high school completion and some job skills
- Inmates taking education programs, if available, for religious, personal development and employment
- Convincing correctional agencies that education is an important mission is tough to do

Incarcerated Adults with Low Skills - Patterson

- **Importance of paper**

- Presents a more complete picture of literacy deficits among US incarcerated population
- Fills in more detail and numbers than previous studies of correctional education
- Explicates issues with more demographic detail than ever before
- Highlights significantly higher percentage of learning disabilities that in turn complicates solution for resolving literacy problems

- **Issues and Implications**

- Bad news again that the need is greater than ever
- Actual educational resources have shrunk at federal level (IDEA, WIOA, Title 1, Perkins) and in most states
- No voters - no voice politically to resolve problem of accessing adequate resources
- Competition with adult educators in community for precious federal and state resources
- Need for PR campaign for literacy (We miss you Barbara Bush!)
- Federal report on Bureau of Prisons education and reentry programs greatly reduced in recent decades
- Big shortage of technology to address computer literacy and reading and math literacy
- Reentry not focused on education and work, but more on drugs, mental health, housing and job needs
- Corrections agencies not collecting enough individual education/job information for reentry planning

Prison-based education: Programs, Participation and Proficiency – Cai, Ruhil and Gut

- **Importance of paper**

- Explicates value of major types of education programs – ABE, GED, Career Tech
- Clarifies motivation of incarcerated students – self-improvement and employment
- Compares literacy and numeracy skills of incarcerated with free community populations
- Explains education not well emphasized in state and federal prison systems
- Shows GED grads often go on to Voc-Ed programs
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- **Issues and Implications**

- Prison environment undervaluing role of education for safety in prison and life afterward
- Reentry programs undervaluing continuum of programs from initial incarceration through preparation for release and beyond
- Lack of resources to challenge inmates
- Inferior or no library resources and services
- Importance of reading, writing and numeracy skills for vocational and work training success (i.e GED required for access to most skilled job areas)
- Vocational skills important to get and keep job as are soft skills (communication, problem-solving, etc..)
- prisons charging for books and materials via private commissary contractors making resources even harder to obtain and putting cost on inmates

Conclusions

- In last decade only RAND and AIR studies of correctional education have shown there are few financial resources to do additional research and data collection. Even in the free adult education world federal and state allocations for services are less than needed to fight illiteracy. So, will we ever improve investment in prison education?
- Research showing value of education in fighting crime once touted as key to more educational resources, but political priorities hinder growth of funding.
- The new liberal and conservative alliance to fix the criminal justice system causes some optimism for switch in funding from security and detention to more programs, including education. Rationales are religious, economic and social, but politicians in general are still reluctant to be seen as soft on crime. Public is not been adequately educated about importance of literacy, numeracy and job skills among all populations including corrections.