A Call for the Abolition of Prisons
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In the history of philosophy, there is perhaps no more powerful image than the cave described by Socrates in Plato’s Republic. This deep, dark hole, we are told, is inhabited by prisoners bound in such a way that all they can see is the play of shadows on an interior wall, fleeting shapes that they mistake for reality. Far above these hapless souls, outside their underground dwelling, is the dazzling light of the sun, a sight reached only after an arduous journey upward.

For over a quarter of a century I have been making that arduous journey; striving to reach that dazzling light of freedom and justice, not just for myself but also for the two million women and men presently housed in that cave in the United States. During that journey I gained new insight regarding the pain of prisons, and the devastation and brutalization of people by capitalism and imperialism. From that painful experience, I became a prison abolitionist.

I may never be able to fully describe the complex dynamic process of how to organize and bring about the abolition of prisons. However, it is my hope that the views and information presented here will help others to develop further their own reasons for why they would be willing to undertake this struggle. The strength of my vision has depended in great measure on what I have learned about prison during my twenty-five years of incarceration and how much I am willing to continue learning. This type of learning requires a lifelong commitment to continual inquiry and knowledge in order to arrive at new levels of understanding and insight.

I have learned that there are many different ways of looking at anything, event, or process. It all depends on how you look. I continue to look and learn as I live within the rotten, corrupt core of the criminal justice system. The prison has been a teacher for me. It reflects my own mind. The prison has not changed. It is my mind that has changed.

When your mind changes, new possibilities begin to arise. In fact, everything changes when you can see things on different levels simultaneously, when you can see fullness and connectedness as well as individuality and separateness. Your thinking expands in scope. This can be a profoundly liberating experience. It has taken me beyond a limited preoccupation with myself. It put things in a larger perspective. It has certainly changed the way I relate to prisons and the criminal justice system. If we hope to see things clearly, as they actually are,
and thereby perceive their intrinsic meaning, we have to be mindful of the ruts our thinking gets us into; we have to learn to see and approach things differently.

Facing our problems is usually the only way to get past them. There is an art to facing difficulties in ways that lead to effective solutions. We can, by exercising imagination, intuition, and creativity use the pressure of the problem itself to propel us through it. It is incumbent upon us to find new ways to break through the cycle of violence that so often characterizes the present corrections and criminal justice system.

The least controversial observation that one can make about the criminal justice system today is that it is remarkably ineffective, absurdly expensive, grossly inhumane, and riddled with ruthlessness and racism. In my view, and the views of a growing number of people, the hypothesis that prisons are institutions for controlling people of color is far more viable than the notion that prisons are an effort to prevent crime. All serious analyses of the history of incarceration reveal the same historical thrust: prisons and other systems of punishment are for social control, not crime control.

The criminal justice system is a multibillion dollar industry and very subversive of democratic principles. This establishment has doubled over the last decade. Its power has mostly been concentrated on the black community. The system is accountable to no effective form of civilian oversight. No system is less accountable than the correctional system. The corporate media, government, and private think tanks usually frame the debate over the criminal justice system. Researchers and policy makers, answerable to no elected official, formulate policies and concoct plans that wreak havoc on the poor and minorities, especially on black women and men.

Social factors and issues that create crime are no longer examined. Most people do not want to talk about things like adequate income, employment, and anti-poverty programs. All of this is now passé. People are left with the idea that criminals must somehow be simply wicked people, quite unlike themselves. If criminals can be defined as genetically different, the distinction between them and us is made even easier. It is a simple way out. Then no one has to feel any guilt for what goes on in society. The general public wants its pound of flesh. It does not care what happens. Racists want to prove a point with blacks, and politicians are going to help them to do it with the criminal justice system.

Race is the big, ugly secret that lies at the heart of most crime policy, certainly in North America. The criminal justice system is a system run on
soundbytes and throwaway lines. The system is not interested in anything that would lower crime, much less in anything decent or humane that is going to advance society. It is just a terribly corrupt system. And, of course, when you are talking about crime and criminals, it is very easy to fall into demonizing and stereotyping. Not only will people accept it, you can build a political career around it.

There is a need to find alternate options to incarceration, a lot of options, especially for the lesser offenders who have drug problems but who are now being sent to prison. We must go further than merely condemning prisons and the building of more prisons. We have to point the direction in which the solutions lie. We must focus upon what can replace prisons, and whether what we demand or propose will really eliminate the evils being objected to. We have to create and offer a well-thought-out program for accomplishing change and propose specific alternatives to replace the present system. We are going to have to face and deal with questions that demand workable and acceptable solutions. How would society function if we abolished prisons? What will be done with the dangerous few? Who decides? Who pays? Who benefits? Who will be in charge? Where will this lead us?

This is why we must be clear as to tactics, and above all, be armed with a workable program that will enable us to reach our goal. We cannot ignore the lessons that history has already taught us. We must create and project a powerful program for reaching our revolutionary goal of abolishing prisons. I strongly suggest we begin a new way of thinking about abolition.

Justice suggests that we may need to take a broader view of certain problems if we hope to solve them. This approach involves asking ourselves what the extent of the problem actually is, and discerning the relationship between the various isolated parts of the problem and the problem as a whole. If we do not identify the system correctly in its entirety, we will never come to a satisfactory solution because a key domain will always be missing, the domain of the whole.

We have to expand beyond our habitual ways of seeing, thinking, and acting. If we do not, our attempts to identify and solve our problems will usually be thwarted by our own prejudices and preconceptions. Our lack of awareness of the system as a whole will often prevent us from seeing new options. We will have a tendency to get stuck in crises and to make faulty decisions and choices. Rather than penetrating through problems to the point where solutions
are reached, there is a tendency to make more problems and to make them worse, then to give up trying to solve them.

Such experiences can lead to feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and insecurity. Our doubts about our own abilities become self-fulfilling prophecies that can come to dominate our lives. In this way, we effectively set our own limits by our thought processes. Then, too often, we forget that we have created these boundaries for ourselves. Consequently, we get stuck and feel we cannot get beyond limits of our own creation. Therefore, when someone comes forth with the idea of abolishing prisons, most people react and respond with all sorts of self-imposed boundaries. Some will even turn a deaf ear to the words calling for prison abolition.

I took on the challenge and the risks of facing the full attack from the criminal justice system. I surprised myself and others with my newfound courage and clarity. In the process, I discovered my limits, and I found myself capable of doing things that I never thought I could do. The point is, we do not always know what our true limits are.

Prison abolition, like the abolition of slavery, is a long-range goal. Abolition is not simply a moment in time but a protracted process. Prison abolitionism should not be considered a pipe dream but rather a strong strategy that can, in time, bring about a halt to the building of more prisons. This is why an abolitionist approach demands a solid critical analysis of crime, that is juxtaposed with appropriate social structures plus anti-crime strategies that focus on the provision of social resources. We must educate the public that prisons need to be abolished as the sole way of attempting to resolve social problems that are better solved by other more humane ways and means.

Abolition and revolution are not new. History is replete with stories of the struggles of people on the bottom of the social ladder banding together and organizing to bring radical change for the betterment of their lives and the lives of future generations. Some struggles succeeded, some failed, and others are ongoing. The questions we face regarding the struggle to abolish prisons are too many to count. I do not know how long it will take to abolish prisons. That is akin to asking someone how much air is in the universe. Therein is the real challenge—our search for answers must be incessant.

Should we not ask ourselves how we could build new powers from below? How can we create a new common language to define injustice and to imagine a society without prisons? What are we doing in practice to create the new from within the old? Does such a movement have a chance of surviving and
creating change? Survival and victory depend on coordinated action. We must learn how to cooperate quickly and effectively so as to intensify, broaden, and deepen our struggles. We need stronger networks for communication and support. We must develop a process of dialogue and organization unprecedented in our history.

We can develop a process of dialogue and organization unparalleled in the history of abolition. Let us strive to give hope that a new kind of thinking about the abolition of prisons is in the making, one capable of inspiring people to come together and speak to each other about abolition and revolution. *We must strengthen the hope and dreams of Freedom, Abolition, and Revolution.*

Here we are, the dead of all time, dying once again, only now with the object of living. You have to get out of your self to save yourselves. What we seek, what we need and want is that all those people without a party and organization make agreements about what they want and do not want and become organized in order to achieve it (preferably through civil and peaceful means), not to take power, but to exercise it! (EZLN/Subcommandante Marcos)

**SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MOVING AHEAD**

First, accept the fact that no one person or organization can keep up even in a cursory manner with all aspects of the struggle. Sharing that work through political organizations is necessary, as is developing supportive and cooperative relations among many organizations. Therefore, we should consider supporting, listening, learning, and exchanging knowledge (not just "information") with anti-death penalty organizations in their efforts to first bring about a moratorium of the death penalty and the eventual abolition of the death penalty. When such a goal is achieved, we can build upon that success by inviting them to take the next revolutionary step and buttress our struggle to work toward abolishing prisons. We would then have a much broader base of well-seasoned activists, supporters, networks, knowledge, communications, information, and funding.

Secondly, we do not need to set out with the idea of tearing down prisons, but to promote and transform the present prisons into healing and caring centers. The infrastructure is already in place for all the basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medications, transportation, and recreation. Prison staff should
be retrained to become in-house teachers, paid at the same pay scale as they are presently being paid. Such a strategy will help placate the various guard unions and other misguided prison advocates. Present-day prisons could eventually become healing and caring centers for the homeless; shelters for abused and battered women and children; meaningful and productive drug and alcohol treatment centers; places offering meaningful education and vocation programs for families living in abject poverty. Bring new leadership roles into prisons to work along with most treatment personnel.

Thirdly, to the best of my knowledge, there has been little if any mention, much less serious discussion, among abolitionists about what to do with the dangerous few. I think we can all agree that for the overall well-being and safety of society at large, detention is, and may always be, required for the small group of people who cause harm to others. This question must first be acknowledged, studied, discussed, and resolved, not only by abolitionists, but also among broadly-based groups of doctors, judges, community organizations, corrections personnel, psychologists, legislators, and others at all levels of government. The general public must be invited to take part in these open discussions. This issue will test the mettle not just of abolitionists but also of all involved parties. Now is the time to begin planning tactics and strategies regarding this important and sensitive issue.

NEW POSSIBILITIES

Creating new ways of “thinking about prisons” requires the best efforts, ideas, and experiences, along with honest, careful, sharp, and critical reflection from all those who are willing to take on this daring and daunting task. We construct the groundwork for future generations to build a world that is safe and just. Let us begin working at the edges of what is possible. Let us strive toward a new possibility. Let us fight with the weapon of intelligence. I invite you to join us.

To learn more about the Coalition for the Abolition of Prisons (CAP) please log on to our website at www.noprison.org or e-mail us at CAP@noprison.org. I am deeply indebted to Monty Neill and the Midnight Collective for sending me the great book Auroras of the Zapatistas. Contact Midnight Notes at P.O. Box 204 Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.
Access to educational programs for condemned prisoners awaiting execution at California's infamous San Quentin State Prison can be summed up in one word: "dismal." Since August 2000, there has been no evident effort by the State of California to provide any educational programming directly to the denizens of Death Row. The current supervisor of Academic Instruction explained to this writer in a written response to an inquiry asking what educational programs were available to the condemned population that none were available due to a staff vacancy in the position of Condemned Row Teacher, and that "when the position is filled, education services to the condemned will resume."

On November 7, 2001, a newly-assigned staff member stopped by my cell to pick up a college course textbook from me, and to inform me that she was the new teacher for Death Row. She also indicated that new college-level courses "may" start again for the Row in 2002. She did not indicate if any elementary- or high school-level courses would be available. The depth and range of this new effort remains to be seen. She seems to be acting only as the college course coordinator. I have seen no efforts by San Quentin to provide any basic or high school education to Death Row inhabitants at the time this was written (January 29, 2002).

Prior to August 2000, Death Row did have some access to elementary- and college-level education. At best, however, that access was limited and sporadic depending upon the zeal of the student and teacher. It has been my experience, since coming to Death Row in 1980, that it takes a condemned human being several years to overcome the feeling of being cast out of society as a pariah worthy of elimination and to seek out ways in which to understand one's position and how to better it. Once an individual has reached that point of desire, he or she must come into contact with a teacher who has passion to teach, and who is not simply in it for the stable income of state employment. In the two decades that I have been here I have seen both types of teachers and prefer the former to the latter. However, all is for naught if the prison's administration does not wholly support the education of the dead; unlikely, I surmise, since educating the condemned may give them the intellectual tools to defeat the state's ultimate goal of exterminating them.

In years gone by, the prison made an effort to provide a basic level of education (grades 1 to 8) to each prisoner who did not have this level at the
time of commitment to confinement. This idea extended to the condemned, and a sincere effort was made to raise the reading comprehension level among them. In addition, the prison offered some high school (grades 9 to 12) and General Education Diploma (GED) preparation courses to both mainline (non-condemned) and Death Row prisoners. Arrangements were made to permit mainline prisoners to take the GED exam and obtain the diploma; no such arrangements were made for the condemned, and they were left without a sense of accomplishment or any official recognition of their efforts.

In 1996, in response to the US government banning Pell Grants for convict scholars, a group of San Francisco Bay area academics set up an all-volunteer accredited college level program at the prison with the acquiescence of San Quentin officials. The college courses taught by volunteer graduate students and professors for the mainline students were taped by SQTV, the in-house video department, and aired over the prison's closed circuit television system.

The condemned were given access to this program via closed circuit television lectures and the services of a volunteer staff liaison. This was a boon to the intellectually starved men on Death Row and many men jumped at the opportunity. However, the program was fraught with problems, ranging from technical difficulties with the taped video lectures to obstructionism by custodial staff. Despite this, at least one condemned man gained an Associate in Arts (AA) degree, and many completed a number of the courses offered. This writer was able to accumulate 42 college credits and maintained a 3.82 grade point average during the program's duration, which ended for the condemned in August 2000.

Without access to educational financial aid, such as the old Pell Grants (less than one percent of all Pell Grants actually went to prisoners), the prohibitive costs of accredited college level correspondence courses and the difficulties in obtaining them (requiring the co-operation of the prison’s Education and Mailroom departments) make it nearly impossible to pursue this avenue of credit earning and possible degree attainment in higher education from the depths of Death Row.

I cannot put my finger on the cause of the lack of a viable education program for Death Row inhabitants. The view that prison is to punish and not rehabilitate is certainly a factor. As well, the idea of wasting time, money, and energy on the walking dead can account for some of the lethargy. It may also be a case of deliberate indifference, brought about by the misguided “Tuff on
Crime” crowd, who have been given a sacrosanct role in judicial and penal policy-making in California and elsewhere.

Which leaves the condemned to fend off for themselves the vegetating effects of long-term Death Row confinement. Security needs forbid self-help group therapy programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, for the Death Row population. The only time any number of Death Row convicts are permitted to congregate is during yard exercise periods, and it is very difficult to conduct a group therapy session in the midst of a basketball game, or in the same space as a mass of exercising convicts who are not interested in a program of this sort.

Even the religious services on Death Row are fragmented into small groups divided by faith and yard assignment. For instance, all Catholics on Death Row cannot attend Mass en masse, but just one or two who are assigned to the same yard group can attend together. The services are conducted in a cage, with the congregation of a few separated from the priest by a wire screen and the whole thing overseen by an armed guard! The round robin scheduling of religious services between recognized faiths and yard groups limits the activity to about once a month, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

Many men, out of necessity, devote their time to the study of law. Several have taken a paralegal correspondence course and help others with research guidance. The condemned at San Quentin still have limited access to a small law library, but I am not sure if it is being kept up to date in light of the US Supreme Court’s decision a few years ago stating that prison systems need not maintain a law library (Lewis v. Casey, 518 US 343 [1996]). By passing kites (i.e., notes) to one another, by taking information to the yard, or simply by yelling out new information from cell to cell inside the cellblock, most men on the Row share any legal expertise and materials they have with others across racial lines, in recognition of the common problem we all have: a death sentence!

The condemned also have access to the prison’s general library collection of fiction and non-fiction books on a weekly check-out basis. The collection is patronized quite a bit and it takes about twelve years to cull the collection of outdated non-fiction texts and a little longer to read through the fiction section. I suppose one could attain a basic knowledge on a myriad of subjects by checking out various textbooks and engaging in self-education.

We cannot purchase hardback books, and the state does not provide any publisher or bookseller catalogues, which adds an extra burden to the purchase
of soft-cover books. Bookseller’s catalogues must come directly from the publisher or vendor, and the mailroom either permits their delivery or not. We are required to submit a synopsis of the book to obtain purchase approval, and unless we obtain a catalog or can get an information sheet from a bookseller, we are up the crick or in the proverbial Catch-22; the system thwarts our efforts to expand our minds.

SQTV, the closed circuit television service within the institution, does air educational programming on a variety of subjects, as well as provide limited access to commercial television. Some of the recent programs offered from the SQTV videotape library cover art history, history, anthropology, archaeology, psychology, black history, Native American history, and English as a second language. SQTV and commercial television programs are only available to those who own a personal television set. The state does not provide television sets to prisoners on Death Row. If a prisoner can afford to buy a personal television, SQTV programs are available; however, no program schedule is provided, and so it is pretty much catch as catch can. Nonetheless, the viewer avoids the mesmerizing distraction of commercial television which the state has deployed as a one-eyed babysitter to numb our minds under the guise of allowable personal property.

Despite all of the above, certain individuals among the dead do engage in positive, productive, and progressive creativity in self-education, writing, and art. They have not succumbed to the deliberate indifference of the state, whose ultimate goal is to eliminate, not educate.

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Expanding Horizons through Education: Excerpts from the Life of a Convict Criminologist

Charles M. Terry

Education is often associated with light, knowledge, understanding, and awareness. Learning, especially when sparked by enthusiasm and motivation, can be an exciting, rewarding journey. With education comes new ideas, ways of seeing, beliefs, possibilities, and action. Ignorance, on the other hand, is associated with darkness. Unable to ask questions or wonder about anything beyond their limited worlds, the ignorant tend to grope through life. Often they are led like sheep. Whether they are steered one way or another by television, people at work, their families, or by anyone else, they maintain a sense of safety and purpose by blindly following an unthinking pack of others they identify as being similar to themselves.

In many ways I have been in the process of overcoming this “herd mentality” (Fromm, 1976) for quite some time. All my efforts to do so have involved some form of education. This article is a brief overview of my personal story as it relates to how I have been affected by learning. It includes excerpts from my life history dating back to when I became a full blown heroin addict at the age of eighteen; four prison commitments for drug related crimes in California and Oregon resulting in a roughly twelve years behind bars; my college education which began in prison in 1986, and culminated with a Ph.D. from the University of California in 1999; and a bit about my experiences as a college professor, and my associations with other ex-convict academics.

Before beginning, however, I think it is important to note that in 1984 I was sentenced to the Oregon State Prison (OSP) for burglary. This would be my fourth prison commitment. Like the other three, all which took place in my home state of California during the 1970s, my conviction was related to the fact that, as a heroin addict, I was unable to live a law-abiding lifestyle. It was during the six and a half years I did in that system before being paroled that I began learning things that dramatically altered the very narrow, distorted perceptions I had about history, life, people, and myself.

The way in

Like everyone, I have been learning all my life. Yet what we learn reflects how we interpret what we are exposed to: our self-concepts, values, and sense of
purpose in life. My oldest memories leave me with the impression that I learned to feel differently from others and out of place at a very young age. I remember playing hooky in kindergarten because I thought I did not like school. Rather than show up for class, I hid in the bushes beyond a chain link fence that encompassed the playground. (Little did I know that in the future I would be living on the high side of C-block at OSP, where I would observe people in the yard through the bars of my cell and the windows of the cellblock). Unpleasant feelings flowed through me as I watched the other kids playing during recess. They appeared to be having fun and, however hard I tried, I could not understand why. By age twelve, I was hanging around with youngsters who, like me, did not thrive well in a school environment. Instead, we smoked cigarettes, listened to rock and roll music, and surfed every chance we could. By the time I was fifteen in 1967, I was smoking pot and using other drugs like LSD, speed, and alcohol. At the tender age of eighteen, I injected heroin for the first time.

The first time I felt something burn my body, I knew I had to keep hot things away from my skin. Similarly, once I felt the euphoric effects of heroin, I instantly knew I had found my purpose in life. I remember actually telling the guy who gave me my first shot, “Man, this feels so good. I can’t believe I’ve been doing anything in my life other than using this stuff.” When I was under the influence of that drug I was fixed. All of a sudden I was in love with the world. As never before I felt connected to other human beings. I would greet old ladies as they walked down the street. I would say “hi” to little kids and give them dimes and nickels for candy. Whether I was working, having sex, nodding out somewhere, or stealing, whenever I was high I was okay with my place in the universe. For the next twenty years I did my best to “chase the dragon” and to satisfy my desire for what came to be my reason for living. As fate would have it, however, I spent the bigger part of those twenty years behind bars.

Before a year had passed after that first shot, my entire social network had been turned on its head. No longer did I have anything in common with the surfers and hippie types I hung out with before. In their place came a group of people who shared my love for heroin. Inadvertently, these hookers, thieves, and ex-convicts became my teachers. From them I became educated about an entirely new way of living.

The transitional phase from surfer to junkie was awkward at times. I recall the repulsion I felt while watching the desperate attempt of a forty-year-old prostitute to inject the drug. She had sores all over her body. Some of them,
looking like open wounds, contained an oozing, yellowish fluid. Her arms were covered with black-lined tracks, scars from years of addiction. Unable to find a vein, she kept poking herself over and over with the syringe in hopes of getting the drug into her body. Before long, blood was dripping off her elbow onto the floor. When I tried to hand her some toilet paper to wipe herself off, she frantically told me, as she moved the needle in and out of her arm, "I almost got it. I almost got it!" Cleaning the blood off herself was the last thing on her mind at that point. I also recall older males, most who had been to prison, teaching me about "the game" of being an addict. They taught me how to make an "outfit" (tool for injecting the drug) out of plastic tubes and baby pacifiers, and how to sharpen the needle on a matchbook cover when it got too dull. They taught me how to bring somebody around if they happened to overdose. From them I learned that it was only a matter of time before I would be getting locked up, and some hints on what to do when I did.

As a whole, my new associations helped me neutralize or rationalize my actions (Sykes and Matza, 1957), which, very quickly, became the daily use of heroin, along with petty thievery. In this social world it was okay to break the law, it was okay to be a dope fiend, it was okay to go to jail. What was not okay was cooperating with agents of the law for any reason, at any time. Horror stories of what happened to snitches were legend. Those who lived by the rules of the game seemed to live with dignity and were treated with respect. Those who did not were stigmatized or worse.

As predicted, it was not long before I began getting arrested and spending time in jail. The "street-oriented" education I had been exposed to prior to actual incarceration was helpful in making the transition to the social world of confinement. While there, I quickly learned that the majority of those who remained in custody without making bail were also heroin addicts. The guys I came to know on the inside had the same basic worldview as the people I had been hanging out with on the streets. Still, doing time was different than being out.

Prior to being sent to prison, I spent many months in the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles county jail systems of southern California. Paradoxically, these were places I would witness both the best and worst sides of human nature. It was in the Los Angeles County Jail in particular that I became highly informed regarding the art of surviving in an upside down, overcrowded, and unbelievably oppressive environment.
My experiences in LA County Jail helped to teach me the value of shared suffering. Camaraderie between prisoners, especially in the closed confines of our crowded cells, was always amazing. On one occasion, I was so addicted when I entered that human processing agency (or zoo, which is what it more closely resembles) that I did not sleep a minute for three entire weeks. During that time there were a few other prisoners, total strangers until we met on the tier, who did what they could to ease my misery. Lacking any real appetite, and too weak to make it to the chow hall, these guys supplied me with warm coffee and candy bars—often at their own expense. Typically, it was not until we were moved into more open public spaces, such as the chow hall or recreation yard, that we exhibited feelings of animosity toward each other.

In LA County Jail I also learned that brutality against prisoners is an everyday occurrence. It was there I witnessed guards beating men with flashlights, and heard them screaming endless tirades of disrespect at everyone who was confined—the mentally ill, the severely addicted, the chronically homeless—it did not matter who we were. All of us suffered at the expense of our keepers. We were strip searched, sprayed with DDT to kill whatever bugs might be on our bodies, and herded into cells where the only available place to sleep was on the concrete floor—without a mattress.

We also suffered because we were not always able to get along with ourselves. Prisoner violence was something that could and did erupt on the spur of the moment. Except for the earliest hours of the morning, the cellblocks were always loud. Screaming and yelling were the primary means of communication. One night I remember hearing someone on another tier yelling the universal message that someone has lost consciousness, “Man down. Man down.” Once heard, it is expected that guards will hear the call and send help as soon as possible. In response, a prisoner from another cell screamed, “Is he out?” “Yeah,” came the reply. Immediately thereafter I heard, “Then roll him over and fuck him.” My education in jail was very useful in helping me negotiate my next horizon—prison.

Prison was actually an improvement over the jail conditions I had experienced. Most of all we were given more autonomy. We could attend school, work, or hang out in the yard where we exercised, got high, played cards or dominoes, told endless stories, and laughed a lot. The pervasive prison humor helped us negotiate and manage the gaps between our “normal” and convict identities (Terry, 1997). Because of what I had learned prior to
arriving, my transition to the prison lifestyle seemed relatively easy. What I did not anticipate, however, was the huge significance of race behind the walls.

In the California system, and elsewhere, there were boundaries between groups that required a thorough understanding because crossing them could lead to violence and death. This was a world where almost everything revolved around an individual's race and where he came from on the streets. Very quickly, I learned that, except in unusual circumstances, whites and browns and blacks kept their distance from each other whenever possible. In the public spaces of prison I saw what amounted to de facto segregation. It was as if certain segments of the chow hall or yard belonged to specific races. Moreover, the groupings of men by race were further splintered based on their place of origin in the outside world: over here was Orange County, over there was the San Fernando Valley. The northern Chicanos were involved in a constant war with Chicanos from the southern part of the state, a battle that continues to this day. Familiarization with these social realities was essential for survival.

In prison I also learned about personal responsibility and integrity. This was not a world where deceit and pretentious projections of self had much longevity. As on the outside, how we were seen by others was related to the people we hung out with and how well we were trusted. Being respected and feared were nearly synonymous. To be seen positively as "solid," or "stand up," was next to impossible for any significant period of time unless one was seen as trustworthy and lived by the tenets of the culture.

The more time I did, the easier it was to live behind bars because I developed a self-concept and a worldview which reflected a convict perspective. The downside of this was that as the years passed it became increasingly difficult to adapt to the outside whenever I was released. While inside I had a secure social network and a positive self-image which allowed me to live with integrity. I knew what to expect, who my enemies were, and how to thrive in that environment. Once released, I felt like a stranger in a strange land. Alienated to the extreme, the only people I could relate to were other addicts or people who had also done time. Ultimately, I always ended up getting hooked on heroin and sent back to prison.

By the time I was 35 years old I found myself sitting against the wall in the Oregon State pen with a few other institutionalized convicts. These were my brothers, my herd. We did everything from working out, eating, getting high and laughing, to showering and shitting together. Though their presence in my life was essential to my well-being, the perspective we shared was extremely
narrow. We lived in a black and white world where right was right and wrong was wrong. What was right was being under the influence of drugs and living by the rules of the game we had all learned to play. Without knowing it then, this limited world view left me basically cut off from almost all human beings. The game I valued left me isolated from almost everything in life.

**The way out**

In 1986, I had to do a week in segregation for being under the influence of narcotics. It was there that I managed to read a book called *The Source* by James Michener. I had always read books while confined, including several Michener books, but the effects of reading *The Source* at that time had a huge impact on me. It is a book about the history of a specific location in the Middle East, ranging from many thousands of years BC to the present. As Michener does in all his books, he incorporated fictional stories with historical situations, trends, and people. From that one book I was introduced to the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and much more. Upon its completion I was left with a thought that had never occurred to me before. I realized I enjoyed learning.

At that particular time I had already been incarcerated for just about three years. Along with my newfound awareness that I enjoyed learning, I had also become bored with the monotony of prison life where change is so uncommon. These aspects of my life, among others, motivated me to attend a couple of college classes in the education department. At that time college was an option, supported by Pell Grants from the federal government, which were available to all prisoners who qualified by having a high school diploma or a GED. Since I was working full time in the furniture factory for top pay ($3.00 a day), and highly valued my job, I decided I would take a couple classes, which were available in the evenings, just to see if I was even amenable to school. Today I believe it was a decision that dramatically altered the course of my future.

The first two classes I took were called Cultural Anthropology and Developmental Psychology. Both had the effect of shattering the foundations of my limited knowledge about the world and myself. In the cultural anthropology class I learned about different traditional (non-modern) cultures that had been discovered all over the planet. Each had a distinct meaning system. Each had its own set of values, norms, and lifestyles. In one, for example, babies were raised solely by men for five years after birth. In another, there was no distinction between what we define as cousins and brothers. The single commonality
among them all was a belief in some force connecting all life. It was amazing for me to be able to see how each worked perfectly within the context in which it was found. What people did was necessary for their survival. And what they did simply worked. From the cultural anthropology class I began to see the world I lived in behind the walls as a unique culture. Implicitly, this meant that there was not only another, but many different ways of living and of seeing the world. Though I did not know it then, my notions of right and wrong and black and white were beginning to crumble.

The developmental psychology class was equally enlightening. Rather than helping me to reconceptualize the social world of the prison, it helped me redefine myself. It was especially interesting for me to hear the teacher go over Erikson's (1963) theory of emotional development. According to Erikson, we internalize certain attributes during various stages of life. In our early years we learn trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative (self-motivation) versus guilt, and industry (attempt to win recognition by doing good things) versus inferiority. During puberty we either develop a sense of identity or suffer from role confusion. By the time we are young adults we evolve into people who are eager for intimacy or we suffer from a deep sense of isolation and become totally self-absorbed. The implications of the teachers’ words rattled me to the core. I knew in my heart that I came out on the negative end of each of Erikson’s phases. As the meaning of this new understanding dawned on my consciousness I disrupted the lecture and blurted out, “No wonder I’m a dope fiend! By the time I was a teenager I didn’t trust anybody, I was overcome with guilt, shame, doubt, and didn’t know who I was! Now, what can I do to quit being a dope fiend?” Chuckling kindly, the teacher suggested I take many more classes in school. I did.

With the aid of financial support from my family, I was able to quit my job and become a full time student for the next two years. The classes I would take during that period provided me with windows into worlds I never knew existed. Courses I took included psychology, sociology, biology, anatomy, algebra, the history of world religions, and several versions of cultural anthropology. And as the classes came and went, the views I had about the world and myself continually changed.

My exposure to that educational environment and all I was learning, amidst the monotony of the prison experience, was stimulating, nurturing, and life enhancing. Instead of hanging out in the furniture factory or the yard thinking about how to hustle another high, I found myself in classrooms with the
minority of other convicts interested in learning; in my cell reading, studying, and writing. Getting high was still part of my life, but once underway, the educational process had me in its grips almost as powerful as any drug ever had. I recall one time when I was taking an anatomy class having to memorize ten pages of notes for a test. I would be out in the yard pulling these pieces of paper out of my pocket, going over them, repeating three of four words at a time until I had it all memorized. And in the education department I would see other guys I knew. We hung out in the smoking room between classes and talked trash like we had been doing for years. But we also talked about history, biology, and psychology. One friend and I used to call each other “doctor” as we passed each other in the hallway of the education department or on the tier. We joked about being convict scholars. It was almost as if it was not okay to be doing what we were doing, that we were unworthy or incapable of becoming educated. Such thoughts, of course, were merely reflections of the meanings we had learned in the prison culture and of our convict identities.

The teachers who came to the prison were influential in ways beyond being educators. The main reason for this, I believe, is that unlike almost everybody else who works in the criminal justice system, they treated us like human beings. While in those classrooms it was almost like being somewhere in the free world. In the presence of these teachers we were not degraded for simply existing. Ken Jensen, the guy who taught cultural anthropology, was also the college program coordinator. Bright, shy, friendly, and selfless in his actions, he was a tremendous inspiration to many of us. Often I would make him blush with my crude, convict-oriented humor about some particular topic he was discussing. Ken’s many years teaching at Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) spawned his interest in criminology-related studies, especially about programs that have the potential to help prisoners turn their lives around. We have remained in contact over these many years and occasionally see each other at academic conferences.

The teacher who taught developmental psychology also had a huge affect on me. Again, it was not just what he was teaching, but also his style of interpersonal relations with us that really got my attention. He treated us with decency, respect, and obvious compassion. And he did so every single time he came. This was strange territory for me—unchartered waters. One evening, as I sat listening to him lecture during class, an alien thought crossed my mind. While observing him I noticed he looked happy. And when I considered his disposition over time, I realized he always seemed happy. This contradicted
my reality because, for me, to be happy meant to be high. The next thought that came to me was, “this guy looks happy and I know he’s not loaded.” In retrospect, I can never recall noticing another human being as being happy before that night in school; that is, unless that other person was high. Once this occurred to me I thought, “I wonder what it would be like to be able to be happy without having to be high?”

After those years in college I had the opportunity to be transferred to a minimum-security forest camp near the Oregon coast because I was nearing my release date. The transition from OSP was severe at first, but I adapted. While in that camp I learned how to cut trees down with chain saws, which was a total blast. It was there that I was also introduced to literature related to spirituality.

A friend of mine from asp, who had embarked on a journey to expand his own horizons, gave me access to his personal book collection. Much of what he had gathered contained works related to eastern philosophy and mysticism. In a way they acted as an extension of what I had already been learning in the prison college classes. They taught me more about another way of seeing the world, and about ways and means of attaining inner peace. For example, in Stephen Levine’s A Gradual Awakening I learned about the value of letting go of efforts to control things outside of ourselves. Krishnamurti (1969) helped me realize why human beings are attracted to anger and violence and how, ultimately, our notions of reality stem from the way our minds have been conditioned by our methods of education and culture. From Ram Dass (1974) I was reminded of the four noble truths of Buddhism, which I had first heard about in a world religion class at asp. Basically, what they teach us is that suffering is at the heart of the human condition. We suffer because we have desires. Freedom from suffering comes from releasing those desires; the hard part is that in order to really be free from suffering, we have to actually let go of our own expectations, demands, and self-conceptions which, based on the ways we have been conditioned from birth, determine the things we desire or not.

My interest in this literature and what it represented provided me with both the means and motivation to spend a significant amount of time meditating during my last year of incarceration. In an effort to quiet my mind, I would sit in the back of the cell, stuff my ears with foam plugs smuggled from the metal shop to lessen the noise, and pull a wool beanie over my eyes to block the light. With continued practice, I managed to locate a place of deep calm within
myself that I never knew existed before. In this place there was no fear, no doubt, no difference, and no uncertainty about anything. In this place there were no names, time lines, or other borders which characterize the separating attributes of the world. As the writers of the books I had been reading said, in this place was only oneness and a deep sense of peace. The feeling I experienced while meditating was somewhat familiar to the way I felt while under the influence of a strong shot of heroin. The difference, however, was that the more heroin I used the more I needed to get to that place. On the other hand, the more I meditated, the easier it was to get there and the harder it became to leave. Moreover, each time I came back to “reality” things were just a little more pleasant and a little less hectic than they had been before.

Experiencing peace while meditating was great. But I quickly learned that any peace I gained in the cell could be lost in an instant on the tier, in the chow hall, or on the yard. The books I was reading said that we create the way we feel based on what we bring to the circumstances we encounter. Ultimately, we receive what we give, always, at all times. When we give anger, we get anger. When we give love, we get love in return. It was for this reason that I began making efforts to watch my thoughts as they emerged during my daily activities. Of special concern to me were the situations and events that propelled me toward anger and hostility toward others.

Ironically, the people I hated the most became my most valued teachers. Though I never said a word to any of them, they helped me become a freer, happier person. For example, there was one guy in OSP who had been convicted of kidnapping, raping, and murdering women in California, Oregon, and Washington. After having his way with them, the story went, he would leave their bodies on Interstate 5. He was well known and despised by a majority of the prisoners. When I did time in California, people like him were kept in protective custody. In Oregon he remained in the general population with everyone else. Not only that, he carried himself with an air of superiority. One day I was hanging out with a friend in the yard. As we did on many occasions, we were walking around the track, talking as we went. In my guts, on the inside where I live, I felt okay, calm. The world was a decent place to be. Suddenly, I looked up and saw this I-5 guy walking in our direction. It was not like he was heading toward us in particular. He was merely part of the crowd walking in the opposite direction. Instantly, as soon as I laid eyes on him, I felt the familiar feelings of hatred, anger, and rage, and they were all aimed directly
at him. It was not like I was trying to feel this way. I just did. I hated this guy.
From my perspective he was no good and did not deserve to breathe.

Unlike the untold number of times I had experienced similar feelings in relation to other people or situations, on this particular occasion I became somewhat conscious of what was happening. The understanding that followed was overwhelming. I realized that my hatred toward this man had no effect on him whatsoever. Instead, I was the one experiencing the effects of my hatred. In fact, I learned when it comes to the way we feel, we really do get what we give. I gave hatred, I received hatred. It was quite an eye opener for me to realize that this is what is happening all the time, throughout the world with all of us. I could be in C-block and suddenly get angry over the three packs of cigarettes a guy in D-block owed me, and I would feel the anger! What this meant, in short, is that holding onto resentments is like taking poison and waiting for the other guy to die. This awareness had a huge effect on me. It helped me reduce the amount of pain I caused myself by judging others negatively because they do not happen to live up to my expectations and demands. By the time I left that institution I was able to pass the I-5 guy without experiencing the toxic effects of my anger. It was not that I could go up to him and give him a hug, but his existence no longer caused me to suffer as it had in the past. For me this was evidence of the possibility that there really was a “way out.” And that “way” did not necessarily have anything to do with being diagnosed as healthy by a prison shrink or deemed eligible for release by a parole board.

The only time I got high during that last year was when somebody “kicked me down” for free. By then, trying to get high had become too much of a hassle. It was overly expensive, time consuming, and seldom worth it. Along with exercising and meditating, I ate and slept well, and (since I was thoroughly institutionalized by then) had little to worry about in life. Further, while getting high felt good, it typically took me several days to get back to normal after the dope wore off. Without realizing it, I was learning that feeling normal felt good.

Ninety days before my last parole, my cellie brought home enough heroin for us both. I was excited, to say the least. What awaited me, however, was something I never anticipated. The first thing I thought after feeling the euphoric effect of the drug was, “God, I can’t believe I screwed my whole life up for this feeling.” Somehow, it just was not what it had always been. Within the next instant I experienced what is often referred to as a “moment of clarity.”
What came to me seemed clear and unequivocal. I thought, “This stuff isn’t giving me anything. In fact, it’s taking away from what I have.” Implicitly, this meant that being clean would be better than being high. It seems to me today that “what I had” was something that had been hidden from my awareness most of my life. It took everything I had undertaken prior to that point in time, especially the years I spent in college, the books I read at the forest camp, and the time I spent meditating and watching my thoughts, to learn that what I “have” is what everyone else has: the potential to feel joy, happiness, and a sense of inclusion with those around us. Unfortunately, it is impossible to experience these human qualities when we are immersed in fear, anger, hatred, and feelings of exclusion and difference.

CONCLUSION

As I look back at my life today, it seems clear that the effects of what I began learning in those college classes at OSP were nothing less than transformational. More than anything, perhaps, I began seeing myself within a much broader context than I ever had before. My interests in spirituality, which followed, built upon and reinforced this major perceptual shift. In addition, I started thinking more critically, seeking answers to questions that were, to me, as yet unanswered.

Prior to being released I decided I would try to pursue a formal education after I got out. My thinking in this regard was simple: “I know I’m institutionalized. I do well in institutions. Colleges on the streets are institutions. Since I do well here maybe I could do well there.” Of course, “doing good” meant staying out, something I had never done for more than three years since I was eighteen years old. As fate would have it, my plan worked beyond my wildest expectations. Along with a tremendous amount of social support from my family, as well as friends in twelve-step programs and academia, came opportunities which I took advantage of, the motivation to continue learning, and a whole new way of life. As the journey has evolved I have had the privilege to begin the wonderful experience of acting as teacher myself.

Today I am employed as a college professor who teaches classes about criminology, law, and society. I do my best to educate students about the ludicrous nature of the harsh, revenge based realities of state sponsored social control. In other words, I teach about the system of criminal injustice as a whole, ways it benefits big business, and how it is legitimized by politicians,
the media and members of law enforcement who indoctrinate the public with the fear of crime and the need for public safety. The combination of bringing my extensive education and experience within the system to the classroom seems to work quite well. It also seems to enhance my credibility with students. It is one thing to lecture about prison, for example, using notes from what is often dry, empty literature filled with statistics, and quite another when you can juxtapose academic material with real life stories because in fact you have actually “been there.”

Over the years I have developed relationships with other ex-convicts who have undergone a journey similar to my own. All of us have been to prison. All of us either have completed, or are working toward a Ph.D. This group, which is becoming known as the “New School of Convict Criminology” is becoming stronger and growing over time. Though our interests and views vary considerably, we do what we can to inform others about issues related to social justice from a convict perspective. The foundation of our work stems from our experiences. These not only set us apart from mainstream academics and practitioners, but also make us a potential threat. We talk about what is wrong with and missing from professional literature about criminal justice and “corrections”; about how our views differ from those without “insider” status; about the obstacles we faced along the rocky roads toward becoming college professors; and about suggestions for reform that would enhance the experiences of people currently caught up in the system (See Richards and Ross, this issue).

Convict criminology provides a vision that needs further support. Rather than controlling prisoners, which is the primary focus of the criminal justice system, we advocate efforts to reduce the prison population by cutting back on lengthy sentencing guidelines and ending the war on drugs. We also support voting rights for all convicts and felons, better living conditions for prisoners, an end to the use of prison snitches, and increased opportunities for higher education behind bars. Moreover, we agree with others who suggest that supervision by the state upon release from custody should be entirely eliminated for the majority of individuals, or at least greatly shortened (Austin, 2001).

Along this journey I have discovered that we all have a window through which we see the world. All the meanings we give to everything in our lives stem from what we see through the glass. The window I used to look through was dark and murky. What I saw was limited to the extreme and highly distorted. This murkiness, though still there to some degree, has diminished along with
my education. The hard part to deal with is that the clearer the picture gets the more painful it is to see. In other words, the more we learn, the more aware we become of injustice, inequality, death, and suffering which affect huge numbers of human beings who inhabit our planet. And the more we learn, the more we develop a sense of responsibility to do something to make the world a better place.

A few years back I was eating lunch with Alan Mobley and John Irwin, two other ex-convicts who earned Ph.D.s. John, who is now a retired professor and has authored many books about prisons, is like the gang leader of convict criminology. At some point in the discussion, Alan and I touched upon the seeming worthlessness of the battle we are engaged in today. Trying to right the wrongs of the law, the criminal justice system and the forces that support them, seems to be an insurmountable task. John, with his ever-present wisdom, responded by saying, “Yeah, but we gotta keep up the fight. If our ancestors hadn’t fought the fight we’d all be slaves right now.” He may very well be right.

As it has been for me, education can lead to ways out of negative, self-destructive lifestyles. It can also be a way to bring about social change. The worst we can do is to be apathetic about the way things are. The most we can do depends on our abilities, opportunities, and actions. What we do, and the future we create, is up to us all.

REFERENCES


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The United States’ relationship with higher education has always been a stormy love affair. On the one hand, most people recognize and even extol the value of education, primarily because of its practical application as a means to better paying jobs. On the other hand, people in this country tend to be suspicious of highly-educated individuals, especially academics, often disparaging them as naively inexperienced and philosophically removed from the real world; thus leading to resistance of theoretical work in general, whether in the physical or the social sciences. Post-secondary education in the United States is, in fact, not of primary interest to most of the population; only twenty-six percent of the population has a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. It will therefore come as no surprise that those same attitudes of the population at large extend to the men and women in this country’s prisons and to the individuals charged with keeping them there. Unfortunately for everyone involved, including the free electorate, the advantages of higher education as both a management tool and a prophylactic device to preclude further criminal behavior are often ignored for more pernicious reasons than casual ignorance.

When I first entered Florida’s prison system in 1974, an extensive junior college (two year) program was in place, established and maintained by Lake City Community College. Prisoners could take as many as four classes each semester on the way to either of two associate’s degrees, paying for our education with veteran’s benefits or federal assistance, which contrary to later claims, did not deprive free citizens of educational opportunities. At the same time, the prison staff received reduced tuition rates at the same college for classes at the campus in Lake City, and were also encouraged to attend the University of Florida in nearby Gainesville, where they could take up to six credits per semester at state expense. The men inside prison stood in line to

1 The Basic Education Opportunity Grant later became the Pell Grant and paid for both tuition and books. In 1994, prisoners were excluded from qualifying for the Pell Grant (Taylor, 1998).
register for classes each time they came around, but the classes available to prison staff remained unfilled. I was one of the lucky ones who attended class as long as the program lasted, and it was there that my personal education began in ways that continue to astonish me.

I was not new to college. Before coming to prison, I had made it through two years of an athletic scholarship; that is, playing football and drinking beer. Along with other semi-thinkers I encountered, I had never placed education at the top of my to-do list. I was content to function at a basic level, thinking only when I was forced to do so. But prison makes us hungry, if for no other reason than to counter the mind-numbing routine of doing time. So I found myself in class again after an eight-year sabbatical, and I could not get enough.

I loved the books and lectures, but more than that, I looked forward to the dialogue with the professors; real people who treated me like, well, like a real student. The experience not only provided a focus for my intellectual curiosity, but also served to remind me that my peers and guards, many of whom would harm me at a moment's notice with only the slightest provocation, did not exemplify the external world. Even if I doubted that—and I admit that I did at times during my Nietzsche phase!—the education I was receiving inside the classroom expanded my constricted world view and introduced me to men and women whose work I could admire and try to emulate. This enabled me to understand why prison was an aberration in every conceivable way and not even remotely comparable to the real world outside. This discovery came with another sort of lesson, one that I shared with more people than I would have imagined.

William Golding never did time, but early in his life he also underwent a philosophical and intellectual epiphany in an educational environment. In an essay written seven years after publication of Lord of the Flies, Golding describes three grades of thinkers, relating them to his own experiences. His scale begins with Grade-3 thinkers, people who limit their cognitive exercises to only those matters that help them get through the day: getting up, eating, going to work, coming home, shopping; all the mundane things that people do automatically, similar to my own status during college. Grade-2 thinkers are a step above, capable of recognizing contradictions when faced with them.

2 From "Thinking As a Hobby" which first appeared in Holiday Magazine, in 1961.
Grade-1 thinkers comprise the 2.5 percent on the high end of the distribution curve; they think all the time. These are the men and women disparaged and often reviled by those existing on the lower tiers.

Golding's discovery came while he was in the office of his school's headmaster for some disciplinary infraction, allegedly involving his refusal to think. In this office, the headmaster kept three statuettes, arranged in specific order, symbolizing his personal pantheon. The first in line was a small figure of the *Venus de Milo*, representing, of course, beauty. This was followed closely by a leopard posed on a rock, exemplifying nature. The third piece of sculpture was Rodin's *Thinker*, connoting pure thought. During the scene described in Golding's essay, the headmaster reaches for the Rodin piece, places it in front of the young Golding, and demands that the young student stop wasting his time and the school's and learn to think. The lesson clearly took, and the young man began to understand the benefit of serious thought: it was both liberating and empowering. The same sort of revelation occurs inside prisons, a development that administrators and guards tend to view as dangerous.

Francis Bacon was right, of course, when he stated that knowledge is indeed power, and it therefore becomes something that must be denied to those one wishes to keep powerless. Thus the logical strategy for prison administrators is to keep prisoners ignorant to prevent the acquisition of any high-minded ideas, lest we begin to question our subjugation and treatment. And that continues to be the case with a few notable exceptions.

Resistance to higher education in prison in my early years came from every direction: a cash-strapped legislature, vindictive citizens, and envious guards. For a variety of reasons, all of which related to the prisoners' status, voices spoke against educating us past the most rudimentary levels. Only later, when I began to read Frederick Douglass, for example, did I understand the more deeply held reasons for denying us the opportunity for growth. Douglass described for me the results when he began to read and consequently to think:

> [Education] had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. ... The more I read, the more I was led to

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3 Prison education usually stops at basic literacy programs and GED preparation.
abhors my enslavers. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. (Douglass, 2000: 226)

Clearly such revolutionary attitudes were irreconcilable with controlling recalcitrant slaves or maintaining a secure prison. If we began to question our roles as prisoners and the moral authority of our keepers, the potential threat to order would grow exponentially. My status as a prisoner must therefore militate against any extension of rights and privileges, including higher education available to free citizens, or else the differences between us would shrink. As Douglass points out, “[E]ducation and slavery were incompatible with each other” (p. 225). Prisons, therefore, dare not equip their prisoners with intellectual tools and thereby risk developing Grade-1 thinkers, a status that would violate the prisons’ preconceptions of what we should be. In other words, we prisoners are to be treated like mushrooms, kept in the dark and piled high with manure.

But my newly-pursued education brought me insights, and my thirst for knowledge and explanation led me further into the field of literature and philosophy. I began to question and to understand, not only what I had done but also what was being done to me. I discovered Maya Angelou’s tragic description of her eighth-grade graduation from the Lafayette Country Training School in Stamps, Arkansas, in 1940. The seniors graduating in the same ceremony listened to white commencement speakers describe for them their futures, not in four-year colleges but in the traditionally black agriculture and mechanical institutions, thus placing them in the box that majority society had selected for them. Her response, with the hatred such a bleak future generated, is still resonant:

We were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous. Then I wished that Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner had killed all white folks in their beds ... and Christopher Columbus had drowned in the Santa Maria.  

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4 Black slaves who led bloody revolts against their masters.  
The precise attitude encountered by Angelou’s graduating class was alive and well in Florida’s prisons during the early seventies, which guaranteed the eventual demise of any program devoted to higher education. After all, we were merely convicts; why educate us beyond our station?

The reaction to college classes in prisons was systemic, fueled by the new conservatism and the harsher attitudes of society in general. Florida’s prisons are usually situated in rural areas, traditionally the poorest counties and the ones that welcome the prison as the primary employer. The security apparatus reflects those same rural attitudes, generally expressed as utter disdain for higher education in general. Part of the response, however, can be traced to the resentment of the guards during encounters with prisoners who were more highly educated than they were. This usually took the form of ridiculing whatever degrees we might have earned at the time and disparaging the academic work as somehow less than what we would encounter in the real world. Then, too, there was the perpetual question: “What are you going to do with those degrees?”

Higher education also posed a problem for the classification system, designed to sort quickly through incoming prisoners and assign each of us to a particular job based on a standard profile. In Florida, the rule was to place all new prisoners either in the laundry or the kitchen—punishment positions—just to get our heads right “Went to college out there, boy? Don’t make no difference in here. You ain’t in college now, and we got no use for them silly ideas anyway.” No matter what the result of the classification process, educated prisoners were and still are a puzzle to classification teams in every prison because we do not fit the mold; we are more than the number stamped on our chests, and we will not be consigned to a pigeon hole. And believe me, that creates serious philosophical dilemmas for prison staff—and existential dilemmas for those of us doing the time.

To illustrate: I recently underwent a psychological evaluation as part of my parole application after twenty-seven consecutive years of a life sentence. The parole board requested the evaluation and indicated that they would look favorably on my request if the results rang no alarms. An interview was scheduled, one that lasted maybe fifteen minutes with no diagnostics administered. At the end of the interview, the psychologist recommended three books that I should read for stress relief. She then went back to her office and composed a half-page summary of the interview, in which she described me as polite and cooperative, oriented to time and space, alert, and manifesting no
alarming behaviors. She stated that I was not suffering from any mental illness and had no history of addiction, domestic violence, or sexual offenses. So far, so good. Ah, but she could not resist. At the very end, she said that is was her "impression" that I suffered from a personality disorder with antisocial characteristics.

The outcome should be obvious. The parole board seized on that single sentence, the last segment of the evaluation, and denied me parole for a minimum of five more years. When I next saw the psychologist, I advised her of what had happened and explained the basis for the parole board’s action. With respect to the antisocial personality disorder, she said, "Well, what do they expect after all the years you’ve been in prison?" In other words, I did nothing to confirm such a diagnosis. She simply looked at my twenty-seven years in prison and assumed that I was antisocial, arriving at that conclusion by the convoluted reasoning that since I did not act crazy, I must therefore be crazy. She could not accept that I was normal, going to work each day, teaching college classes at night, and doing what I could to make the time pass. Using my status as a long-term prisoner, she assigned me a role that she expected me to play and casually destroyed my hopes and dreams.

This sort of preconception is hardly new, having followed me for nearly three decades behind bars. It was the driving force behind the retrenchment in educational funding, culminating with the death of the Pell Grant for prisoners in 1994. The standard rationale, and the boldest lie, was that prisoners were taking grant money away from free citizens; therefore, education’s limited funds would be better spent on assistance for low-income people who obeyed the law. This conflation of fiscal prudence and philosophical opposition to prisoners’ education paved the way for the organized destruction of higher education behind the walls, even producing a knee-jerk reaction in Canada’s prisons (Murphy, 1998). The prevailing attitude hardened, permitting our keepers to profess that their primary job was protecting the public, and candidly admitting that they did not care about any of the prisoners under their care (Robert, 2000).

Those prison staff who feel compelled to phrase things a little more discreetly now claim that they can, more competently and persuasively than strangers to the system, better address the traditional prisoner-related issues of cognitive difficulties, deficient social skills, and ethical and moral development. In this theoretical construct, the benefits of higher education are lost in the self-aggrandizing and self-perpetuating environment of prison “schools”—
institutions that remain infamous for emulating society's worst educational failures by graduating students who cannot conjugate a verb in the present tense, solve the equation $3 \times ? = 6$, identify this country's northern neighbor, or place the American Civil War in the proper century. Moreover, prison teachers tend to be security personnel first and educators second. By constantly disciplining their students and reminding them of their inferior status, the teachers reinforce stereotypes and destroy self-esteem, locking the men and women in their classes into certain failure.

For example, a teacher at New Hampshire State Prison, on the first day of class, held up a sheet of paper with the word "fuck" printed on it. He told the students that he did not permit the f-word to be used in his class. He warned them that if he heard it, the student would suffer the prison equivalent of expulsion without recourse. Granted, profanity generally has no place in civilized discourse, but think of the difference between the restrictive nature of the prison class and the freedom in college classes to discuss, for example, the objectification of women by a patriarchal society, including the use of the verb "fuck" to indicate something being done to someone. In prison schools, as in prison in general, there is no flexibility; the rule is the rule is the rule. Educational opportunities are therefore little more than another means to control behavior, a management tool by which prison staff achieves results by threatening to remove the only redeeming program available.

This is Bentham's Panopticon, the perfect prison in which prisoners' behavior is manipulated by any available means to produce conformity and obedience, that which higher education discourages in favor of an independent intellect. It is the precise oppression, and the most pernicious one, as described by Condorcet, "in which one's oppressor knows one's name and one's weakness, and where one lives" (Rothchild, 2001: 116).

Attempting to modify such a bureaucratic monolith presents enormous difficulties, especially considering the widespread suspicion of higher education by the public at large. Prison teachers, for example, consistently refuse to admit misconceptions whose rectification might place their jobs in jeopardy. They tend to see the introduction of higher education as both an infringement and a threat that diminishes their own roles. They are largely incapable of seeing post-secondary education in prison as a natural extension of their own efforts at the secondary level, even in the face of ineluctable proof of the benefits.
First, higher education costs the prison nothing. At the New Hampshire State Prison, students have the option of taking classes provided by a two-year technical college (New Hampshire Community Technical College) or those brought in by a four-year institution (New England College). Federal grants are available for youthful offenders, but in general, students pay for both tuition and books from their own funds. Moreover, classes usually run in the evenings, so competition with the prison’s school for classroom space does not occur. For those who would object to the youthful-offenders grant, J. Michael Quinlin, the former Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, notes: “Society should recognize that the cost of college [in prison] is really very insignificant when you compare the cost of damage done by crime” (Marks, 1977). In stark terms, would you prefer to have the government pay a very small amount to educate a prisoner or have that same prisoner return to your neighborhood, as most of us will do, break into your house, steal your property, and drive up your insurance rates while completely destroying the sense of security and comfort that people should enjoy inside their homes? It is really a no-brainer.

What about the guarantees? There are none, of course. Life in general is not that simple, but supporting data exist. In any given year, fifty-nine percent of the men and women in prisons and jails in this country are either illiterate or functionally illiterate. This compares with twenty-five percent (still an embarrassingly high percentage) of free citizens (Haiger et al., 1994: 124). Realistically, what else can illiterate ex-felons do but steal or sell drugs? That is the insanity of returning people to the street in the same (if not worse) condition in which they were found.

Now look at the difference higher education makes. In George W. Bush’s Texas, of all places, research into the benefits of college programs and their effects on recidivism rates for 1990–1991 demonstrated the inverse relationship between higher education and recidivism. Ex-felons with no university degrees returned to prison at the disheartening rate of sixty percent. Only 5.6 percent of those with bachelor’s degrees returned, and those with a master’s degree had a recidivism rate of zero percent (Tracy and Johnson, 1994: 6–7). This is not rocket science; yet politicians and their constituents persist in ignoring or denying both the practical and therapeutic benefits of educating the men and women they incarcerate.

Higher education in prison, however, goes far beyond the utilitarian implications for reducing crime; it develops the individual to the extent that
criminal behavior is simply no longer an option. To accomplish this, college programs in prison subscribe to John Henry Cardinal Newman’s description of the purpose of a university and the importance to the student of advanced learning:

[Education] shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them. (Newman, 1964: 258)

Cardinal Newman was hardly the first to make the observation that men and women are expanded, broadened, made complete, and nourished by higher education. In the famous Parable of the Cave in The Republic, Plato discusses with Glaucon the benefits of systematic learning. “The instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole be turned from the world of becoming into that of being.” Higher education thus frees the individual from the solipsistic trap of thinking only in terms of self and immediate gratification. It educates and enlightens at the hands of college instructors who bring into the prison knowledge that is more valuable and realistic than the busy-work programs students generally encounter in prison-mandated programs. These professors deliver to students an awareness of both their potential and their naive self-assessment, because, as May Sarton reminds us, education requires humility. 6

And students in prison classes need a healthy dose of humility because, in those secondary classes or GED preparation programs inside prison, they are often fed a diet of intellectual pabulum and passed along from grade to grade to pad the numbers and qualify for federal grants. The students emerge convinced that they are doing well in complex tasks when their skills are rudimentary at best. This accounts for the identical phenomenon outside, where forty percent of students in primary and secondary school consider themselves among the best in the world while performing among the worst in international competition (Stevenson, 1992). In college classes, prisoners learn how much they do not know, a concept that is vital to self-improvement.

Up to this point, I have written about the philosophical chasm that separates secondary from post-secondary education inside prisons, and I have presented

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the statistics and what the professionals have to say about the subject. And yet, what gives me the right to climb on my soapbox to talk about transformations? How do I know that education does what its proponents claim? The answer is easy: it happened to me.

Once I understood the value of education, I went after it with a single-mindedness that permitted no interference. Life became, with the unwavering support and encouragement of my long-suffering parents, the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. I thought of my mind as a sponge, soaking up everything that I put into it. I studied all the science and mathematics I could find in texts and journals purchased by my family, determined to explore the world at its most fundamental level. Years went by as I satisfied my curiosity about how things worked. I moved to philosophy and religion, remaining largely untouched by the latter but satisfied that I had developed a basic understanding of the various belief systems that both unite and divide segments of the world. From there I finally addressed literature and began a search for all the great works I had seen referenced in my other studies. For the better part of twenty years, I followed Jefferson’s example and read twelve to fifteen hours a day. I developed an enormous (by prison standards) personal library, but still something was missing. I possessed a lot of information, but I began to sense that life was more than simply knowing things. That is when my life changed radically; that is when I met the professors from New England College.

Higher education was a force to be reckoned with when I arrived at the New Hampshire State Prison. New England College brought out an average of four courses each semester, beginning with an associate’s degree program and evolving into work towards a bachelor of science degree in human services. Participation was so great that there were waiting lists for all classes, since each classroom could accommodate only twelve students. We studied writing—both fiction and essay—literature, history, sciences, mathematics, psychology, in short, everything that traditional undergraduates would study outside. The professors treated us to inspiring lectures, challenged our intellects, and transformed those of us who were willing to take the risk of becoming better people, not necessarily from a vocational perspective (although that was indeed a part of our education) but more as an enriching process that demonstrated how we shared common cause with other human beings on the planet. In alchemical terms, they transmuted base metal into something that might not have been gold but was definitely more valuable.
Learning was not new for me at this point, but I thought learning was restricted to what was in the lectures or text. I could regurgitate information with the best of them, so exams were no problem. In other words, I made the same arrogant, compensatory mistake so many of us in prison make. I thought I knew most of what I needed to know about everything. I was a Renaissance man with no soul, but I was also fortunate to become quickly disabused of that specious superiority when I walked into a writing and critical thinking class in early 1993.

As we explored various authors and discussed writing as a reflection of the individual and his or her environment, my professor mentioned the preconceptions that people bring to any discussion of epistemology. Time ran out before I could respond adequately, so I asked if she would remain for a few minutes after class. She did, and during the ensuing fifty minutes, I discovered, among other things, that because I am white and male, the world assures an identity that reflects a white-male bias and operates according to white-male principles. I resisted this assertion vigorously! "No, no," I objected. "The world operates according to universal principles, governed by microscopic and macroscopic laws that define each of us as individuals. Although descriptive bias is a possibility," I admitted, "prescriptive bias cannot exist because the statistics and science in which the laws are grounded are completely neutral. If white males, for example, score better on standardized tests, then the simple explanation is that we are better qualified." That was the beginning, and the process is a continuing one. I, in other words, am a work in progress, as are we all.

So began a more contemplative life than the one I had led, shepherded along by the men and women from New England College. I learned to bring a historical perspective to contemporary politics, especially when examining retributive justice, capital punishment, the so-called war on drugs, and the extremely long sentences imposed in the United States. I began to entertain the possibility that many, if not most, of the hostile attitudes regarding criminal justice issues in this country were more a product of ignorance than malice. I became more tolerant, discovering that Cardinal Newman was correct about higher education's ability to teach us how "to bear with" others sharing the planet with us. The professors who taught me brought me the tools I desperately needed to live in the world—I had already mastered living in prison, and that was the problem. The men and women I met were thinkers and teachers, people who thought and wrote as their life work. The exposure to their lectures
and classes, and the experience of being educated by them, were inspirational; that influence is what I still turn to when life in here presses closely at three in the morning. As Hemingway has Lady Brett explain in *The Sun Also Rises*, it is sort of what I have instead of God.

Because of higher education, I took another giant step on the road to becoming a better person, I began to teach. When the local community college agreed to install a satellite campus behind the walls, the director here searched for men with a minimum bachelor’s degree to serve as adjunct faculty. I eagerly, if a bit apprehensively, accepted a post in the English Department. For three years I have taught writing and a variety of literature courses to minds that had been starved. I have watched awareness dawn in vacant eyes, awareness of what the students had missed, which created an insatiable thirst for more. Once, a student was having difficulty understanding a poem by William Blake, not an unusual response. After an explication, he shook his head and said mournfully, “I am so superficial.” It takes this kind of candor, the kind produced in college classrooms, to induce personal growth; it is remarkable to watch, even more so to play a small role in the event.

Do I make mistakes? Of course I do, but the wonderful part about being a member of such a community is the ability to call on those same professors for help. In another class, I was having problems getting *Macbeth* across. My lectures met blank stares, even as I rhapsodized about Hazlitt’s comments concerning Lady Macbeth. That same night, the professor who turned my head around about my intrinsic bias reminded me that to teach a class I had to become part of the class and develop an approach that will establish a rapport with the students, instead of simply lecturing them and having them look at me as just another authority figure defining my worldview at the cost of theirs. I returned the next day to discuss Macbeth’s murder of Duncan, only this time I described the killing in street terms. Suddenly, my class was rapt! I discovered the priceless lesson that teaching is concomitantly a tremendous learning experience.

It is constant work, but I am finally beginning to understand why people teach. When it works, the results are astonishing because they are, quite literally, world altering. Higher education is transformative for both teacher and student, even for those of us behind the walls who are amateurs at both. It acts, as a Proust beautifully puts it, “Like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself” (Proust, 2001: 3).
Higher education also alerted me to the consequences of being a Grade-1 thinker, as well as to the perils of being a Grade-3 thinker. I wish I could say that prisons in the United States have left the obscurantist dogma behind and are now pushing post-secondary education as the primary tool for reform, but that is not the case. I have been one of the lucky ones, being in a prison that recognizes the value of education and makes the courses available for those who want them. It is therefore appropriate for this essay devoted to education that I thank the men and women who have played such conspicuous roles in my life, and especially to recognize that one special professor who has played the most important role of all in my own transformation.

Susan Nagelsen was one of those dedicated faculty from New England College who made the arduous trek to the prison after putting in a full day on campus, and she continues to direct the writing program there at NEC. Yes, she is the professor who first identified and described my intrinsic bias for me and then dragged me kicking and screaming into the twentieth century. But far more than that, she showed me, with an intellectual and philosophical brilliance, that true knowledge was not the mere mastery of information; what counts is what you do with it. She nurtured my curiosity and rudimentary literacy skills, and I would not be writing today if it were not for her encouragement and guidance. Thanks a ton, Susan, for showing me what it means to be a living, breathing human being instead of a computer.

As a result of these experiences, I no longer pursue knowledge exclusively for its own sake. I have stopped viewing the acquisition of information as my life’s goal. I have learned in the college classrooms, both as student and novice teacher, that obtaining knowledge is not enough. The most important thing we can do as men and women is to preserve that knowledge and then transmit it to those coming behind us. Nothing is more important from an educational perspective, as well as from a human one, because the essentials thus shared enable us to understand each other and to come to terms with our differences, to accept ourselves and others as worthy, even those who disagree with us. That is why teaching is such a noble profession and why I am proud to play even a marginal role in the process.

I mentioned William Golding’s work at the beginning of this essay, and I want to close much the same way he did. During his later years, he would often think about those three pieces of sculpture and the way he would arrange them differently to reflect the world as he had experienced it.
I would dust Venus and put her aside for I have come to love her and know her for the fair thing she is. But I would put the Thinker, sunk in his desperate thought, where there were shadows before him, and at his back I would put the leopard, crouched and ready to spring. 7

The world continues to be, as Golding's arrangement symbolizes, one fraught with dangers for serious thinkers, especially thinkers behind the walls, and the men and women who venture into the abyss to teach us. But recognizing the dangers helps us all prepare to face them.

So, to those of you who teach us, and to my brothers and sisters in cages, keep thinking, keep learning and growing, keep the fire burning for those following. And never forget to watch your back.

REFERENCES


7 See Endnote 2, p. 32.
Charles Huckelbury has done twenty-nine consecutive years of a life sentence. Most recently, he was the recipient of the PEN America award for fiction for 2002. He has written essays, fiction, and poetry seriously for seven years. He can be contacted at New Hampshire State Prison, P.O. Box 14, Concord, NH 3301.
For me, a lowly prison scribe, to try to transpose the timely aphorism uttered by one of Canada’s leading scholars (recently deceased) may seem a little pretentious, if not totally antithetical. But I know in my mind that Marshall McLuhan, who was routinely called a media guru and the oracle of the electric age, would have welcomed contrary insight from anyone with the temerity to tinker with his favorite toys—words. McLuhan’s brash statement that “the medium is the message” turned the world of communications on its head, as did many of his theories—a term he disliked. From what I understand, he preferred to call his concepts a “probe” into the collective consciousness surrounding the art and science of communication: a probe designed to stir controversy and stimulate dialogue, a process that inevitably leads to the development of character and mental powers, which is how the dictionary defines education.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan was born in Edmonton, Alberta, on July 21, 1911. Several years later his family moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he grew up while receiving a modest grade school education. He enrolled at the University of Manitoba with the intent of becoming an engineer, but quickly switched to English literature. He was awarded his B.A. degree at Manitoba in 1933, and his M.A. degree in 1934. He studied overseas at Trinity Hall in Cambridge University, taking another B.A. degree in 1936, another M.A. in 1940, and his Ph.D. in 1942, in the respective fields of medieval education, Renaissance literature, and Elizabethan rhetoric. Upon his return to North America, he taught at the University of Wisconsin and St. Louis University, and then at Assumption University in Windsor, Ontario. Later, he taught at the University of Toronto, where he was named a full professor in 1952. He became the director of the University of Toronto’s Centre for Culture and Technology in 1963. He was appointed to the Albert Schweitzer Chair in Humanities at Fordham University in New York City in December of 1966, and was a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and held an honorary doctorate from the University of Windsor. McLuhan has written eighteen major books and countless articles.

However, I believe the message in Out of Bounds magazine is the medium through which prison reform can be realized. In addition, it is the medium through which personal reform can be realized for all of those who grace its
Out of Bounds is the quarterly published by Pithy Penal Press at William Head Institution, British Columbia. Over the eight-plus years that I have been involved, I have witnessed considerable reform, or what I prefer to call growth, in the attitude and ability of many of the ‘inside’ contributors to the magazine. Thankfully, my involvement in this literary endeavor has initiated quite a bit of positive growth of my own.

This growth, or reform—what Correctional Service Canada is wont to take credit for and call rehabilitation—is the cumulative effect of alterations in attributes and opportunities. Without doubt, the singular most significant altered attribute would have to be higher self-esteem and its concomitant increase in feelings of self-worth that individuals experience from having their writing or art published.

And perhaps the most ostensive opportunity a prison publication such as ours provides is a venue for disseminating discontent, an expedience that can actually alleviate some of the frustrations from not having a voice. These frustrations, if they are not expressed in an appropriate manner, can lead to destructive thoughts and aberrant behavior. Ideally, a message is the means to an end. Stated differently, the message is the medium. More specifically, the message in Out of Bounds is the medium for change. This change can encompass thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors; but more importantly, it heralds enlightenment. Education is the ultimate end. Producing a prison publication is an educational experience bar none. And in this case, as with most prison publications, the enterprise is prisoner inspired, owned, and operated.

Not surprisingly, there is some applicability to McLuhan’s utterings with respect to our tiny tome. Although the ideas inherent to the content of a medium must take precedence over its form, that does not necessarily mean its structure and design are not important. A well-arranged and well-designed printed publication will first attract the eye and then infiltrate the mind. Most publications strive to gain credibility, a complicated task at the best of times. In our case, this effort is compounded by the fact that we are publishing from within a federal penitentiary. Accordingly, by being very particular about our layout and design, and pernickety with our grammar, we earn the confidence of our readers and subsequently impart integrity. Unfortunately, prison publications often have to struggle against society’s stereotype of prisoners: that we are
lesser beings who are dumb yet deceitful. We, as prison writers, editors, and artists can counter this undeserved label by being honest and authentic in our endeavors.

Such a display of veracity does not come unencumbered. Our magazine has a long and storied past. Christened Out of Bounds, a new vessel was launched into the turbulent waters of the penal press on September 4, 1980. The premiere issue had a long name but a short cargo. The masthead read Out of Bounds: William Head Institution Newsletter. The cargo comprised four double-sided 8 x 11 inch pages of text and cartoons, all held together by a staple in the upper left-hand corner. Using a typical newsletter format, the founding felons incorporated an atypical logo: a medieval woodcut depicting what I can only construe to be the town fool thumbing his nose at society—very apropos I might say. That inaugural issue quoted Oscar Wilde from his "Ballad of Reading Gaol" on its front page:

The vilest deeds like poison weeds,
Bloom well in prison-air;
It is only what is good in man
That wastes and withers there.

The photocopied newsletter started out as a weekly, but within two months it was cut back to publishing bi-weekly, due to a lack of submissions as well as difficulties in procuring a typewriter, paper, and printing capabilities. Although it is not stated explicitly, it appears the publication's genesis was inspired by the University of Victoria post-secondary degree program taking place at William Head at that time. That same university program generated the inspiration that led to the formation of a prison theatre society in 1981. Now named WhoS, for William Head on Stage, it continues to provide quality theatre for prisoners and the paying public to this day.

Two months later, in January 1981, the newsletter became a monthly, a schedule it stayed with until September 1982, when it became a bi-monthly for one issue and then back to being a monthly in November of that year. By this time the content had increased dramatically. It was up to forty double-sided pages, the title had been trimmed to Out of Bounds Monthly, and the format was fitted with three staples down the left side to give it more of a magazine feel. Gone was the old nose-thumbing logo, replaced by different drawings on each successive cover. The original nose-thumbing attitude,
however, still ran rife throughout the magazine. In October 1983, the magazine went back to being a bi-monthly and dramatically changed its format. Using 8 ½ x 14-inch paper, folded in half and saddle-stapled, the magazine, now simply titled *Out of Bounds*, became a 7 x 8 ½ inch booklet with thirty to forty pages. This design change was intended to make reading easier and mailing cheaper. From its inception to the present, the magazine has been sent to interested readers and subscribers in the public domain.

This brief history of the magazine is somewhat sketchy in that I am garnering the information from an incomplete collection of old copies that were generously lent to me by the William Head librarian Kim Remple. Keeping this in mind, it appears that *Out of Bounds* became a quarterly publication at the beginning of 1990, and then disappeared halfway through 1991. Throughout this long, arduous journey the periodical suffered severe bouts of censorship by the prison administration, and on several occasions lapsed into temporary obscurity due to this censorship and/or a lack of interest on the part of the prisoner publishers.

In 1993, Steve Foote, who had just recently arrived at William Head from Mission Institution, decided to get the magazine up and running again, and I came along—also transferred from Mission—just in time to help him with the “resurrection issue” that came out in June of that year. At that time, we were told that the magazine had not put out an issue for two years, therefore I assume the 1991 issue mentioned above was the last in that line. With its rebirth, we hoped to create a prison publication that was different from all the rest. When I say we, I must give credit where credit is due. A lot of the credit for the longevity of our current uninterrupted publishing run of eight years and counting, and the popularity of *Out of Bounds*, is due to my friend and mentor Steve Foote. Although Steve only co-edited the magazine with me for one year before moving over to WHoS to become president of the theatre company, the pertinacious inspiration and positive influence he provided has stayed with me to this day.

We wanted *Out of Bounds* to be more than just a newsletter, and also to earn greater prestige than the usual “joint newspaper”; therefore, we added *magazine* to our title and admonished anyone who called it otherwise. We went back to the 8 ½ x 11 inch format, but printed the front and back covers on heavy, canary-colored cover stock that gave the magazine a unique, permanent look and feel. We filled it with an average of forty pages of interesting non-fiction articles, fictional short stories, poetry, and humor; then we bound
it all with three staples down the left-hand side to keep with the magazine make-up. On our masthead page we permanently placed a quote by Oscar Wilde, without knowing that the premiere issue from 1980 had quoted the illustrious author cum convict. The new quote read,

I need not remind you that mere expression is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life. It is by utterance we live. Of the many, many things for which I have to thank the Governor there is none for which I am more grateful than for his permission to write fully and at as great a length as I desire.

With each new issue we tried to publish an eclectic collection of submissions with the hope that each and every reader would find something that piqued his or her personal interest. We had a copy of Robert Gaucher’s article “The Canadian Penal Press: A Documentation and Analysis,” published in the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons, from which we learned:

A distinction needs to be made between what I define as “outside directed magazines” and “inside directed or joint magazines.” Outside directed magazines are intended to serve as a means of communication with the Canadian public, and therefore feature analysis of contemporary criminal-justice issues and serious prose on the experience of criminalization, incarceration and recidivism. Joint magazines are directed at the population of a particular prison and focus on reporting institutional activities such as sports, social events and club endeavors, and on providing information on new programs and legislation, coming events and internal news. Both provide insight into the perspectives and understanding of prisoners and the everyday experience of prison life in Canada. (Gaucher, 1989, 4)

But with Out of Bounds we amalgamated some of the outside directed aspects with some of the inside directed and then took it one step further, making it a truly unique prison publication. We intermixed the in-depth communication aspect of the outside directed with the inside directed reporting on institutional programs and activities; thus, both prisoners and the public would get an idea of what is going on in our penitentiary. Then we invited and encouraged the public to send us submissions so the communication aspect of the outside directed designation would become a two-way dialogue. Also, we
canvassed community-based prisoner advocacy groups and organizations devoted to helping prisoners during their incarceration and upon their release. We asked them to send us information so we could regularly publish "outside resources" and thus improve and extend the inside directed aspect. Subsequently, with our hybrid publication we were able to effectively breach the barbed wire that separates the "inside" community from the "outside" one.

Three years into our publishing run we acquired a binding machine. Since the Spring 1996 issue, the black plastic ring binding has added another important cosmetic complement to the magazine's presentation. Then with the Winter 1999 issue we changed editors and completely overhauled the layout and design. We went with white cover-stock, front and back, and put a different photo taken somewhere inside William Head on each successive cover, rather than the prison art that we had previously used. Although we try to maintain a consistent look over long periods of time (on the belief that consistency breeds familiarity, and familiarity ensures a faithful following) wholesale design changes every so often are necessary to keep up with society's changing styles. Consequently, part of the complete overhaul involved changing our original logo and adding another word to the title, becoming Out of Bounds Prison Magazine, a more defined distinction. With the Fall 2000 issue, we changed editors again and went back to putting prison art on the covers due to the substantial urging of both our inside and outside readership.

The educational experience that comes from publishing a prison magazine is truly unique and indescribably valuable. It is far beyond the scope of this particular article to discuss the means and ends of prison pedagogy. It is difficult enough trying to come up with a working definition of education within the custodial milieu. If education involves learning, when you are sentenced to do a semester in the "school of hard knocks" you will learn a difficult lesson every day if you are not careful. The real purpose of education in general has been variously described as individual empowerment, personal development, formal instruction, enlightenment, guidance, and discipline. I prefer to simply call it growth, qualified by the designations spiritual and mental. In my opinion, educational instruction in prison serves a dual purpose. It enables a prisoner to overcome deficiencies such as being illiterate, under-educated, and/or under-qualified for trade training. And it serves to prepare a prisoner to better comprehend, and thus benefit from, the rehabilitative programs that he or she will be required to participate in. In contrast, the pattern of education a prisoner-
initiated enterprise can provide extends well beyond the "correctional" purposes just mentioned.

The tutelage encountered while participating in a prisoner-initiated enterprise such as *Out of Bounds* speaks more to the psychological and intellectual well-being of the participants during their incarceration, as opposed to the illusive specter of rehabilitation that institutional programs cater to. One peculiarity of the "medical model" of corrections, the model most in use today, presupposes that criminals are inflicted with some sort of social ill, and a stint in the penitentiary will somehow (with the aid of countless programs, constant badgering, and a pinch of punishment) miraculously cure this ill so the "rehabilitated" offender can return to society as a law-abiding citizen. Unfortunately, part of this "cure" involves being separated from and scapegoated by society. It involves being labeled, dehumanized, and degraded; it involves the loss of rights, self-respect, and self-determination; but more importantly, it involves the loss of community. I believe that most crime comes about when the perpetrator loses touch with the essence of community and the commonweal essential to its survival.

One of the more important qualities of community that I turned my back on when I entered a criminal lifestyle was the practice of joining together as a group to accomplish common goals for the good of the whole community. Unfortunately, my involvement in crime resulted in me becoming extremely self-centered and selfish, showing little concern for the well being of others. In contrast, my involvement with *Out of Bounds* has helped alleviate quite a bit of that egoistic attitude and behavior. Participating in prisoner-initiated endeavors contrasts markedly with taking correctional programs. Prisoner-initiated endeavors are voluntary as opposed to mandatory; they concentrate on personal development as opposed to character "correction"; they encourage excellence as opposed to punishing error; and they promote creativity as opposed to enforcing discipline. But most importantly, because prisoner-initiated endeavors impart a strong sense of ownership to their participants, positive feelings of self-esteem and self-determination often result. These are benefits that not only allow for immediate learning but also encourage further exploration, creating an upward-spiraling process of mental and spiritual growth.

There are several complementary rehabilitative features arising from prisoner-initiated endeavors as well. I suppose that is why prison administrators inevitably allow (sometimes even encourage) their existence. Specifically, with a project such as ours, whose primary purpose is communication, the process of enhancing an individual's ability to express his or her accomplishments,
disappointments, complaints, and concerns in an objective, pro-social manner is at once educational and rehabilitative. Through this process we gain experiential knowledge and a methodology of understanding that assists us in our everyday interaction with both institutional staff and our fellow prisoners.

Experiential learning is an important aspect of any endeavor. We learn best by doing. Didactic programs offered by the Correctional Services Canada (CSC) often fail miserably because they involve less than impartial instructors (forewarned with stereotypes about their students) lecturing to less than enthusiastic participants (usually forced to attend mandatory programs) with a premise that is as controversial as it is demeaning (you are defective, we can fix you). Rehabilitation is more effectively realized when the person who is being rehabilitated perceives that he or she has a stake in that process. With prisoner-initiated projects, that perception is a self-evident outcome. The sense of ownership these endeavors impart upon their participants coalesces with the resultant feelings of self-determination, and together they fuel further learning, dignity, and decorum.

The message in Out of Bounds emanates from the writing and art published in the magazine. Although there can be a different statement expressed in each individual submission, the overall representation is one of contrite hope and realization. By being honest, open, and willing to share our thoughts and feelings with our readers in an authentic manner, we hope to dispel some of the misconceptions that surround prison and prisoners. And by enunciating our own shortcomings alongside the abject failings of the system that we are locked into, we eventually come to the important realization that we can fix ourselves—that we can become rehabilitated a lot easier and more effectively than “be” rehabilitated. We learn that we need to examine and criticize the underlying aberrant attitudes and beliefs that led to our criminal activity with as much rigor and enthusiasm as we expend criticizing the criminal justice system. But in doing so we need not let that system off completely either. Society has to bear some complicity in our social “illness” and learn to prevent that illness rather than try to punish it into remission.

The message in Out of Bounds is one of emancipation. Freedom of speech, in its purest form, is a liberating sentiment. Unfortunately, in prison, freedom of speech is seldom practiced in its purest form, if it is practiced at all. Even under the duress of censorship (whether it be self-imposed to preserve the con-code, or imposed by prison administrators for the “good order of the institution”), the opportunity to voice one’s concerns and opinions in a prison
publication, combined with the educational experience that comes from learning how to write effectively, in an objective manner, speaks to the psychological and intellectual well-being touched upon earlier in this article. If prisoners believe that they can make positive changes to the system as well as to themselves, their incarceration becomes less troublesome in both scope and duration. If we can learn to accomplish things for the common good of our little microcosm of society, a microcosm replete with an abundance of hate, anger, violence, and selfishness, then in a sense we are liberating ourselves from these otherwise negative constraints. If Out of Bounds can nurture an honest sense of altruism in its participants, then it becomes much more than just a prisoner-initiated educational aid and a CSC-cherished rehabilitative tool. It becomes a character-building message, the medium for social change.

On a personal note, I am going to miss working for the magazine when I finally leave this place. The learning aspect of the experience is not the only valuable component. Upon reflection, I keep coming back to the concept of community, and it is not mere coincidence. The Out of Bounds community has made the whole intricate journey worthwhile. To me, our subscribers are not just customers: they are friends. Friends willing to support our cause, willing to listen to our side of the story, willing to hear our voice, a voice that usually falls on deaf ears. And in some cases our subscribers are more than just friends, they are family—literally and figuratively. My family has supported my involvement in the magazine through their encouragement, subscriptions, and donations right from the very beginning. This has a hidden benefit in that I am not very punctual with respect to writing letters, so at least every three months they hear from me through my articles in the magazine.

One thing that really surprised me, and pleases me to no end, is the warmth with which some of our readers invite us into their lives and living rooms. One particular family on the east coast of Canada, who have been subscribers as far back as I can remember, frequently send us letters and newspaper clippings updating us on some of the going-ons with respect to their family and community. They regularly sent us their used postage stamps for our SPCA stamp drive, until the Visiting and Correspondence department of the institution started sending them back, for reasons which are beyond me. They recently suffered a death in their family, and my heart and prayers go out to them, as I somehow feel like an adopted member of that family.

We canvass most of our subscriptions at the bi-annual William Head on Stage productions, quality plays performed in the prison that attract about 150
people per night each ten-night run. Working the Out of Bounds kiosk that we set up during each production is a highlight of my peripheral involvement with WHoS. I do not socialize much around the prison, and when I do, situation dictates that it is usually with one particularly distinct social sub-class: prisoners. So twice a year I am afforded the frightening pleasure of meeting and greeting a steady stream of diverse personalities from all social classes, collectively known as “the public.” I am always grateful when people who are already on our subscription list come to the kiosk and introduce themselves, thereby putting a face to one of the many names we have in our database.

Putting a face on otherwise invisible people (prisoners) is an important mandate of our magazine. By publishing our thoughts and feelings, our hopes and dreams, our accomplishments and failings, as well as the accomplishments and failings of the system we are locked into, we hope to show that we are not just “offenders.” We are husbands and fathers, sons and brothers, uncles and nephews, friends, cousins, acquaintances, and in too many cases, long lost relatives. We are a thinking, feeling, breathing part of humanity, albeit somewhat confused and often angered by the complexities of the human social condition and its inevitable failings. Through writing we attempt to make sense of the situation we have landed ourselves in and impart some of that sensibility to the public, as well as to our fellow prisoners.

It always encourages me when I observe, from issue to issue (sometimes from year to year), the positive growth in both ability and attitude of my fellow prison writers and artists. I take pride in assuming that in some small way Out of Bounds has helped facilitate that growth. The process of taking a small piece of crumpled paper, shyly submitted by a so-called hardened criminal, knowing that he has agonized relentlessly over the writing of that article or poem (in some cases taken a heart-felt risk due to its content), then filtering that submission through the regimen of editing, layout, printing and binding, resulting in what many people believe is one of North America’s best prison publications, has its own rewards. For me the reward lies in the look of apprehension, then pride, that emanates from the fellow who made the submission, when I hand him his copy of the finished product and he sees his work in print.

So, as I prepare to leave William Head on day parole, I look forward to taking the Out of Bounds experience with me. In doing so, I encourage all prisoners who are reading this: if you are interested in writing, art, or the process of publishing, get involved with your prison’s publication. If you do
not have a publication, start one. The experience will not only be rewarding, it will be rehabilitative in spite of itself.

REFERENCES


Patrick Rafferty is serving a life sentence for second degree murder with a parole eligibility date of eighteen years. He is currently on day parole in Victoria. He can be reached at 138 Dallas Road, Victoria, BC (Canada) V8V 1A3.
The Texas prison education program does not fill the needs of modern prisoners. It requires extensive changes to its curriculum, the addition of incentives to attract students and give them reason to apply themselves, and expansion of access so that all prisoners have a chance at educational programs to challenge their intellects and expand their minds.

The curriculum in prison must implement intensive reading comprehension courses. In my years here in a Texas prison, I have seen many examples of prisoners unable to comprehend what they read. This is one of the most prevalent problems faced by prisoners. When individuals cannot comprehend what they read, they are limited in their ability to learn. Many prisoners are illiterate, or at least semi-literate, but once individuals are taught to read well, comprehending what they read and how to use their own intellect and logic to examine material in detail, they have the key to all knowledge.

One way this could be done would be to train prisoner-teachers and have them work in two ways. First, they could do one-on-one teaching, and second, they could lead reading circles where prisoners would take turns reading out loud. Reading out loud would help them learn the proper way to pronounce words, and give them confidence to use these words in conversation. Classes could also be held in debating. That would be a wonderful way to teach prisoners—most of whom come from violent backgrounds—that there are non-violent ways to settle differences. It takes more intelligence to see another person’s point of view than it does to close your mind and see only your own position. Debating could even teach prisoners to value each other for their differences, a valuable lever with which to fight prejudice. We can always agree to disagree.

The system gives good time credit for going to school, but that is not enough when most prisoners are not eligible to receive good time. Anyone convicted for a violent crime is considered to be doing aggravated time. For them, good time credits mean nothing. Neither do the work time credits they receive as payment for working. These credits do not even make them eligible for parole sooner. For those prisoners doing time for nonviolent offenses, these good time and work time credits at least make them eligible for parole sooner. But when you add the penchant for Texas prisons to take good time and work time credits away for disciplinary infractions, you see that this is a
paycheck nearly impossible to cash. Never is any form of good time permanent. When prisoners make parole they are forced to sign away all good time credits before getting out. Once good time credits are lost or signed away, they are gone forever.

I propose a system of automatic time cuts for educational achievement. For example, a prisoner has a ten-year sentence for drug possession. He gets a GED, which is worth ten percent of his sentence, and one year is either subtracted from his sentence or is added to his flat time credit. This would give all prisoners a real incentive to get an education, and those serving the longest sentences would have even more incentive. Very seldom is an individual unchanged by education. The system for automatic time cuts proposed here would give all prisoners hope and make Texas prisons a much happier and safer place in which to do time, not only for prisoners but officers as well.

It is important to keep in mind that in prison most crimes go unpunished. When prisoners have no hope of freedom they can, and often do, become very dangerous. The chance of getting a new charge is slim due to the lack of caring by the staff. Even crimes against officers go unpunished because there is a lack of proper investigation and evidence. I have witnessed prisoners living as slaves for other prisoners with the knowledge of the administration. With a time credit system that gives real rewards for education, this behavior would end or be limited.

Prisoners enrolled in educational programs should, where possible, be housed together. These individuals would be able to work together and tutor one another. They could discuss books and philosophy rather than drugs and pimping. They would set positive goals for when they are released, and the recidivism rate would drop. Once these newly educated men went home, there would begin to be a drop in the crime rate due to the effect educated former prisoners would have on their neighborhoods and youth. Surely it would take time, but eventually violence in the school housing areas of the prison would be the exception rather than the norm. Educated individuals are much more likely to use their minds than their fists.

Educational access must be expanded so that no prisoners are denied a chance to better themselves. At this time in Texas, close custody and two levels of administrative segregation have no access to education, not even library privileges. These problems can be overcome. Prisoners should be given access to correspondence courses so their minds do not atrophy. The library should be made available to all and not treated as a privilege. For prisoners in
administrative segregation, speakers with on-off switches could be installed in all cells and used voluntarily to play recorded programs at set times: book tapes, lectures on diverse subjects, spelling, news, debates—the list of possibilities goes on into infinity.

In administrative segregation you have human beings locked into tiny cells twenty-three or more hours a day. Many have not got the reading skills to pass their time in a constructive manner, and the administration pretends they do not understand why these men become so violent and frustrated. It is because so many of them are badly in need of education and have been living with this need for many years. Education and learning is what makes for a civilized world. If we can civilize our world by civilizing and challenging the minds of these individuals, and in doing so create a safer and less violent prison, why not do it?

In conclusion, education must never be treated as or considered a privilege. It is the only tool we have to rebuild the minds and morals of the prison populations. Only through education can we ever really get tough on crime. Only through progressive and radical changes in educational opportunities in prison can we ever hope to live in a world free of crime and violence, where individuals love their neighbor as they love themselves.

There are very few prisoners who are not capable of becoming productive members of society. The greatest crime our society committed in the twentieth century was to allow the incarceration of youth to become big business. No one cares now if prisoners are rehabilitated. There is too much money being made creating prisons and assuring a constant growth in the prison population. I hope that I live to see the day when people realize what has been done. Surely on that day, although it may be too late for me, we will see educational programs implemented to save our youth, to rehabilitate them, and to let them go home to stay.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a journey with no end; books open on the world and take us many places, some of them less pleasant than others. I have always loved to read, and for this, like most of the wonders of this life, there is a price to pay.

I entered federal prison not as a convicted criminal, but a prisoner of the drug war. I would do hard time in maximum security for failure to cooperate with federal authorities in the persecution and destruction of others. As a result, I would lose a wife, son, and home. Still, I had my health and strong mind; now I would need to bury the past, and invent new dreams. I reached back to a happier time—when I was a university student studying sociology. I started college in 1969, and left in 1972 without a degree. I entered prison determined to somehow complete that degree. Upon leaving prison I went to graduate school. Today, I am an associate professor of sociology and criminology. This is the story of how I managed to pursue a "higher education" in federal prison.

In this essay I recall, as best I remember, how I got into this mess, penitentiary dreams, the books I read in prison, classes in prison, taking college correspondence courses, completing a college degree, graduate school, becoming a professor, and conclude with a guide to university credits for prisoners.

HOW I GOT INTO THIS MESS

Upon graduation from high school in 1969, I began my higher education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW). The university community, like Berkeley, Columbia, and dozens of other campuses in the US, was busy with the social revolution of the late 1960s, including protest marches for civil rights and against the war in Indochina.

As a student with a romantic political conscience, and deeply impressed with the hippie movement that dared to question nearly everything, I joined the fray, and was radicalized by police assaults with gas and riot batons. Reading in sociology, history, and political science reinforced my aversion to the daily
body counts in Vietnam, and like many students, encouraged idealistic views that we had a moral duty to help bring the war to an end.

At UW I remember taking courses about China, Latin America, and Africa, and I learned that my government opposed liberation movements all over the world. I was struck by the fact that there are, at the very least, three separate worlds existing side by side. I was born of the first world, which is composed of the rich industrial countries. The second world is the so-called developing countries, where the first world has elected to deploy some investment capital. The third world is the domain of countries that are largely seen by American and European bankers as places to extract mineral resources, rather than to allow economies to develop as a means to raise the standard of living for the indigenous population.

In 1970, my head filled with the ideas of Frantz Fanon (1976a, 1976b), Regis Debray (1980), and B. Traven (1970, 1972, 1991), I left the land of privilege and traveled to Mexico for the first time. I should have stuck to the tourist destinations, but no, I had to seek adventure, get to know the people, and venture beyond the pale. Mexico is a country that may be characterized as balancing on the edge of the second and third world; a large nation, with vast potential, but with serious economic disparities. The Mexican elite is very rich, and most everybody else dirt poor. I quickly found myself mesmerized by a country dominated by a ruthless upper class, mired in poverty, and with a long history of failed revolutions.

Spending months at a time as a guest of left-wing students in the interior of the country, I lived in villages and urban districts where electric and water services were sporadic if they existed at all, the daily staple was beans and corn, and the people knew the federal police and military to be bandits. In retrospect, I understood very little of the language or culture, but I still remember the poverty. I was shocked by the economic conditions, not just the beggars that stood on every tourist corner, but also the death that came so young and was so common.

Over the next few years I returned to UW, took some more classes, but had lost interest in academic studies. Instead, my “higher learning” would continue as a gringo gone bad who volunteered to help finance the modest economic development of a few remote Mexican villages. Desperation and youthful idealism is the mother of invention. What was I smoking?

Well, you guessed it. My romantic interest in the plight of the Mexican people introduced me to a strange business, where Yankee green backs flowed
south and pipe dreams north. In a small way my “work” did contribute to a modest improvement in living conditions for the farmers of a few rural provinces. I have no regrets, certainly not about the friendly people I got to know south of the border, the food and building supplies we trucked to their villages, or the water pipe and electrical service we built. I still remember the smiles on one occasion when we turned on the pumps and the water flowed into the modest homes and the lights went on in the adobe schoolhouse.

Over the next decade I traveled extensively south of the border, returning home to the States, indifferent to the inherent risks, an adventurer playing a dangerous game. I played a role that could only end in disaster. By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the “drug war” in the early 1980s, many of my friends were dead or in prison. By 1982, I was a bit worn from living on the lunatic fringe, ahead of my time and way outside the law. The years of travel had taken their toll. Still, the work continued, as the Yankee dollars brought hope and relative prosperity to so many people who worked the land in quiet desperation.

Nonetheless, I should not have been so surprised that my own government thought less of my endeavors and decided I was a dangerous criminal. After many years of twilight activities, for which I have few qualms, I was set up by a cowardly pilot in a federal sting operation, and indicted on ten counts of conspiracy to distribute ten tons of imaginary marijuana. In 1984, I started a nine year sentence in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP).

**PENITENTIARY DREAMS**

Strange thoughts occupy a person late at night in a penitentiary. As the lights went off in the cellblock, I lay down in my bunk and drifted into sleep. My dream took me back more than ten years. Fifty feet off the deck, with cacti and sage brush below, the twin engines of the Beechcraft roared, the wings fluttering in the dark as we flew beneath the radar, the plane speeding at 200 mph over the Sonora desert. Gritting my teeth, I slammed an eight track into the tape player and turned up the volume. Linda Rondstat belted out “Willing,” the music barely heard above the cabin noise.

I woke up in a sweat, confused as to whether my dream was any better than the nightmare of this federal pen. At least I was alive, which is more than I can say for some of my friends who over the years had crashed and burned, or drowned at sea.
In federal prison I met many men who were drug war refugees. Some were the top echelon that had organized and financed smuggling operations, while others were the hired help, pilots or boat crewmembers. These are the men who smuggled pot from the third world plantations to first world destinations. They came from many countries, many of them ex-military who had fought in real wars, or done time in foreign prisons.

The "ganga soldiers" were my buddies in prison. As a federal prisoner I did time in a number of prisons, including four "mainline" penitentiaries. In every joint I met men serving life sentences for importation or distribution of marijuana. Many of these individuals were non-violent and well-educated victims of their own romantic notions about social change. They pay the price for a social revolution that began in the 1960s, flourished through the 1970s, then got hammered by the Reagan-Bush drug war in the 1980s. Some of them, like myself, live on through new dreams.

**THE BOOKS I READ IN PRISON**

I learned in college that the people who run this world read books. From the time I was first jailed in South Carolina, and as I journeyed through nine different prisons in six states, I was preoccupied with reading. I certainly had more "free time" to read in the "joint" than I ever had as an undergraduate or would later have as a graduate student. Locked in a cage, the books kept me alive.

In the penitentiary you do not have access to university or public libraries, so you have to beg friends to mail books in, or work through the shoddy paperback collection of worn out copies found in the library. In letters I requested books, my preference being serious reading, including classical literature, college textbooks, and political theory. In each federal prison I would make frequent visits to the library, scanning the limited collection of books, going from A to Z, looking for something worth reading. Amid the volumes of trashy fiction, I would find a few gems. In each prison I would get to know a few educated persons who were readers and would lend me their treasures.

authors, I turned to Kurt Vonnegut (1960, 1966), and Herman Hesse (1982, 1990, 1999).

Planning to return to university upon my eventual release, I brushed up on the physical and social sciences by reading outdated textbooks I managed to find in prison libraries. This allowed me an opportunity to get reacquainted with chemistry, biology, geography, and physics. I read a number of Isaac Asimov’s science primers, and his trilogy *The Foundation* (1982). Carl Sagan’s works, especially *Cosmos* (1980), and other books on astronomy, allowed me to see beyond the narrow confines of my daily existence. Living in prison, locked up at night, with rarely a view of the night sky, I missed the stars.

My political preferences were to catch up on my subversive studies. I read Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman (1979), and spent the better part of my final year in the joint with Karl Marx (1973, 1987). The months slipping by, as I completed the three volumes of *Capital* (1977, 1979, 1981). Finally, in my last year in prison, as preparation for entering graduate school, I read sociology.

**Classes in Prison**

The federal prisons where I was interred had no college classes; the educational program limited to Adult Basic Education (ABE eighth grade) and General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Of course, I was forced to participate in the standard “vocational studies,” including twelve-hour shifts in the kitchen seven days a week, landscape maintenance, mopping floors, and cleaning bathrooms. No matter the duty, I carried a paperback book in my pants pocket. I was free as long as I could read.

The only institutional program worth remembering was a ten month, eight hour a day, computer repair school, operated on contract by an outside corporation. I enjoyed learning about computer architecture and program languages, but spent most of my time teaching remedial math classes to my fellow convicts. Some of them actually learned enough basic algebra to pass the computer course exams. Unfortunately, this unique prison program was discontinued when the funding expired.

In every prison there was a dedicated group of prisoners, many of them college educated, some of them former teachers, who tutored other men for their ABE or GED. FBOP policy emphasized the need for prisoners to complete
these basic requirements. In each prison there was an education office, usually
staffed with one hack (officer) and a number of convict clerks. The success
of the program depended as much upon the determination of the individual
prisoners as upon the skills of the officer. Still, the results were less than
impressive, as the atmosphere resembled a penalty study hall in a ghetto high
school, with the hack teaching little if at all, and the convict students studying
even less. Prisoners who wanted to start or continue their college education
were usually given little support or assistance by prison staff. They may have
received encouragement from individual officers, but there was little formal
institutional support.

Those prisoners that were successful in passing the GED exam were,
more than likely, tutored by other convicts one-on-one. They would bring
their GED workbooks home to their cells and solicit help. If they were lucky,
they found a college-educated prisoner with the patience and good will to help
them through the English, math, and science. These teachers enjoyed helping
another man learn to read, pass the test, and accomplish something positive.

In every joint there were “classes” organized by the prisoners. Some of
these were informal reading circles where a number of men would pass one
worn copy of a classic book or political literature, then meet on the yard or
work site to discuss what they read. In Terre Haute, a library clerk reintroduced
me to the wild works of William Reich. I had already read *The Mass Psychology
of Fascism* (1980) while in college. A group of convicts read *Listen, Little
Man!* (1970) and learned that Reich, a student of Sigmund Freud whose books
were outlawed in the US, was imprisoned for his writing and died in federal
prison. In Leavenworth, we read Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables* (1987) and the
collected works of Leo Tolstoy, including *War and Peace* (1982) and *The
Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1991). Hugo’s character Jean Valjean is the classic example
of a convict struggling for redemption. Tolstoy’s short story *The Kreutzer
Sonata* (1987) helped me to better understand the bourgeois concerns of my
wife when I received the inevitable divorce papers in Leavenworth.

Semi-formal classes were also organized and improvised by prisoners on a
wide range of topics. Many of these were taught by men convicted of white-
collar offenses or tax crimes. I remember entrepreneurial subjects like writing
business plans, applying for small business loans, and operating a limousine
service. We also had classes in foreign languages, including Spanish taught by
Colombians and Mexicans, as well as German and French. The population of
the FBOP is one-third foreign, with prisoners from all over the world. It was relatively easy to find a tutor. There were also generous instructions by jailhouse lawyers in the art of writing administrative remedies, writs, motions to court, appeals, and post-convict motions. It goes without saying that all of these "classes" were unofficial, with no assistance from prison authorities, as they were free and taught by convict volunteers.

Formal classes, beyond GED, were not available, with rare exception. Occasionally, a local community college might offer one or two introductory level courses, but these were far and few between, depending upon the institution, the whims of the warden, and in any event, only served the few dozen prisoners at a time that could somehow scrounge up the funds to pay the tuition. The community college usually pulled the plug on the program when they discovered the convicts could not afford the courses, losing patience with the Neanderthal bureaucrats that managed the penitentiary. The FBOP, despite their program propaganda, does not support higher education. Most wardens, even those that publicly portray themselves as dedicated to rehabilitation, see outside university instructors as "a threat to the security of the institution."

Prior to 1992, the Federal Pell Grant program, theoretically, was still available for prisoners in both federal and state prisons as a means to pay college tuition for courses taught inside institutions or by correspondence. I know that some prisoners who spent years doing time in one prison were able to access this program, receive funding, and pay for college credits. Unfortunately, this was somewhat more difficult in federal prisons where convicts were transferred frequently. I applied for a number of Pell Grants at different prisons, completed the paper work, and was then shipped out, never receiving the support to pay for college credit.

Later I learned that this was a common experience for many prisoners. Still, it is difficult to know if the midnight transfers were a result of applying for the grant, or resulted from other circumstances; for example, overcrowding, disciplinary infractions, or filing legal motions. Nonetheless, the rumor among federal prisoners was that even though they applied in person for a Pell Grant to pay for their intended college courses, the education office at the prison, and not prisoners, actually received the funds. This money could be spent by the institution on whatever—basketballs, pencils, GED manuals, or even flower gardens for the Warden's house planted by "inmate horticultural students." In any case, I never received a Pell Grant.
COLLEGE CREDIT BY CORRESPONDENCE

Most prisons have a small number of prisoners taking college credit by mail. They usually hang out in the prison library or law library where it is quiet and they might have access to typewriters and copy machines. Determined prisoners may complete as many as three to nine course credits in ninety days, depending on their funds to pay for courses and stamps, scholastic ability, the conditions of confinement, and their ability to get along with other prisoners and staff.

I entered prison with 115 college credits towards a Bachelors’ Degree in sociology. Still needing fifteen credits to graduate, I went to work in a UNICOR (federal prison industries) cable factory, where we constructed electric cable harnesses under contract for the military. I worked my way up to Grade 1 clerk, and as one of the highest paid prisoners in the facility, made approximately $200 a month, including overtime. I used my “inmate pay” to pay for college courses by mail. Every month, after making my commissary purchases (food, smokes, stamps, etc.), I would set aside so much to pay for the next course. It took me two years to complete five courses (15 credits), and complete the degree requirements for the UW degree. To my knowledge, I was the only prisoner that year in the entire FBOP to complete a college degree.

College credit courses are not for everybody. Prisoners, just like first year students on college campuses, have a high rate of failure. The “good news” is that, ironically, prisons are an ideal place to begin college study. Convicts have lots of time to read, room and board are provided, and for the committed student there may be few distractions. Beginning college in prison on their own initiative, prisoners are planning a new future, reinventing themselves, reaching for freedom. Upon release from prison, the college transcript will help them gain admission to a university to finish the degree.

COMPLETING A COLLEGE DEGREE

Many so-called “traditional” students (aged 18–22), both in prison or the “free world,” take years to finish college degrees at large state universities. Very few finish in four years, even those attending classes and living on university campuses. A four-year degree is now really five or six, depending on finances and academic ability. Yes, some students from affluent families graduate in four years, especially those who attend private schools with expensive tuition
and low academic standards. Still, most working-class students who have to work to pay their own way take five or more years to finish college. "Non-traditional" (older students) now make up a growing population on many college campuses. These are older men and women pursuing higher education later in life, maybe after a career crisis, divorce, military service, or stretch in prison. Many university professors know these students to be above average even gifted individuals who are serious about their studies.

I completed my bachelor’s degree in 1986 in prison, so I never attended a ceremony or celebration. Still, I was no less proud of the achievement and looked forward to graduate school.

**Graduate school**

In 1987, while on a six-day furlough from Federal Prison Camp (FPC) Oxford, I visited the Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UW-Milwaukee) and asked to see the Department Chairperson, Professor Gregory Squires. Upon introducing myself, and informing him I was interested in applying to the Masters Program, I gave him two file folders: one contained my undergraduate university transcripts, the other my prison furlough papers. Squires asked, "Can you teach criminology?" He then called the Dean of Arts and Sciences for permission to admit me to the program with an appointment as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). His next step was to have his secretary type my application to their graduate program in his office, waive the application fee, and introduce me to some of the faculty. When I returned to FPC Oxford, I used the UW-Milwaukee admission and GTA appointment to secure a six-month halfway house.

Released from federal prison in 1987, I entered the Masters Program at UW-Milwaukee. In 1989, upon completing the M.A., I entered the Ph.D. Program in sociology at Iowa State University, graduating in 1992. Today, I am an associate professor of sociology and criminology at Northern Kentucky University.

**Becoming a university professor**

It is a long way from Leavenworth to the ivory tower. Earning a Ph.D. was only the first step in becoming a professor. I still needed to overcome the stigma of a criminal record, and learn to manage my identity. If I had chosen
Stephen C. Richards

an academic discipline other than criminology this may have been less of a problem. Nevertheless, the experience I had with the criminal justice system and prisons has provided a real life education in these subjects that goes well beyond the academic training available to most of my colleagues. Unfortunately, some university faculty are threatened by an ex-convict that understands how little they know about the subjects they teach and research.

Many criminology and criminal justice faculty come from sheltered backgrounds. They have little real world knowledge of working class lives, let alone the perils of poverty, or the struggles of convicts. Yes, they have Ph.D.s, and through many years of studying their discipline they do acquire considerable insight into why people do crime. Still, they never really get it. Which is no surprise, considering they never bothered to talk with convicts. Many academics who claim to be prison scholars, and write books on the subject, have spent precious little time inside of prisons, and even then only on escorted tours.

No wonder most prison literature reads like fairy tales (this journal being one exception). Textbooks talk about constitutional amendments, the Bill of Rights, prisoner’s rights, prison programs, and rehabilitation. Ideally prisoners should have these protections and services. Unfortunately, most textbooks paint a false picture of reality, and as such do a disservice to students.

I have learned that becoming a professor means I do not have to suffer fools or foolish books. I have no patience for social scientists who study their subject from a safe distance. Fortunately, we have a growing group of “convict criminologists” that have the courage to do the science and “tell it like it is.”

**CONVICT CRIMINOLOGISTS**

Today, even while working to fit in and play the professor role, I enjoy my ex-con status. As one of the leaders of the Convict Criminologists, a growing group of ex-convict criminology faculty, I prefer the company of my “felonious friends” who, although they have fancy college degrees, have not forgotten from where they came.

Since 1997, the Convict Criminologists has grown in numbers and strength. The group includes faculty and graduate students, both ex-cons and “non-cons.” The core of the group is the ex-cons. Still, the group has been successful because of the many contributions of talented non-con critical criminologists. It is the need to do science the truth that holds us together and drives our efforts to research and publish.
We do conference sessions, including the American Society of Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, even the American Correctional Association (ACA). Many of these presentations have drawn large audiences. Ironically, our 2001 plenary session at the ACA conference in Philadelphia drew the largest and most enthusiastic crowd yet. In retrospect, I think the correctional administrators and “line staff” were proud of their “bad boys” that had made good.

As a group we have formed our own cyberspace “convict department”. We use e-mail to communicate, coordinate research and publication, and mentor graduate students. The ex-con professor writing tradition began with John Irwin (1970, 1980, 1985). The list of significant publication has grown as new colleagues are added.1 Convict Criminology (Ross and Richards, 2003) includes chapters by eight ex-convict academics. Our non-con critical criminology friends write some of the best chapters in this new volume.

CONCLUSION: BOOKS WILL TAKE YOU ANYWHERE YOU WANT TO GO

I have shared my own story to demonstrate that even while in prison men and women can begin new dreams through higher education. University study has been demonstrated by research to be the single best means to post-prison success. A prison record and a GED provide men and women released from prison with few prospects other than minimum wage jobs and a limited future. Prisoners who complete university credit courses while incarcerated may continue on and finish college degrees at universities upon release from prison.

After getting out of prison, one possible path is to go to college. Former prisoners make good university students, as they are already institutionalized, familiar with dormitory living, cafeteria food, and bureaucratic rules. Considering they will have a difficult time finding a decent job, have no income, and have not paid taxes in years, they will qualify for generous student loans and possible grants. Besides, universities are dream machines, the places where people go to learn and grow and remake their lives.

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In my experience as both a convict and professor, I know ex-convicts to make good students. I have had many ex-convict students in my classes that study hard, get good grades, and graduate with honors. Like many non-traditional students, they are serious learners and masters at overcoming adversity. Taxpayers need to figure out that it costs much less to send individuals to college than keep them locked up in prison. Then again, maybe I am still dreaming. In any case, remember, books will take you anywhere you want to go.

REFERENCES


Stephen C. Richards


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Piecing together a College Education behind Bars

Jon Marc Taylor

This article sets forth the reasons for prisoners to pursue the personal quest for a college education. It discusses how equivalency-credit programs can accelerate the pace of that pursuit while decreasing the costs; end-of-course exams and credit bank schools can coalesce divergent academic experiences, and pulling it together by filling in with life-experience credits and relatively inexpensive correspondence courses to fulfill the chosen curriculum. While this article is directed towards incarcerated students in the United States, traditional students may find the advantages applicable. For academics, the article offers a practical method of higher education delivery in the penal setting, and for students and teachers it is an affirmation of the value of post-secondary correctional education (PSCE).

A wise man once advised: “If you want to make the world a better place, begin by making yourself a better person.” To begin that process behind bars, start by reconstructing self-worth devastated by poor personal decisions, and by systemic devaluing abuses leading to this position in your life.

Education is the single most significant program on this journey of self-discovery, individual revelation, and personal transformation. Beyond the necessary achievement of a high school or GED diploma (in many jurisdictions in the United States, the GED is required to qualify for parole consideration), earning a college degree not only creates the best chance to stay out after release, it is also the best way to qualify for a decent job and to become equipped with skills for successful re-integration.

Half-a-dozen years ago, most department of correction systems in the United States offered on-site higher education opportunities. Then, for political expediency, the U.S. Congress barred prisoners from receiving their chief tuition source, Pell Higher Education Grants. Almost immediately, half the prison college classes across the country were closed, and opportunities in most surviving programs were reduced as well. Today, the only access the majority of convicts have to post-secondary education is through traditional correspondence classes, less well-known university end-of-course exams, and even less publicized equivalency tests.

This article presents options to access higher education behind bars, while keeping the process as inexpensive as possible. This article points out the least expensive means to a college degree without the financial aid from Pell Grants. The first section, however, reinforces the efficacy of PSCE in your life.
THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The most certain but most difficult way to prevent crime is to perfect education.


Recidivism

The value of PSCE programming cited most often in the literature is that it significantly lowers the likelihood of returning to prison. Typically, recidivism drops from seventy percent of parolees being rearrested to twenty percent for those who earned an associate (i.e., two-year) degree, or more. Two decades of PSCE recidivism studies consistently report "statistically significant" reductions in recidivism. Robert Ross analyzed prison college programs in his article "Behavioral Approaches to Treatment in Corrections: Requiem for a Panacea." He summed up these studies by observing that "nowhere else in the literature of correctional programming can one find such impressive results with the recidivistic adult offender" (Ross and McKay, 1978: 290).¹

Employment

Parole officers identify unemployment as a prime factor in recidivism. On average, less than half of ex-offenders find steady employment when paroled. Every study on the issue has found that college educated ex-offenders are the ones who find steady employment (Ayers et al., 1980; Harer, 1995; Holloway and Moke, 1986). Besides overcoming the stigmatization of being an ex-felon, the majority of jobs in today's service economy require the skills of a college-educated person. Without a college degree, or at least some post-secondary course credits, menial work at minimum wages is the most likely option for

¹ The State Correctional Institution (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) study on PSCE found that "inmate students with the highest risk of recidivism experienced a statistically significant ... reduction in recidivism when compared to the control group on 108 variables" (Blumenstein, A. and Cohen, J., 1979). The Texas Department of Corrections Treatment Directorate showed that "participation in the junior college program definitely results in lower recidivism rates" (Gaither, 1980). Participants in the New York Department of Correctional Services PSCE programs demonstrated a twenty-six percent recidivism rate compared to a forty percent overall rate (Clark, 1991). Also see Duguid (1981), Harer (1995), and Holloway and Moke (1986).
the ex-con. And for the uneducated, newly-released prisoner, Princeton University professor Bruce Western reports that the average parolee starts out making ten to thirty percent less than high school dropouts without criminal records (Western and Pettit, 2000).

**Earnings**

In today's workplace, those who earn at least some college education or post-secondary vocational training are far more likely to find employment that supports a decent standard of living. For the average adult, the annual rate of return on the money and time invested in four years of college is about eleven percent (University of Wisconsin, 1995). For the paroled prisoner, it is immeasurably greater. In 2000, the average salary for a worker with a four-year Bachelor degree was $50,000 (Armour, 2002), and over a working lifetime the degree is worth more than $1.6 million in additional income over that of a high school diploma (Haralson and Tian, 2002). Even in markets with above average unemployment levels, the college educated ex-convict stands the best chance for a job providing a living wage.

**The most important reason**

The single most important reason for anyone, but especially a prisoner, to pursue a college education is how it will make him or her feel. Regardless of the date you walk out of the prison and "sally port" to freedom, further education will improve confidence and self-esteem, and improve how you feel about and treat others. Higher education imparts the abilities to analyze, reason, and think for yourself in any situation. As a powerfully liberating tool, it can never be taken away; it can only be ceded by your choice not to utilize those skills.

**Benefits for society**

What PSCE means to society is reduced crime and thus safer communities; economic stimulation provided by better educated, productive, and higher paid workers; and the cessation of the prisoner as a tax liability to a taxpayer. Simply put, the average income of a college graduate compared to that of a high school graduate results in thousands of dollars in annual tax revenues. Beyond these quantifiable benefits, the transformational effect of higher education in the evolution of a more rational and informed citizen strengthens a democratic society.
“A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds.”

Francis Bacon

The next section covers various types of equivalency examination programs recognized for credit by more than two thousand universities and colleges in North America, and exam preparation suggestions for the best chance to succeed with these savings.

**How equivalency credit programs can reduce costs**

The single biggest expense of earning a college degree behind bars is the cost of tuition. At present, the average undergraduate tuition fee in the United States is $125.00 per credit hour. A two-year Associate degree requires an average of sixty semester credit hours, and a four-year Bachelor degree requires a minimum of 120 semester credit hours. By this general outline, tuition fees alone will average $7,500 for an Associate degree, to more than $15,000 for a four-year degree. The pain, however, does not end there. Aside from several hundred dollars in incidental costs (e.g., enrollment, term registration, shipping and handling expenses, and graduation fees), there is the cost of texts. Books will be the second greatest expense in earning a degree in the joint. On average, a student can expect to spend $90.00 per course for the necessary texts and study guides. With twenty classes for an Associate degree and forty classes for a Bachelor degree, an individual should expect to spend an additional $1,800 to $3,600 for textbooks.

All told, even with "room and board" and medical (such as it is) paid for by the state, earning a college degree behind bars using only traditional correspondence course opportunities will cost from $9,000 to $20,000. That

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may not be a problem if a person has extensive personal resources or a generous supporter. The purpose of this article is to show how one can piece together a college degree for less than $2,000 and a Bachelor degree for much less than $5,000. Admittedly, this is not cheap in the penitentiary, but it is possible to finance if it is spread out over years. If there is one thing we prisoners have in abundance in the American "gulag archipelago," it is time on our hands.

**Equivalency programs**

Literally thousands of colleges and universities in North America grant credit towards their degree programs based upon various "testing services" examinations. These tests are meant to represent the final exam in a particular college course. Individuals who pass the test with a high enough score (which may vary from school to school) can be granted equivalent credit as if they had taken the complete class at full cost. For one-tenth of the expense and a month of intensive study, you can document "transferable" college credits applicable to virtually any degree program you choose.

Few schools, however, will grant degrees singularly based upon exam credit accumulations; therefore, it is usually necessary to enroll in one-quarter of the required degree hours at whatever college you are seeking a degree from. This means you will have to juggle university-level credits from various sources and take some traditional correspondence courses to earn your degree. It is well worth the effort. Considering our original projection of $20,000 for a Bachelor degree, imagine earning three-quarter of that baccalaureate at next to no cost.

Three major testing services administer exams (CLEP, DANTES and Regent College Examinations).\(^3\) These are offered at testing centers all over the U.S. on many dates year round, and all have procedures for institutionalized individuals to participate. You will need to work with your prison’s education office to coordinate the testing process, but these exams are not significantly different

\(^3\) The major testing services and their exam fees at the time this was written (2003) were: CLEP EXAMS, P.O. Box 6600, Princeton, NJ 08541 which charges $46.00 per credit hour; DANTES Program, P.O. Box 6604, Princeton, NJ 08541, which charges $35.00; and the Regents College Examinations (formerly Excelsior College Examinations), 7 Columbus Circle, Albany, NY 12203, which charges $40.00 or more per credit hour. The testing services provide lists of the topics and courses for which they offer tests.
to proctor than standard correspondence finals. If your prison permits distance education participation there should be no problem.

Testing services

The value of testing service exams is that, for a small fee of usually less than $50.00, it is possible to earn from three to thirty semester hours of academic credit. In our example, where one credit equals $125.00, three credits would normally cost $375.00, perhaps $400.00 with texts. At $50.00 for three to thirty credit hours, the savings are considerable!

Each college or university sets its own transfer credit policy on what courses and testing services’ exams it accepts, and what grades and scores are required. When contacting a school it is necessary to ask: (1) what exam services are accepted and in what subjects; (2) what scores are needed for equivalent credit; (3) if accepted, do such credits allow you to skip one or more introductory courses; and, (4) are there any additional requirements before credit is granted?

Over 2,800 colleges and universities recognize the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). It is probably the most respected and accepted testing service, as it is backed by the century-old College Entrance Examination Board. Over four million students have utilized the CLEP program, and these are challenging and comprehensive exams. Credit is earned only if you can demonstrate concentrated subject knowledge acquired through prior or independent study, through cultural pursuits or special interests, or through professional development, such as in a military occupation specialty or company training programs.

CLEP exams cover subjects from business to science, offering five General Exams and twenty-nine Subject Exams. The General Exams cover material taught in courses that most students take as requirements in the first two years of college. Each test is ninety minutes long, and except for “English Composition with Essay,” they consist entirely of multiple-choice questions to be answered in two separately-timed sections. Six-semester hours of credit (in our formula, worth approximately $900.00) are usually awarded for satisfactory scores on each General Exam.

Each Subject Exam covers material taught in an undergraduate course with a course name that is similar at most colleges and universities. A college usually grants the same amount of credit to students earning satisfactory scores on the CLEP exams as it grants to students completing the same course at its
school. Many Subject Exams are designed to correspond to one-semester (three-credit) courses; however, some correspond to full-year (six-credit) or two-year (twelve-credit) courses.

“DANTES” Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) is a nationally recognized testing program developed originally for military personnel, thus the acronym DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support). This service provides the opportunity to receive college credit for learning outside the traditional classroom. Over 80,000 individuals take DSSTs annually. More than 1,200 colleges and universities currently award credit for DSSTs. There are thirty-seven different test titles to choose from, in the areas of social sciences, business, mathematics, applied technology, humanities, and physical science. While DSSTs are not timed, they usually last ninety minutes. They are multiple-choice tests with no scoring penalty for guessing.

Regents College Examinations (formerly known as ACT-PEP exams) have been offered for three decades and are accepted by nearly 1,000 colleges and universities. The forty-two multiple-choice, essay, and mixed format course exams cover the areas of arts and sciences, business, education, and nursing, at the Associate and Baccalaureate levels. While Regent College Exams may cost up to three times the fee for CLEP and DANTES exams, the diversity of upper-level courses and nursing specialty exams provide testing options that these other services do not. The Regent exams are worth considering for junior and senior level students, or for those who are only a few credits short of graduating.

Putting together an exam strategy

As you can see, these exams can save a significant amount of money in earning a number of college credits. Moreover, the testing services have fee waiver programs for “special situation” individuals, which can include prisoner-students. The CLEP program in particular grants waivers to prisoners; however, these services have a limited budget for exemptions. Since they are available on a first come, first served basis, it is necessary to apply early in the year for the best chance of fee waiver approval. If denied by one service, apply to another. Remember: “no” means “not now,” not forever.

Even with free testing, study materials present another expense. Each of the services (see Note 3) offers free fact sheets and study guides along with sample questions. CLEP charges $18.00, and Regents College Examinations charge $18.95 for comprehensive study guides covering all of their thirty-plus
exams. These guides include sample questions, test-taking tips and answer rationales for multiple-choice exams, procedures for getting university credit, and study resource recommendations.

Through these recommended study resources it is possible to save yourself even more by creatively managing access to the preparation textbooks. Each study guide suggests half-a-dozen of the routinely-used classroom texts covering the exam’s material. First, check the prison library. Most libraries collect various texts (e.g., sociology, psychology, mathematics, history, physics, and literature anthologies). If your library does not, you should start requesting that it acquire them, specifically suggesting the titles listed in the study guides.

Secondly, once newer editions of these textbooks are issued (about every three years), the previous editions are discounted by the publisher. For a few dollars you can pick them up from closeout catalogs without significantly sacrificing information covered on the exams. There are also several specific preparation guides and learning packages published with full-length sample tests. Request that your librarian order these as well. Thirdly, working through your librarian or education director, form a committee that will write to area colleges and universities seeking donations of departmental and professors’ discarded texts. We built cost free a multi-thousand volume reference library for the Ball State University program at the Indiana State Reformatory with this or a similar donation strategy.

From test-fee waivers, free study guides, to off-the-library-shelf textbooks, you can earn anywhere from three to ninety (to even possibly all the necessary) credit hours applicable to a degree program at virtually no cost. Using a little bit of timely hustle by applying for fee waivers early in the term, and using creative management of your prison library (even if you have to stock it yourself), you can piece together the major portion of your degree’s required course hours for no money. By forming a study group in your joint, not only can you increase prospects for passing the exams, you can leverage available resources with the collective power of your brain trust. You can begin by collecting the hundred-plus free study guides from the CLEP, DANTES, and Regents College examination services, which will serve as the foundation of your reference library. The rest is limited by your capacity to dream.

Finally, just how difficult are these exams? Dr. John Bear relates in his many books on distance education that this is a subjective question. People comment that these exams are “a lot easier than they had expected.” This is truer for mature, life-experienced students, than it is for eighteen year-old high
school graduates. Cramming has been proven to be an effective study strategy for some. Bear tells of a man who crammed for, took, and passed three general GRE exams, earning the equivalent of ninety credits. The man then took five CLEP General Exams in a row, earning an additional thirty-hours. Applying them to an accredited school, he received a Bachelor degree for less then twenty hours of exam time. Admittedly, it is an extreme example, but it is effective and demonstrably possible (Bear and Bear, 1999).

Do some research, collect your materials, take the self-scoring sample tests, and see how you do. If you do well, go ahead and take the exam. If you score "so-so," read the texts, do some cramming, and write the exam again. If you fail miserably on the sample test, perhaps other means outlined in the rest of this article may be more favorable to earning you a college degree.

If you take an exam and do not score high enough for credit, you can retake the same subject exam again in six months—all the wiser for your experience. Never give up. Never surrender your future. In the words of Marabel Morgan, “Persistence is the twin sister of excellence. One is a matter of quality; the other, a matter of time.”

END-OF COURSE EXAMS, LEARNING PORTFOLIOS, AND CREDIT BANKS

Credit-equivalency exams probably provide the best dollar for dollar value. However, for most people these exams will not meet the entire course requirements for most degree programs. Other credit accumulation options exist, and this section outlines them.

The traditional way to fulfill these last few class requirements (even for on-campus students) is to enroll in standard correspondence courses, submitting a dozen or so lessons and taking on average two proctored exams for each course. This option will be covered in the final section of this article. In keeping with the overall strategy of piecing together your college education as inexpensively as possible, and to earn a degree in the shortest amount of time, end-of-course exam options, prior learning portfolio accreditations, and credit bank services are reviewed next.

End of course exams

End-of-course exams, also called “course credit-by-examination” among other labels, are similar to CLEP and DANTES exams, except in this case the credits granted are usually for a more specific course in a college curriculum.
This method is of particular use when one or a few defined classes are necessary to fill out the requirements of a degree program.

These exams are basically the same tests used in the courses, although sometimes the correspondence course's two standard exams are collapsed into one. The value in utilizing this option is in reduced expenses and time invested. In the typical situation, the expense of credit-by-examination courses is from one-third to one-half of a traditional per credit hour enrollment costs.

In most programs you can enroll in these courses (which at some schools are the same courses available for traditional correspondence study), purchase the study guide, syllabus and texts, and schedule the end-of-course exams when you are ready. There are no assignments or midterms to complete. You study to prepare to pass the single end-of-course exam. For most students, the selection of a particular class using these means is based upon some prior knowledge of the subject, as well as a particular need for the transcript credit; usually to fulfill a minor or major area of study.

Employing strategies similar to Credit Equivalency Exams, the associated expenses can be reduced further. Used texts can be purchased, books on similar topics can be pulled from a library shelf, and a couple of you can take the same credit-by-examination course in order to split the material fees. Furthermore, if you add these materials to your resource library you are constantly expanding the opportunities for those following in your trail-blazing footsteps, motivated by your example.

**Prior Learning Assessment**

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), also called “experiential learning” or “life-work experience,” can be a time and money saving way to accelerate your advancement toward a college degree. PLA is how the scholastic world is acknowledging that many students have a level of work experience and life knowledge that should be recognized for credit. Over 1,000 schools offer PLA. The central principle that underlies assessment of work or life experience is that *what students know is more important than how they learned it*. If students can demonstrate that their existing knowledge and skills are reasonably comparable to those of college-trained students then comparable credit is awarded. Credit is usually obtained through the process of writing a “portfolio” which summarizes and documents the student’s knowledge.

Not all life learning can be converted into collegiate credit, but you will be surprised how much of what you already know is indeed credit worthy. There
are eight major categories that may yield college-equivalent credits. These are: (1) work (skills and activities performed on the job, including military service); (2) homemaking (maintenance, planning, budgeting, child psychology, cooking, and nutrition); (3) volunteer work (church activities, political campaigns, service organizations such as Jaycees and Toastmasters); (4) non-credit learning in formal settings (business training courses, clinics, conferences, lectures and workshops); (5) travel (tours, business trips, significant vacations, living abroad); (6) recreational activities and hobbies (acting/community theater productions, arts and crafts, aviation training, gardening and landscaping, musical skills, etc.); (7) independent reading-viewing-listening (extensive or intensive self-directed study); and (8) conversations with experts.

To receive credit for these experiences you must construct a Prior Learning Portfolio. A portfolio is a written report justifying and documenting your request for college-equivalent credits. It is not an easy task, but it can be well worth the effort. Many schools provide instructions on how to compose your portfolio. Portfolios have four components: (1) a request for specific course credits; (2) a resume identifying your educational, professional, or other relevant activities; (3) a narrative demonstrating that you have college-equivalent knowledge and skills; and (4) documentation to support your claims of accomplishment. It is crucial that you are able to document your life experiences. An assessment team at the school will evaluate your portfolio. Criteria used to evaluate your portfolio includes, but are not limited to, the amount and level of decision-making responsibility; reporting relationships with subordinates and colleagues; the span of financial control; the duration of training experiences; and the overall level of responsibility required. Schools and the American Council on Education (ACE) are striving to create "menus" of uniform credit awards for non-traditional experiences. ACE publishes two massive books making such recommendations: The National Guide to Educational Credit for Training

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4 Examples of possible creditworthy activities include: playing tennis, leading a church group, taking a body-building class, reading *War and Peace*, writing a book, navigating a small boat, watching public television, being a camp counselor, playing in a band, repairing a car, performing magic, writing a speech, organizing a union, and devising a marketing strategy.

5 Selected examples of standardized awards are Alcohol and Drug Counselor (6 credits), Basic Red Cross Lifeguarding (1 credit), Basic Literacy Volunteers of American Tutor Training (3 credits), Emergency Medical Technician (4 credits), Fluency in Spanish (24 credits), Legal Clerk, Army MOS (24 credits), and Water Safety Instructor (2 credits).
Programs and Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Forces. Urge your education director or librarian to order these reference guides for your educational resource library.⁶

Many colleges and universities offer portfolio credit evaluations. The number of credits possible to earn range from a few to over one hundred, depending on students’ backgrounds and their effectiveness in preparing portfolios, as well as the school’s particular policies. Evaluation fees vary from college to college. They usually range from a few to several hundred dollars for registration and evaluation, and on average, from $31.00 to $60.00 per credit hour granted and listed on the transcript.

Credit Bank Schools

Schools that have unrestricted transfer and portfolio credit granting policies are also called “Credit Bank Services.” These fully accredited schools work like a money bank accepting deposits of academic credits. Regardless of where the credits are earned, they issue a single, widely recognized consolidated transcript. These schools also offer a wide variety of degree programs.⁷

There are seven basic categories of learning experiences that can be deposited in credit bank accounts. These credit sources can be mixed and matched to fulfill a majority, and in some cases all, of the necessary hours to complete a degree’s requirement. These seven categories are: college courses, either classroom or correspondence; equivalency exams; military service occupations training and experiences; ACE accredited industry training programs; FAA pilot certifications and licenses; nursing performance examinations; and all other life experiences coalesced in a portfolio assessment.

⁶ For PLA guidance materials contact: Earn Credit for What You Know, L. Lamdin, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 55 East Monroe Street, #1930, Chicago, IL 60603. This publication sells for $24.95 plus tax. Ask for additional publications. Portfolio Video Seminar & Printed Study Guide, Follet’s Bookstore, Governors State University, Illinois, 1-800-GSU-8GSU, ext. 4588. Experiential Learning Guidebook by W. Kemble, National College Studies, Student Assistance Division, Dept. BG1, 675 Blue Mountain Road, Saugerties, NY 12247.

⁷ Over 200 undergraduate areas of degree granting diplomas are offered by the following three colleges: Charter Oak State College, 55 Paul J. Manafort Dr., New Britain, CT 06053-2142; Thomas Edison State College, 101 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608-1176; and Regents College, 7 Columbia Circle, Albany, NY 12203-5159.
For students with diverse training and life experiences, credit banking services provided by these profiled programs could be an excellent investment. Banking allows you to pull together all the creditworthy accomplishments you have earned. Even students with limited life experiences and extensive credits earned via widely accepted equivalency exams can benefit, if not necessarily from the credit banking services then from the liberal acceptance of transferred credit hours towards these schools' degree granting programs.

Fees vary among these services. Portfolio assessment fees range from $250.00 to $600.00, with per-credit-granted rates from nothing to $100.00. Annual records maintenance fees average another $100.00. With deft timing (i.e., applying when enough total hours have been accrued) these service fees can be avoided by immediately applying for a degree. For those directly seeking a degree, rather than credit banking services, the Charter Oak State College Foundation offers grants of up to $500.00 per student for courses, tests and portfolio assessment fees. Apply early for this generous waiver program.

For those able to submit credit deposits of 120 academic certifiable hours or more, a baccalaureate could be earned for around $500.00. This is quite a savings over the initially projected cost of $20,000 for a degree earned via traditional correspondence studies. Only your imagination limits your creative uses of all of these resources to achieve your degree. In the words of Marcus Garvey, “According to the commonest principles of human action, no man will do as much for you as you will do for yourself.”

**Curriculum construction, “best buys,” and pulling it all together**

In any institutional setting, pursuit of a higher education is an arduous task. The quest of a college degree via distance education is especially difficult with all the attendant rules, regulations, and policies of the schools, the department of corrections, and even of the particular prisons. You have many masters, but only you are the captain of your fate. To undertake such a dream, you must plan a step-by-step approach.

The first task is to collect and review your institution and system’s policies regarding distance education enrollments as well as associated regulations (e.g., personal property restrictions). These will provide the parameters within which you will have to construct your course of study. Contact your prison’s education supervisor and see what assistance and service he or she can provide. The education administrator can be your best ally by smoothing out the inevitable
glitches, or your worst bureaucratic nightmare by obtusely or even malevolently failing to manage your education program.

**Curriculum construction**

The next step in your goal of a college degree is to plan your course of study. It is the responsibility of the distance education student to design a curriculum that fulfills the desired degree requirements.

To be able to design your curriculum (i.e., the courses you need to take) you have to know what degree you want to achieve and where you want to earn it. It is a decision that should take into account many factors. These include: the number of transfer credit hours permitted towards degree requirements (the more the better), the acceptance of equivalency exam and portfolio credits (the more liberal the better), and the tuition fee per course hour (the lower the better).

There are two basic types of undergraduate degrees: Associate of Arts or Sciences, which is generally a two-year degree requiring from fifty to seventy semester-based credit hours; and a Bachelor of Arts or Sciences, generally a four-year degree, requiring from 120 to 130 semester-based credit hours. The Associate degree provides a basic or foundational college education, with "science-oriented" degrees fulfilling specific technical training, such as advanced automotive or computer certifications. The Bachelor degree is built upon the foundation of an Associate degree, and provides two additional years of more-focused education in major or dual minor areas of study.

My recommendation, based upon the enlightenment of the personal experience of 180 credit hours, observation of hundreds of other prisoner-college students, and intense scholastic research, is to take as many diverse types of courses as possible within your limited circumstances and permitted by the latitude of your chosen degree curriculum. All schools provide curriculum counselors. Be sure to use their services and have their approval for your chosen curriculum.⁸

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⁸ A generic curriculum for an Associate of Arts degree includes Basic College Skills (6 credits), Arts and Humanities (12 credits), Natural Sciences (9 credits), Social Sciences (12 credits), Mathematics (6 credits), English and Composition (9 credits), and Electives (9 credits). For a Bachelor of Arts, the typical curriculum is Basic College Skills (9 credits), Humanities (9 credits), Physical Sciences (6 credits), Mathematics (6 credits), English and Composition (12 credits), Social Sciences (15 credits), Foreign Language (6 credits), Electives (9 credits), and 48 credit hours in a major field of study (e.g. sociology, anthropology, physics).
"Best buys" in correspondence study

In the vast majority of cases, no matter how many equivalency-exam and life-experience portfolio credits you have been able to achieve, you will need to complete a minimum of five (for an Associate degree) to ten (for a Bachelor degree) three-credit hour courses by correspondence from the college or university from which you are seeking a degree.

Actually, this is a good thing. In prison there is nothing quite as satisfying as successfully completing the struggle to earn a grade in a college course. The feeling of enhanced self-respect and self-worth you achieve from your own efforts to overcome all institutional and intellectual obstacles to complete a class is like no other self-satisfying rush! The exception may be winning your pro se written brief before the Supreme Court, but how many of us get a chance to do that?

As mentioned previously, there are many factors to consider when selecting a school. Accreditation is an essential qualifier. Tuition rates are another important factor to consider but should not be the overriding qualifier. In Note 9, "Effective Rates" (ER) for tuition are listed by computing all administrative and registration expenses and tuition fees, averaged to an across-the-board comparable sum per credit hour. While tuition rates increase every year, the schools listed offer some of the "best buys" in the United States. Do not forget the other factors to consider in the school selection process, such as the flexibility of credit transfer and acceptance policies.

There are other colleges and universities offering tuition rates below the national average to consider as well. Indiana University, with a tuition rate of $98.75 per credit hour, offers certificates, and Associate and Bachelor degrees with more than 200 correspondence courses. The university's international scholastic reputation and academic recognition makes it a program worth considering.

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Note 9: Effective Rates (ER) at some "best buy" schools: Louisiana State University, Office of Independent Study, E106 Pleasant Hall, Baton Rouge LA 70803. 160 courses offered, ER $63.33 per credit. Sam Houston State University, Correspondence Division, P. O. Box 2536, Huntsville, TX 77341. 37 courses offered, ER $52.00 per credit. Southwest State University, Office of Correspondence Studies, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666. 60 courses offered, ER $57.00 per credit. Texas A&M University—Commerce, Guided Independent Study, P. O. Box 3001, Commerce, TX 75429-3011. 30 courses offered, ER $60.00/75.00 per credit. University of Arkansas, 2 East Center Street, Fayetteville, AR 72701 110 courses available, ER $63.00/73.00 per credit.
Perhaps you wish to graduate from a school in your state, the home of your favorite college team, or the one from which your parents graduated. Whatever your motives, apply the suggested criteria balanced against your resources and select your future alma mater. Douglas G. Dean, who earned his Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorate at the University of South Africa while he was in prison—now that is distance education—observed, “When it all comes together, it is the greatest feeling in the world” (quoted in Bear and Bear, 1999: 178).

**Note on accreditation**

An important, basic factor when selecting a school is determining if it is “accredited.” Accreditation by a US Department of Education recognized accrediting agency assures a student that the “accredited school” has met certain standards concerning the quality of education, faculty qualifications, appropriate text and materials, financial stability, and so forth. Earning course credits at one accredited school generally assures the transferability of those classes to another college.

There are six regional accrediting associations, and the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), which generally accredit independent and proprietary schools. If a school is accredited by any of these associations, you can be assured of transferable credits and a recognized degree.

Recently, unauthorized or US Department of Education non-recognized accrediting agencies have been formed to “sell” essentially false credentials using “diploma mill” programs. The World Association of Universities and Colleges is such a private accrediting agency. *Caveat Emptor*—“Buyer Beware”—should be your watchword when picking a school. All state-supported colleges and universities must be accredited according to their charters. You would be well-advised to avoid an unaccredited school.

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10 Consider programs at Indian University, School of Continuing Studies, 790 East Kirkwood Avenue, Bloomington, IN 47405-7101. See their Associate of Science in Labor Studies (60 credits), Associate in General Studies (60 credits), Bachelor of Science in Labor Studies and General Studies (120 credits each). Indiana offers 225 courses by distance. ER $98.75 per credit.

11 US Department of Education Recognized Accreditation Agencies: Distance Education and Training Council, Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, and Western Association of Schools and Colleges.
Pulling it all together

Now you know your basic options. The next steps are to evaluate your life experiences, collect some equivalency-exam preparation booklets and texts, send for various schools’ distance education materials, and start building your university curriculum towards your goal of a college degree.

The biggest difference in distance education is that you do not have the classroom experience, which usually provides an opportunity for face-to-face interaction with your instructor and other students. You will have to be even more self-reliant than an on-campus student. Your entire degree program rests in your hands. It depends on your creativity, determination, and motivation.

Whether you are preparing for an equivalency exam, end-of-course test, or regular correspondence lesson, you will need to establish some good study habits. First, set a time and place to study. You need a schedule, and the more strictly you can keep to it, the more likely you are to be successful in your studies. Eliminate as many distractions as possible. For example, when others are out of the cellblock for recreation, you study. You can block out the range’s roar by learning to concentrate with headphones on. Second, set deadlines. Divide the amount of work required for your courses by the number of months you have to complete them. This gives you a schedule and a series of deadlines to guide your pace through the course work. Third, when you set up your study plan, allow some extra time for lessons to be reviewed by the instructor, and for assignments and exams to be graded and returned—not to mention the occasional “interruptions” in prison routine. Fourth, read your instructor’s comments on the graded written assignments and exams. Ask additional questions and keep your returned assignments for study purposes. Here is a hint: many exam questions are derived from assignment questions.

CONCLUSION

With judicious use of life-experience credits, equivalency-exams, and an average of ten courses at $75.00 a credit hour, plus the costs of texts, you can piece together the 120 necessary credit hours for a baccalaureate for less than $4,000. For someone really on top of his or her game, this sum (which is one-fifth of what was projected above) could even be cut in half.

It is all up to you. If you have the will, you can succeed beyond your expectations. With some work and time, build your academic file and keep it close. The limits you face are those you place upon yourself. There is always
a way to piece your college education together behind bars. Mind the thoughts of William M. Bulger: "There is never a better measure of what a person is when he is absolutely free to choose."

**REFERENCES**


**Jon Marc Taylor** is co-editor of this volume of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* with a sustained contribution of articles on prison education published in *JPP*, the *Journal of Correctional Education*, and elsewhere. He recently published the second edition of *Prisoners’ Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada* (Biddle Publishing, 2002). He can be reached at 503273, 1115 East Pence Road, Cameron, MO 64429.
In July of 1972, I entered the State Correctional Institution at Dallas, Pennsylvania (SCI-Dallas). Looking back, I guess I have always believed that everyone should know the value of reading and writing. These were studies that I had taken for granted before entering the prison system, but I have since learned to appreciate them greatly. Based on my thirty years of incarceration, I would say the most obvious reason behind failed attempts at rehabilitating prisoners is their lack of interest in basic vocational and educational skills. Many individuals find the Department of Corrections an easy target to blame for their inability or unwillingness to learn. However, it is not due entirely to the inadequacy of the department, since many educational opportunities exist. The privilege of attending classes has been available to prisoners for as long as I have been here. Unfortunately, few prisoners are willing to seek out and take advantage of these opportunities.

The educational department at SCI-Dallas focuses primarily on adult basic education classes (ABE). Their main objective is to assist prisoners in bringing their reading, writing, and arithmetic skills up to a fifth- and sixth-grade level, while preparing them for their General Educational Development (GED) exam. Teaching individuals what they need to pass the GED exam and receive their diplomas are the dominant activities of our educational department. Once students receive their GED, they then become eligible for vocational classes, where they can earn certificates in Business Management from Luzerne County Community College. Of course, the Pell Grants for prisoners, which were once valuable assets in helping prisoners pursue their post-secondary educations, were cut out altogether in the mid 1990s. The SCI-Dallas mission statement reads, “The goal of the school of SCI-Dallas is to provide opportunities which will enable students to reach their potential.” Although the Department of Corrections is making an honest attempt to meet the prescriptive educational programs, many of us feel that much more can be and should be realized.

Somewhat out of curiosity, I found myself wondering why such a large number of incarcerated men with low-level education would spend so much time in this prison and not take advantage of the educational programs. Why

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1 The author wishes to acknowledge and thank Tiyo Attallah Salah-EI for his support and assistance in editing this paper, Cameron Murry for sharing his experience on writing, and Charles Haas for his help in conducting the research for this article.
were they consistently refusing to enroll in ABE classes? Eager to find the answer, other concerned prisoners and myself conducted an informal survey and found that the majority of men did want an education, but they felt out of place in the ABE classes. A main reason they gave was fear. They feared being laughed at by other prisoners, many of whom are neighborhood friends. We understood their reasons and feelings. In prison, image can be survival.

I discussed my concerns and the survey’s results with another prisoner. He suggested that I become involved in the Laubach Literacy Program. The program is designed to help those with less than fifth grade educational skills.

I learned that the Laubach Literacy Program is a program where prisoners are tutored privately, “One on One,” based on a system designed by Dr. Frank C. Laubach, which has proven to be effective in teaching adult literacy. In 1930, in the Philippines, the late Dr. Laubach originated a method of teaching adults to read and write in their own language. The method was applied to teaching English. The Laubach method established a network of trainers who would come into the institution and train those both able and willing to become Laubach tutors. It seemed to fit our needs well.

In 1988, a group of prisoners met with prison authorities and members of the educational department regarding the possibility of training tutors to help those students who were not attending ABE classes because they feared embarrassment. Out of that meeting SCI-Dallas Literacy Council was formed. Later, the Literacy Council succeeded in opening doors and connecting with the Laubach Literary Action Organization. Soon trainers came in from Laubach and held the first tutor training workshops, and SCI-Dallas got its first certified tutors.

In time, and with hard work, these certified tutors were authorized to train other tutors. I am proud to say that I am one of the tutors who was taught by the first trainer to come to the prison. By the end of 1991, I had become a full-time tutor.

I received my first student in early 1992. Surprisingly, the first session became another learning situation, as I shared the nervousness that I noticed in my student. “How well was I taught?” After a few sessions I found myself becoming more comfortable. I realized that my training called upon me to help as many people as I could, so I requested additional students. Two of Laubach’s basic rules are to respect a student’s privacy and to demonstrate a tutor’s patience. Something my first student taught me was the true meaning of
patience. Despite frustrations and meager resources, he showed up for every class, and it turned out that each time I taught, I learned as well.

Some of the students I tutor are also enrolled in ABE classes. These students need help mainly in preparing for what is taught in those classes. That might include learning the alphabet or understanding vowel sounds. Once those skills are understood I might help them with their ABE work. Often tutors work in conjunction with the school, and in cases like this the student might then be able to join regular school classes. Other students I tutor are of much deeper concern. Many of these individuals experience severe embarrassment. I give them tutoring that focuses not only on reading but also on ways to adjust, relate, and learn with others.

I advanced in this field when I eventually completed the regional workshops to become a Certified Apprentice Tutor Trainer (ATT). This allows me and other ATTs to train and certify other tutors. Certification comes through the Scranton Literacy Council of Laubach. Over the years, I have worked with at least 23 students.

Up to the present time, the prison staff and the educational department have provided space and time for the Literacy Council to continue its program in the classrooms or in the school auditorium. The administration has been relatively supportive of education and our literacy program. I think the reason for this is plain. As tutors we provide a service to the educational department that is productive and free of cost. In spite of our requests and successes we are still not paid. Prisoner-tutors providing private sessions funnel into the programs more people who are better prepared. This makes the teachers’ jobs easier and students’ success rates higher. Given the work that we do, it seems to me that the administration could be more supportive, but we generally do not expect much. The years have tutored us. We have learned to do a lot with little. We get our reward from seeing the difference we make.

The best thing about being a tutor is seeing the students’ progress, from watching the self-esteem of an individual grow as he moves from learning the alphabet to typing letters to his children. Budget cuts and changes in the tide of bureaucratic or public opinion always threaten the existence of prison educational programming. Being an “each one teach one” program helps us in that we can do what we do anywhere, and with whatever meager resources are available.

It is amazing how much a little patience, a little concern, and a little energy can do. Over the years I am proud to say that I have helped a number of men
ascend into the world of literacy, which I hope has opened up worlds to them. And in return, I have received the joy of believing that I have helped others—including myself—to become more productive, informed, and well-rounded human beings.

I have tutored for myself and for my students because there is a need and opportunity. For me, the ability to read is a tool to expanding freedom. And in some small way my efforts at tutoring make me feel like a "Freedom Fighter."

Daniel Graves has been incarcerated since 1991. He has been elected chairman for Bread for the World, and treasurer for Laubach Literacy. "My inspiration to ... continue my work comes from God, my parents, Roland and Christine Graves, and my wife, Gloria Graves." Daniel can be contacted at AM 0633 Unit 1, SCI-Dallas, 1000 Follies Road, Dallas, PA 18612.
Three days after I arrived at SCI-Dallas in 1999, I became Clerk in the kitchen. One of my responsibilities was to process the paperwork necessary to give prisoner-workers their periodic pay raises. While doing so, I discovered that the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections had a rule in place that any prisoners with a reading level lower than the fifth grade could not receive a pay rate beyond twenty-four cents an hour. It was shocking to see that approximately fifteen percent of the kitchen workers had reading levels below this grade and were therefore functionally illiterate.

On my housing block, I was discussing this with Danny Graves (a tutor in the Laubach Literacy Program), who told me that, prison-wide, the illiteracy rate was even higher. He proceeded to tell me about the Laubach Program. I knew that I had to be involved, and I enrolled in the next tutor-training program.¹

I was enthusiastic about Laubach because I agreed with many of the program’s tenets.

- Repetition is used to help the student master the names and the sounds of letters. To avoid confusion, letters with multiple sounds are taught one sound at a time.
- Positive reinforcement is essential. The word “No” is not in the tutor’s vocabulary.
- Privacy is strictly adhered to. Some students might be embarrassed if other prisoners found out that they had trouble reading and writing.
- “Each one teach one” is the program’s motto. Having that one-on-one relationship with the student truly enhances his or her ability to learn.
- Moving at the student’s own pace. This is a real benefit of the “each one teach one” concept.

I have been tutoring now for over two years and continue to be an enthusiastic disciple of this program. My frustration lies in the fact that we are only scratching the surface at this prison. We have about twenty-five to thirty students enrolled in the program at this time and there are probably ten times that many prisoners here who are functionally illiterate.

¹ In late August 2002, the Laubach Literacy Program and Literacy Volunteers of America merged and are now called ProLiteracy Worldwide.
At present, our primary problem is getting new prisoners to enroll in the Laubach Program. We have more tutors than students. The logical source for new students is the education department. However, there was a lack of support for the program from the department in the past. The Education Director and the teachers were reluctant to utilize the tutors. Fortunately, this is now changing. A new Education Director is very supportive of the program; therefore, it gets the teachers’ support. In fact, we have been asked to speak to two introductory reading classes to encourage students to also enroll in the Laubach Program. This is a big step forward.

Another potential vehicle for encouraging new students to enroll is the use of a video. Danny Graves has written a script for a play about Laubach that would involve some of our students who are proud of the fact that they have learned to read and write. I suggested to him that we videotape his play and periodically show this tape on the in-house video channel. This strategy would reach a larger number of potential students and have a greater impact than written material that we could post on bulletin boards, a vehicle that has had no impact on attracting individuals to our program. There is no doubt that Laubach works. We simply need to sign up more students in order to make a deep dent in the illiteracy rate at this prison.

In June 2002, I became the President of our Laubach Executive Board. This position gives me a better chance to be an advocate for literacy programs of all types at SCI-Dallas. I believe that programs like Laubach are essential in the effort to reduce recidivism rates. In my estimation, the lack of education is one of the key contributing factors to ex-prisoners becoming prisoners again. I am not a penologist. I am a person who came to jail at age forty-six after being college educated and having worked for twenty-five years in the insurance industry. However, I do have definite opinions about the educational problems that exist here and in other prisons. I plan to spend my time working as much as possible to improve the education of all prisoners who are interested in bettering themselves, especially those being released soon.

In addition to being a Laubach Officer and tutor, I am also privileged to be Secretary of the newly-formed Education Committee of the SCI-Dallas Chapter of the Jaycee’s. The first program we put in place (free of charge to prisoners and to the prison) was a creative writing class. This will teach prisoners how to write effective communications to staff and family while they are incarcerated. It will also be a help to them when they communicate with prospective employers and others once they are released.
Some other programs that are in our future plans are geared toward those prisoners who we hope will be released in twelve to eighteen months. We hope the administration will look favorably on these efforts. These programs are listed below.

**Driver education**

When an individual is released and is going to work, or looking for employment, a driver’s license will be a necessity. We plan to give them a head start by going through the driver’s license booklet issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles and preparing them for the written test.

**Internet**

The Internet has become almost as important as television in people’s daily life on the street. Information is obtained, job openings are listed, resumes are sent out, cars are bought, and the list goes on. But prisoners who have been inside for six years or more have very little idea of what the Internet is, and no idea of how to use it. Prisoners at SCI-Dallas are not permitted to use the Internet.

We want to offer a class using software that simulates the Internet (on a CD-ROM) so we can teach prisoners what is available on the Internet as well as how to “surf the Net.” This is another essential skill for our fellow prisoners to learn before they are released. It will increase their self-confidence and their comfort level.

**Basic cooking**

The majority of prisoners being released are probably not going to make much more than minimum wage. Eating out is expensive. We want to offer basic recipes that will help them live within a budget.

**Checkbook/budgeting**

I am taking college classes here to keep active. In an accounting class I took only four out of eleven other students had ever had a checkbook or lived on a budget. These are critical skills to be learned if released prisoners are to live on what they can earn legitimately.
AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINES (ATMS)/
NEW SELF-SERVE GAS PUMPS

With the help of an instructional video or pictures that we can obtain from banks and gas companies, we hope to teach fellow prisoners how to use ATMs and the new gas pumps. In doing so, we strive to reduce significantly the stress and the possible embarrassment that released prisoners might experience when they need to use these machines for the first time out on the street.

CONCLUSION

Jaycee’s and the Literacy Council are striving to create positive and productive ways to help our fellow prisoners when they are released. We want them to fit in, to feel that they are a part of life out there, not feel like life has “passed them by” while they were incarcerated.

Finally, for those individuals who will be here for a longer period of time, we hope to hold several seminars on investing options that would be available to prisoners with small monthly incomes.

In my view, education is the key to a successful life out on the street. Prisoners who are blessed with an education should reach out to help our fellow prisoners learn as much as they can. We need to encourage them to take whatever classes they can, including learning a trade that will help them find work. We should also be prepared to teach programs that are not offered by the prison system.

Some people believe that prisoners should simply be warehoused. I was one such person when I was on the outside. From first-hand experience, I now realize such thinking is not going to solve anything. People will only change when they are given the knowledge and skills they need to change their lives successfully and forever.

Rob Rucier was vice president of an insurance company, taught Sunday school, and coached Little League prior to his incarceration. Currently, he is in the sixth year of an 18-36 year sentence. His two sons, Matt and Chris, are his inspiration and what keeps him going. He can be reached at #DT8226, SCI-Dallas, 1000 Follies Road, Dallas, PA 18612.
The Many Faces of Prison Education

David Deutsch

The educational process that occurs in prison takes many forms at San Quentin State Prison, in California, the institution where I am incarcerated. We have the traditional correctional education program, where prisoners who show a need to improve their academic skills are channeled into classes shortly after a committee of staff members classifies them. To determine which prisoners will be routed into education, a standardized test is given when the men enter the institution. If the resulting test score is less than a skill level of grade twelve, the individual will be placed automatically in school; if he can prove he has a high school diploma or GED, he will be allowed to leave education for another work assignment. Attending school is mandatory for those men who do not have a diploma or GED. For the most part they will remain in school until their release from prison or until they pass a GED test. We also have voluntary education programs that meet at night. These non-traditional programs utilize prisoner tutors who work mainly in one-on-one situations with other prisoners to help them advance their academic skills. There is also a college program available at San Quentin. Individuals can earn an Associate Arts degree while they serve their sentence by taking what are essentially the same courses in general education that students at an outside two-year college would take to earn their AA degree.

I am a forty-nine year old first-term prisoner, with a Bachelor degree in sociology. I have been incarcerated at San Quentin for two years. For the first six months I was a teacher’s aide in a basic education class. I have been a volunteer tutor in a GED study program for almost two years, and in a program called Project R.E.A.C.H. for twenty-one months. Both of these programs are peer-tutoring forms of education.

For two reasons I do not intend to place blame on any institution, department, or person for whatever shortcomings exist in the educational process that takes place in San Quentin. First, I am committed to trying to improve the skill level of the men with whom I work, and I believe that trying to place blame is counterproductive to achieving that goal. Second, I do not have enough information available to me to be able to make valid criticisms of why those shortcomings may exist. In my experience, I have seen a great deal of support for all educational programs that are in place at San Quentin, not only from those directly involved in education (i.e., teachers and education department
administrators) but from the warden, associate wardens, and other officials. I sincerely believe the educational process is valued highly in this institution, primarily because educating prisoners has proven to be a huge factor in helping to reduce the rate of recidivism (Cecil et al., 2000; Harer, 1995).

THE LIMITS OF TRADITIONAL PRISON EDUCATION

Traditional education in prison has much in common with public education as it exists in the larger society. In both cases it is a rather expensive proposition. Buildings and their maintenance, supplies and equipment, and salaries for teachers and administrators add up to an enormous amount of money on an annual basis. Divide that total by the number of students being taught per year and you will come up with a surprisingly large sum per capita. It is common to read about the lack of funding for education in the larger society, so certainly one would not realistically expect the situation to be any different in prison. In fact, one would expect the public to be even less concerned about prison education because prisoners are viewed by society primarily in a punitive way. While there are undoubtedly some citizens who understand that prison education is the best way to reduce recidivism (thereby saving millions in tax dollars), there are many more members of society who are not particularly anxious to see their tax dollars spent on educating people they believe should be punished.

Mandatory education in the prison system is also subject to the same factors inherent in any large bureaucratic system that operates in society. In that sense, prison education is a microcosm of public education. Large educational systems are typically slow to recognize the need for changes in their methodology, and are even slower when it comes to implementing change once its necessity is recognized. The teachers I have worked with are intelligent, caring, and dedicated educators, but they are constrained by a bureaucracy that dictates policies they must follow.

Any educational environment requires that there be regular meetings amongst instructors and administrative staff to discuss problems, goals, and upcoming issues relevant to their specific responsibilities. This is true in prison as well, however, in prison these meetings take away from class time. School is essentially year-round since there are new students coming into the system all the time. Because of this there are no breaks or “vacations” when these important meetings might take place without class time being shortened.
This same factor applies to monthly and quarterly paperwork being completed. The bureaucratic policies result in teachers being required to do a large amount of paperwork. While this goes along with the job of being a teacher in any school, there is extra paperwork involved in being an educator in prison because of security concerns. The time spent doing that work ultimately takes time away from educating students. In addition to the paperwork for security, at the end of each month there is one day taken off from class so the teacher and teacher's aide can complete the paperwork that is required by the state. At the end of each quarter, that one day stretches to two days because there is a tremendous amount of quarterly work that must be submitted as well. Students are held to attendance standards (just as students are in public schools), and they receive certification credits and grades, all of which involves a lot of records to document performance. Because this is a prison, records must be completed on a regular basis and involve far more information than would be required in an outside school setting.

There are other factors that limit the degree to which traditional prison education can be effective. In San Quentin, there are no classes for special education; even students with significant learning disabilities find themselves being “mainstreamed” into regular classes which may present great obstacles to their ability to absorb the lessons being taught. While this may prevent these students from being stigmatized, it also limits their academic advancement in dramatic ways. We do have an English as a Second Language (ESL) class here, which is helpful for the men who attend it until their English skills improve enough to be placed in a class where English is the primary language. We also have a high percentage of prisoners who are serving short terms for parole violations and may only be in a traditional education program for two to four months, hardly enough time to learn comprehensively about even one subject let alone several. For these men it is important to try to convince them that they should seek out adult education programs upon their release from prison so they will continue to build upon what they have learned.

The reality of institutional security issues also has a dramatic impact on the effectiveness of prison education. Lockdowns (where prisoners are confined to their living area), institutional recalls (where prisoners must report to those living areas, at least temporarily), and foggy weather all shut classes down. These situations occur regularly. Therefore, learning continuity, which is such an essential factor in the success of any educational endeavor, is interrupted. Students who learn something one day may have to learn it again after several
days of the school being closed. It is difficult under these conditions to build upon the learning process in an effective way.

Teachers must also participate in the inmate classification process, which takes more time away from the classroom. Thus, in addition to security issues, it is not uncommon for a class to be closed so that an instructor can be utilized to administer the standardized tests given to new arrivals to the prison to determine their academic skill level. Of course, testing is seen as a necessary part of the process that determines who will be placed in a traditional education program, but it contributes to valuable class time being lost in the process.

San Quentin and many other prisons offer a three-week class known as “pre-release.” It is designed to help men who are in the final few months of their terms prepare for life on the outside. It has been shown to reduce the rate of recidivism dramatically (Shand, 1996). Several outside people come in to help the men with this preparation, including job counselors and parole officers. Long-term prisoners also give talks to the men in pre-release class about things they need to avoid doing so they do not keep coming back to prison. Since the class lasts for just three weeks, usually it is canceled only for security reasons; however, if the regular teacher cannot be there another teacher is forced to cancel her or his regular class to substitute for the pre-release instructor. This, of course, cuts down on the time that the regular class has together.

Since San Quentin has so many men here for short terms there is a constant turnover of students in any given class. It is not uncommon for a class of twenty-seven men to have five or more students leave and be replaced by new students each month. That kind of rapid turnover tends to be disruptive to the learning process for several reasons. First, a new arrival cannot be expected to just pick up immediately on material that may have been presented several weeks before the student arrived. Second, the teacher is always in a state of adjusting to new students, which is a challenge in itself. Third, because there is constant turnover, the class members are unable to get in that “comfort zone” of learning that lends itself so well to the educational process.

In addition to the problems posed by the high rate of turnover in a class, quite often there is a wide range of skill levels in a given class. While each class is, in theory, supposed to accommodate students with roughly the same skill level, in reality students are put into open spots in classes as they become available. Students at the most basic level of education are almost always correctly placed in the proper class, but it is not unusual to find students with a higher skill level in there with them. In that situation the material being presented
can be too hard for some and too easy for others. In both of these cases the educational process is then inhibited because some students are bored and others are overwhelmed by the lessons being taught. This is not to say the same phenomena does not occur in all educational systems, but a prison environment is already a place that is not particularly conducive to the learning process.

Classes in the traditional prison education system share another situation in common with classes in outside schools: There are some students in class who are highly motivated to learn and others who do not care about learning at all. The difference is that in a prison setting there are already in place mitigating factors that work against attempts to motivate students to learn. First, prisoners in general do not place a high value on education. Motivated students are not surrounded by an atmosphere that stimulates learning. Second, although we have a library, it is quite small, and access to it is limited. Third, the environments where prisoners are housed tend to be very noisy places where it is difficult to study. Fourth, social and recreational activities such as playing cards take place in living areas where it is easy to become distracted from studying.

On the whole, traditional education in a correctional institution is an enormous challenge. The trouble is that so many of the problems the school faces are inherent to the realities of prison life in and of itself. That is not to say there are no ways in which things could be improved upon. Surely there are, but certain aspects of life in prison will probably never change. In many ways the volunteer education programs that are offered in San Quentin can be seen as an attempt at improving upon the traditional system of correctional education. I believe that those of us who are involved as tutors in these programs see ourselves working with the people who are professional educators so we may provide a valuable supplemental component to the educational process that takes place in San Quentin.

VOLUNTARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND PEER LEARNING

As mentioned previously, I have been a volunteer tutor at San Quentin in two peer tutoring programs since shortly after I arrived. These programs are the GED study program and Project R.E.A.C.H., an acronym for Reach for Education, Achievement, and Change with Help. The men who attend these programs do so voluntarily. They are, in general, more highly motivated to learn than is the average student who is placed in a mandatory education class.
Each of these programs is coordinated by outside sponsors who volunteer their time to tutor, support, and encourage the men who participate in the programs. In my experience, these outside sponsors are almost always involved in some aspect of education beyond what they do in San Quentin. In the voluntary education program they are frequently teachers (currently employed or retired) or people involved with literacy work. In the college program, they are college instructors or students. In both cases, these are people who firmly believe in the importance and value of education. Their sense of concern and their commitment to helping these men stimulates the learning process, in part because the men are very appreciative of the fact that these outside people are there strictly to help them with no financial rewards involved. This may sound strange to some people, but the reality of prison life is such that outside volunteers who come to prison to help prisoners in any capacity are highly respected and well liked for giving of their time so generously.

The peer-tutoring programs here have advantages over traditional correctional education classes in several ways. Perhaps the single most important advantage is that the tutor works one-on-one (or occasionally in small groups of two or three) to help others improve their skills. This enables the teaching process to take place at the skill level of the individual student, which greatly enhances the learning process. Even when tutors work with more than one student at a time in these programs, they always work with students who are at almost exactly the same skill level in the particular subject. In fact, sometimes the students will help each other by holding study sessions on their own time, which further enhances the learning process; indeed, it makes students into peer tutors, so the whole process is very democratic and self-generating. It has been well documented in studies on education that students who receive a significant amount of individual attention achieve a much greater level of academic success than those who do not. In a traditional classroom setting there is one teacher, and one or sometimes two teacher’s aides to work with twenty to twenty-seven students. This does not allow for the kind of one-on-one time given to the students who attend the voluntary education programs. Of course, those men in the traditional education classes are encouraged to explore the voluntary education options available to them; in fact, several individuals are involved in both mandatory and voluntary education in San Quentin.

The voluntary education programs that are run here also allow students to borrow learning materials, which they can take to their living areas for personal
study. In addition, tutors in voluntary education can often coordinate additional
time to work with students away from the program for more one-on-one
education. Neither of those options exists in the traditional correctional
educational setting. Of course, lockdowns, institutional recalls, and certain
weather conditions close down voluntary education too, but since students in
those programs have study materials checked out they can use that time to
work at their studies on their own, or in small groups, if they so choose. In
dormitory living areas a tutor may even live in the same dormitory as his
students so both student and tutor can use the extra time for educational
purposes in the same way that they would in the nightly peer tutoring programs.

The environment in which voluntary education takes place is also quite
different from that of the traditional prison classroom setting. From a physical
point of view, it is much quieter with fewer interruptions than those that occur
in a mandatory education class. That lends itself well to an effective learning
process because tutors and students can concentrate better in that situation.
Academics are also more highly valued by the students in these programs than
in traditional classrooms because these students are there voluntarily with the
specific goal of improving their skills. This creates an atmosphere in which
the learning process can thrive because these students take their education
very seriously. In addition, voluntary education programs at San Quentin require
a minimal amount of official paperwork; they are not hampered nearly as
much by the bureaucratic requirements placed on the traditional educational
systems. That allows these programs to be focused almost entirely on the
learning processes of the students who participate in them.

Another aspect of voluntary education at San Quentin that might be difficult
for an outsider to understand fully is the powerful bond that is often formed
between a tutor and his student. Of course, bonding between tutors and students
anywhere is not uncommon, but in a prison environment it can be magnified
dramatically. First, both the tutor and student are prisoners who are subjected
to the same form of treatment on a daily basis. That in itself gives them much
in common. Secondly, the level of mutual respect that exists between tutor
and student is probably higher than one would find in most other situations. An
isolated social environment like prison tends to emphasize the importance of
mutual respect, so members of that social environment will get along with
each other. Respect is very important in prison. Without it a prisoner will have
an endless stream of problems coming his way. Because respect is highly
valued, mutual respect between a tutor and his student takes on a special meaning for both of them. It signifies that they appreciate and empathize with each other's predicament.

Third, there is a sense on the part of both individuals of wanting to succeed against what can sometimes feel like overwhelming odds against prisoners. The rate of recidivism is so high in the California Department of Corrections that even individuals with a lot going for them tend to worry about making it in the outside world when they are released. Also, because the overall prison environment is not particularly conducive to the pursuit of academics, there is a heightened sense of awareness about the importance of acquiring new skills to help improve chances of success out in society. This in turn increases the level of motivation on the part of both tutor and student to see to it that as much progress as possible is made by the student while he is incarcerated. The strong bond that is forged under these circumstances is often very special and unique. As a tutor, I have been privileged to experience this. In fact, that special bond, combined with the thrill a tutor feels when his student grasps something he never understood before, is the primary reward I receive for being a tutor in San Quentin.

Another feature of voluntary education that contrasts sharply with the features of mandatory education is that the former is very goal-oriented. The individuals in the GED study program are working towards earning their GED fairly soon. A GED is also a goal for some men in Project R.E.A.C.H. Other students in Project R.E.A.C.H. are trying to improve their skill level to the point where they will eventually be capable of learning the material they must know in order to attempt to pass the GED. This type of goal orientation helps strengthen the learning process in these programs for the same reasons that being goal-oriented in any endeavor tends to reinforce the process by which we achieve our goals. Primarily, being goal oriented makes people focus sharply on an activity and achieve more than people who do not set goals for themselves.

The voluntary peer tutoring classes at San Quentin meet at night in the same building where general education and college classes are held. Seeing students attend these college level courses often serves as a source of motivation for the individuals who are trying to earn their GED. They know that after they acquire their GED they can pursue a college education as well. That provides them with another goal they can try to achieve while they are incarcerated.
A COLLEGE PROGRAM FOR PRISONERS

The college program offered at San Quentin consists of basically the same general education courses that one would be required to take in order to earn an Associate Arts degree at a two-year college program outside of prison. The individuals who participate in this program are essentially earning their AA degree with no financial cost to themselves or their family. The books used in the classes are high quality and are free of charge as well. A wide variety of courses are offered, and for those who may need to build up their skill level first, there are not-for-credit math and English classes also offered. The director of this program, and the professors and teacher aides who teach the classes are intelligent, dynamic people who give of their time freely—literally without any pay—and generously. They are very caring human beings. Of course, San Quentin’s proximity to a large urban area with many colleges and universities nearby most certainly facilitates the process of finding qualified professors and teacher aides who are willing to donate their time to this program. Thus, there is a relatively large pool of highly-qualified potential volunteers that can be chosen by the director of the program. In addition to that, the San Francisco area has a time-honored tradition of being open-minded toward aiding individuals who are incarcerated to turn their lives in a positive direction for the future. Having said that, it should be noted that the director of the program and the professors uphold very high standards for the students enrolled in college courses when it comes to grades and course credits. Students in college classes at San Quentin work hard and put in long hours to earn their AA degrees, just as students do on the outside at their respective colleges.

The college program also benefits from a high level of support within the prison administration. The warden and associate wardens are strongly committed to the programs’ success, and they have facilitated its growth in every way possible. In addition to that, the community resource manager strongly supports the program and puts in many hours to see that it runs smoothly and properly.

Aside from the regular classes that students in college courses attend, there are also nightly study halls if individuals need help with a specific aspect of one or more of their courses. These study halls are in many ways similar to some lab classes that one might find on a regular college campus. In prison, these study halls are probably even more beneficial to those who attend them because they provide an academic atmosphere in which individuals can study
and exchange ideas, something that is difficult to find elsewhere in the prison environment. Again, it should be noted here that prison living areas are not conducive to the pursuit of academic study. Interestingly enough though, some individuals I have met used the adverse study conditions as a form of motivation to study even harder for their classes than they might at an outside college campus.

The benefits to society that are accrued when people pursue higher education have been proven time and time again, so it is not necessary to list them here (Bonfanti, 1992; Lynes, 1992). It is, however, of particular importance to point out the potential benefits society reaps when prisoners pursue a college education. One of these is the dramatic reduction in the rate of recidivism that takes place when a prisoner receives his AA degree. Perhaps more importantly, we should remember that the acquisition of that degree provides a jumping off point for a parolee to continue his education or find gainful employment upon his release. Now, admittedly, the number of college students at San Quentin comprises only a small fraction of the prison's population, but those students are in many ways positive role models for the others serving time here. This is true not only because they are pursuing academics but also because they are providing an example of how an individual can turn his life in a positive direction while he is incarcerated. Even if getting a college education is not a goal for other prisoners, seeing the advantages of learning a trade, a college education, or other worthwhile life skills may ultimately influence individuals who are not initially interested.

**Final thoughts**

San Quentin State Prison is an institution that is quite old and well-known; therefore, we may benefit more than other prisons do from outside people who volunteer their time to come to work with prisoners. I believe it is certainly the case in the voluntary education programs that we have available to those who choose to participate in them.

If I could change just one aspect of the educational system it would be to have a very large, quiet study room made widely available for several hours a day to anyone who wanted to work in a positive educational environment. I believe that alone would aid the learning process in a dramatic way.

There are clearly many men in San Quentin—as well as many men who have paroled out into society from here—who have benefited greatly from the
education they received during their incarceration. This is true for men who have participated in both the mandatory and voluntary education programs. The goal for the educational system of San Quentin should be to improve the quality of education for prisoners who participate in that system, while working within the realities that are a part of prison life. In addition to that, the voluntary education programs should try to reach out to more prisoners in a meaningful way so that they will see the value in taking advantage of the educational opportunities that are available to them while they serve their time. I hope to continue to be a part of that process for the rest of my prison term. I would like to leave San Quentin knowing that in some small way I helped to improve the system of education for the individuals who will pass through here in the future.

REFERENCES


**David Deutsch** was born in Los Angeles. He graduated from California State University Humboldt in 1976 with a degree in sociology. He has been married for nineteen years. His wife and two sons live in Southern California. He was paroled in late 2003. He is planning a career in substance abuse counseling and plans to do volunteer literacy work.
Introducing the New School of Convict Criminology

Stephen C. Richards and Jeffrey Ian Ross

That's the reality, and to hell with what the class-room bred, degree toting, grant-hustling 'experts' say from their well-funded, air-conditioned offices far removed from the grubby realities of the prisoner's lives. (Rideau and Wikberg, 1992: 59)

INTRODUCTION

The United States imprisons more people than any other country in the Western world. Meanwhile, prison research is dominated by government funding and conducted by academics or consultants, many of them former employees of the law enforcement establishment (ex-police, correctional, probation, or parole officers) who subscribe to conservative ideologies and have little empathy for prisoners. Much of this "managerial research" routinely disregards the harm perpetrated by criminal justice processing of individuals arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes (Clear, 1994; Cullen, 1995).

If legislators, practitioners, researchers, and scholars are serious about addressing the corrections crisis (e.g., Clear, 1994; Welch, 1996, 1999; Austin and Irwin, 2001), we need to be more honest and creative with respect to the research we conduct, and the policies we advocate, implement, and evaluate. In an effort to promote this objective, this article introduces what we are calling "Convict Criminology," and reviews the theoretical and historical grounding, current initiatives, and dominant themes of this emerging school and social movement.

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

In order to appreciate the context of Convict Criminology, it is necessary to understand the steps taken to arrive at this juncture. Four interrelated

movements, factors, and methodologies led to the birth of Convict Criminology: theoretical developments in criminology, the failure of prisons, the authenticity of insider perspectives, and the centrality of ethnography.

Theoretical Developments in Criminology

The history of criminological theory consists of a series of reform movements (Vold and Bernard, 1996). As early as the 1920s, biologically-based arguments of criminal causation were being replaced by environmental, social-economic, and behavioral explanations. Even in the field of radical and critical criminology there have been a series of divisions (Lynch, 1996; Ross, 1998). Since the 1970s, critical criminology has splintered into complementary perspectives including feminism (e.g., Chesney-Lind, 1991; Daly, 1994; Owen, 1998), postmodernism (e.g., Arrigo 1998a, 1998b; Ferrell, 1998), left realism (e.g., Young and Matthews, 1992), peacemaking (e.g., Pepinsky and Quinney, 1991; Quinney, 1998), and cultural criminology (e.g., Ferrell and Sanders, 1995; Ferrell, 1996). This multiplicity of perspectives suggests that radical and critical criminology has broadened its intellectual endeavor. While these diverse discourses and “metanarratives ... open up some new conceptual and political space” (Ferrell, 1998: 64), they too often remain the intellectual products of the well-meaning yet privileged, with only minimal reference and relevance to the victims of the criminal justice machine. Perhaps in the new millennium criminologists and other social scientists might also realize that convict voices, in many instances, have been forgotten, marginalized, or simply ignored (Gaucher, 1998).

The Failure of Prisons

Many prominent criminologists have discussed the failure of prisons to correct criminal behavior, and the differential effects of incarceration are well known. According to Sutherland et al. (1992: 524), “[s]ome prisoners apparently become ‘reformed’ or ‘rehabilitated,’ while others become ‘confirmed’ or ‘hardened’ criminals. For still others, prison life has no discernible effect on subsequent criminality or noncriminality.” Johnson (1996: xi) suggested that, “[p]risoners serve hard time, as they are meant to, but typically learn little of value during their stint behind bars. They adapt to prison in immature and often destructive ways. As a result they leave prison no better, and sometimes considerably worse, then when they went in.” Similarly, Reiman (1995: 2)
argued that the correctional system was designed to "maintain and encourage the existence of a stable and visible 'class' of criminals."

Needless to say, we should not assume all prisoners are criminals, or that committing crime has anything to do with going to prison the first time—and even less the second or third. Considering the dramatic growth in prison populations (Austin and Irwin, 2001: 1–16; Richards, 1998: 125–126), the numbers of "innocent" victims will also continue to grow. The first failure of correctional institutions is that they incarcerate hundreds of thousands of prisoners who, while they were convicted of a crime, are not violent and pose little, if any, threat to the community. The second is that they hold people too long; as Austin and Irwin (2001: 143–146) demonstrated, it is about time, not just "hard time" (Johnson, 1996), but "long time" and "repeated time" in prison. The third tragedy of prisons is "they don't do more to rehabilitate those confined in them" (Rideau, 1994: 80). Instead, prison systems are transformed into vast depositories for drug offenders, minorities, and petty offenders (Miller, 1996: 10–47; Austin and Irwin, 2001: 17–62). One cursory look at the gun towers, walls, and razor wire is evidence that prisons were built to warehouse and punish and not to rehabilitate.

**Inside Perspective**

The existing literature that provides an "inside perspective" on crime and convicts can be divided into six groups. The first group is edited anthologies by prison reform activists (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1996; Burton-Rose, with Pens and Wright, 1998). Embedded in these works are chapters or short pieces written by political activists, lawyers, journalists, and prisoners. The second collection of writing is journalists' accounts of life inside prison (e.g., Mitford, 1973; Wicker, 1975; Earley, 1993; Bergner, 1999; Conover, 2000). Third, prison journalism written by convicts in prison newspapers, for example The Angolite, or appearing in free-world publications like the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons. The fourth group includes edited collections of authentic convict writing (e.g., Martin, 1995; Franklin, 1998; Morris, 1998; Johnson and Toch, 1999; Leder, 1999; Chevigny, 2000). The fifth collection is sole-authored books or edited works by academics that may employ observation and/or interviews of criminal offenders or convicts (e.g., Schultz, 1991; Churchill and Vanderwall, 1992; Johnson, 1996; Cromwell, 1996; Walens, 1997, May, 2000). The last, and most prominent category, is composed of monographs written by convicts about life in prison (e.g., Jenet, 1949a, 1949b; Chessman, 1954, 1955, 1957;

The first four groups, be they convicts, activists, journalists, or academic editors, write "stories" or investigative reports rarely connecting their discussion to the debates found in the scholarly literature. The fifth collection of authors are academics, who while they support their research with excerpts from prisoner interviews, and may themselves at one time have been employed inside prisons, are still writing from a privileged perspective, as compared to the lived experience of convicts. The last group writes authentic and compelling accounts of prison life, but are generally unable to ground their discussion in academic research (e.g., Gaucher, 1999). Missing, or underutilized, are the research accounts by academics who themselves have served prison time.

**Centrality of Ethnography**

Convict Criminology is also the logical result of criminologists (e.g., Newbold, 1982/1985, 1987; Richards, 1995; Ferrell, 1993; Ferrell and Hamm, 1998) using ethnographic methods in order to better understand their subject matter. Clearly, the use of ethnographic methods is not new in the field of penology or corrections (e.g., Sutherland, 1937; Sykes 1956, 1958; Sykes and Messinger, 1960; Jacobs, 1977; Peak, 1985; Lombardo, 1989; Farkas, 1992). For example, during the 1930s, Clemmer (1940/1958), while employed as a sociologist on the prison mental health staff of Menard Penitentiary (Illinois), collected extensive information on the convict social system. Ex-convict academics have also carried out a number of significant ethnographic studies. In a series of articles and monographs (Irwin and Cressey 1962; Irwin, 1970, 1980, 1985; Austin and Irwin, 2001), Irwin, who served prison time in California, drew upon his experience as a convict to interview prisoners, and analyze jail admissions and subtle processes in prison. McCleary (1978/1992), who did both state and federal time, wrote his classic "sociology of parole" through participant observation of parole officers at work and on the street. Terry (1997), a former California and Oregon state convict, wrote about how prisoners used humor to mitigate the managerial domination of penitentiary authorities. Newbold (1982/1985, 1987, 2000), having served prison time in New Zealand, used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze crime and corrections in his country. Finally, Richards and Jones (1997), both former prisoners, used "inside experience" to inform their observations, interviewing Iowa convicts upon their transfer to community work release
centers. Each of these studies benefited from the inside experience of the investigators.

These movements, factors, and methodologies suggest that while academic criminology has flourished intellectually, and has made serious efforts to extend theoretical ideas, there remains a disjuncture, and serious distance, between the critical empirical literature and the real world of convicts. Our remoteness from our subject might be considered as a crisis best remedied by utilizing the emerging research we are introducing as Convict Criminology.

**CURRENT INITIATIVES**

Having outlined the factors contributing towards the formation of the New School of Convict Criminology, we are in a better position to consider the initiatives that our collective effort has taken to date. The subjects covered include: defining the New School of Convict Criminology, inclusion criteria, understanding who these people are, the pre-eminence of John Irwin, its objectives and issues, and the questions asked and answered.

**Defining the New School of Convict Criminology**

Convict Criminology is primarily essays and empirical research written by convicts or ex-convicts in possession of a Ph.D., or on their way to completing one, and by enlightened academics who critique existing literature, policies, and practices, and contribute a new perspective on criminology, criminal justice, corrections, and community corrections. This is a “new criminology” (Taylor, Walton, and Young, 1973) led by ex-convicts who are now academic faculty. These men and women, who have worn both prison uniforms and academic regalia, served years behind prisons walls. Now, as academics, they are the primary architects of the movement. The convict scholars are able to do what

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2 Our use of “new” is mirrored on Talyor, Walton, and Young’s (1973) seminal work *The New Criminology*. This monograph generated considerable controversy and intellectual debate in our discipline. These authors were critical of positivist, functionalist, and labeling approaches that failed to consider how the criminal law, policing, and corrections were socio-political constructions of class domination and the logical priorities of capitalism. Our use of “school” is similar to the Frankfurt School and the New School of Social Research, which suggests a collective effort grounded in a creative and critical research tradition.
most previous writers could not: merge their past with their present and provide a provocative approach to the academic study of criminology, criminal justice, and corrections. These authors, as a collective, are the future of a realistic paradigm that promises to challenge the conventional research findings of the past.

The ex-convict professors have endured years of lockup in penitentiaries and correctional institutions; lived in crowded, noisy, violent cellblocks; and emerged to complete graduate degrees and become professors of sociology, criminology, criminal justice, and related disciplines. They have an intimate knowledge of "penal harm" (Clear, 1994)—and in some cases wear as scars and tattoos upon their skin. They are like Steinbeck’s character Tom Joad (portrayed by Henry Fonda in the movie) in The Grapes of Wrath: people with something to say, an anger that will not betray them. They do not write for vitae lines, promotions, or tenure. They write so that one day the ghosts will sleep.

Together, ex-convict graduate students and professors are now working together to build their expertise in both subject and methodology. We now number over a dozen ex-con professors of sociology, criminology, and criminal justice from Anglo-American democracies. To this we add a growing number of ex-convict graduate students that are joining us as they complete their dissertations, and established criminologists without criminal records who are well known for their critical orientation towards managerial criminology, criminal justice, and corrections. The dramatic expansion in arrests, convictions, and the rate of incarceration guarantees that the number of professors with profound and traumatic first-hand experience with the criminal justice system will continue to increase. In addition, some of the most important members of our growing group are prominent critical criminologists who, while not ex-cons, have contributed to both the content and context of our new school. This growing pool of talent, with its remarkable insight and resources, is the foundation of our effort.

Who Are These People?
The convict authors can be described, in terms of academic experience, as three distinct cohorts. The first are the more senior members, full and associate professors, some with distinguished research records. A second group consists of assistant professors just beginning to contribute to the field. The third, only some of whom have been identified, are the graduate student ex-convicts.
Regardless of academic status, we can understand the ex-convicts as two distinct but overlapping groups with different personal dispositions towards our collective. The first group embraced the “new school” with little, if any, hesitation. Some of these members are known ex-con academics. The second group are ex-con professors and graduate students who share our correspondence and confidence, and provide those of us who are “out” with support and encouragement, but for a number of personal and professional reasons, have elected to remain anonymous—“in the closet”—where only their trusted friends know of their past. Some of their personal reasons include their reluctance to revisit a painful time in life, and a wish to put the past behind. Professionally, a number of the convict professors have expressed concerns that by appearing in print they might be denied fair access to government research grants. A few of the graduate students are concerned about “coming out” while still in graduate school and before they test the job market.

While the ex-cons provide Convict Criminology with unique and original experiential resources, some of the most important contributors may yet prove to be scholars, who while having never served prison time, may have or will, at some time in the future, be arrested, charged and/or convicted of crimes. This situation may lead them to be reasonably empathetic. The inclusion of non ex-cons in the new school’s original cohort provides the means to extend the influence of the new school while also supporting existing critical criminology perspectives.

The school’s mission and purpose emerged as writers shared their prison and academia experiences. Together, these academic authors critique existing theory and present new research from a convict or insider perspective. In short, they “tell it like it is.” In doing so, they hope to illuminate the message that “it’s about time” (Austin and Irwin, 2001): time served, time lost, and time that taught shared lessons. In demarcating the field of study for this new school, the contributors recognize that they are not the first to criticize the prison and correctional practices. They pay their respects to those who have already raised critical questions about prisons and suggested realistic humane reforms. However, Clear identified the problem in his foreword to McCleary’s (1992: ix) Dangerous Men: “Why does it seem that all good efforts to build reform systems seem inevitably to disadvantage the offender?” The answer is that, despite the best intentions, reform systems were never intended to help convicts. The real problem is that the reformers rarely even bothered to ask
the convicts what reforms they desired. The new school corrects this oversight, as the faculty are educated "consultants" (Mitford, 1973: 15).

The Pre-eminence of John Irwin

The most prominent ex-convict criminologist is John Irwin. His work and professional conduct over the years has inspired the group. In 1997, in San Diego, we had our first panel (organized by Chuck Terry) at an ASC annual meeting. That evening, over dinner, Irwin, along with Jim Austin, Stephen Richards, and Chuck Terry, discussed the potential of Convict Criminology. Irwin (Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Irwin 1970, 1980, 1985; Austin and Irwin, 2001) recalled how he had always wanted to assemble a group of ex-con scholars to write criminology from a convict perspective. The problem was, over the last forty years, there has only been a few ex-convicts that held academic positions. Ironically, the drug war, and the dramatic increase in prison populations over the last two decades, has added to our numbers and provided the opportunity to assemble this group.

Irwin has mentored and supported the group from the beginning. We have held long informal meetings at ASC and ACJS conferences, with Irwin generously spending time getting to know each member of the group. Irwin's counsel has been to declare honestly who we are, what we experienced and observed, and to do ethnography that tells the truth (Ferren and Halmn, 1998; Miller and Tewksbury, 2000).

Its Objective

Convict Criminology challenges managerial criminology, criminal justice, and corrections. Research and publication by this group (e.g., Richards, 1990, 1995, 1998; Richards and Jones, 1997; Terry, 1997; Newbold, 2000; Austin and Irwin, 2001) should be viewed as a dramatic attempt to critique, update, and improve the critical literature in the field. We have two goals. First, to transform the way research on prisons is conducted. Second, to insist that our professional associations (e.g., ASC, ACJS) begin to articulate policy reforms that make the criminal justice system humane.

Issue-Based

Convict Criminology is issue-based and not necessarily structured by the traditional disciplinary divisions assumed by criminology, criminal justice, or corrections. These subjects generally provide description of the etiology of
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crime, stages of the criminal justice system, and correctional control as separate entities. Unfortunately, too often this approach has resulted in piecemeal research and analysis conducted by armchair technicians and theorists, with precious little practical understanding of crime, criminals, and corrections.

Most academic criminologists fail to penetrate and comprehend the lived experience of defendants and prisoners, or are simply misinformed. In comparison, Convict Criminology is research carried out by our "felonious friends" who have both personal and abstract knowledge of the criminal justice machinery.

Questions Asked and Answered
A series of questions are answered by writers doing research in this area. What is wrong with criminology, criminal justice, and corrections literature? What is missing from the literature and discipline? How do the views of ex-con academics differ from those without insider status? What is it like for ex-prisoners to read academic material about crime, criminals, and corrections? What did the writers learn about the criminal justice system from being processed through arrest, court, jail, prison, and release? What unique research methods did the convict authors employ in their research? Why do authors need to be honest and truthful about themselves as they approach their research and writing? Did prisoners' views on crime and corrections change when they became scholars? What obstacles did these ex-cons experience as university employees? As ex-convict professors, how are they perceived by colleagues? What suggestions do former prisoners have for the reform of criminology, criminal justice, and prisons?

Development and Support of Critical Criminological Perspectives
As the field of criminology matures it incorporates new voices, ostensibly refutes established hypotheses and theories, and develops new ones. Critical criminology contributes many of the most innovative theoretical developments. It is our hope that the New School of Convict Criminology will support critical criminologists to "ground" their theory in ethnographic accounts. This, in turn, will inform specific policy recommendations that will encourage academics, policy makers, and correctional administrators.

As the prison population continues to grow, so too will the number of individuals released back to the community. Many of these persons, as they
re-enter conventional society, will attend universities and study criminology, criminal justice, and corrections.

As this process continues, some of these former prisoners will complete their graduate educations and become the future cohorts of the new school. We predict that, over time, this New School of Convict Criminology will provide the public with a more realistic understanding of crime, criminal justice, and corrections that is based on experience and cutting-edge research.

Paying Our Respects to the Convict Authors Still in Prison

A number of the Convict Criminologists continue friendships and working relationships with writers in penitentiaries, some of whom are well published in criminology (e.g., Victor Hassine, Wilbert Rideau, Jon Marc Taylor). We all owe a debt of gratitude to the many men and women who live inside prison, and continue to write and publish their ideas, thoughts, and observations. Ex-convict academics use correspondence, phone calls, and prison visits with these individuals to stay current with the conditions inside correctional facilities.

Contributors to this project pay their respects to the prisoners that have and are attempting to write serious commentaries on prison life (e.g., Abbott, 1981; Rideau and Wikberg, 1992; Abu-Jamal, 1995, 2000; Taylor, 1995; Hassine, 1996; Peltier, 1999). We recognize that much of their research and writing, while critically informed, based on their experiences inside prisons, may only be partially grounded in the academic literature. After all, many of these authors lack or have difficulties obtaining the typical amenities that most scholars take for granted (e.g., a computer for writing, university library, and colleagues educated in criminology who might provide feedback on their work). They struggle to write by hand, or with broken and worn out machines, and without supplies (e.g., typewriter ribbons, paper, envelopes, stamps, etc.). In addition, their phones calls are monitored and recorded, and all their mail sent or received is opened, searched, and read by prison authorities. In many cases, they suffer the retribution of prison authorities, including denial of parole, loss of good-time credit, physical threats from staff or inmates, frequent cell searches, confiscation of manuscripts, trips to “the hole,” and disciplinary transfers to other prisons.

The convict criminologists, both the ex-cons and non-cons, have it easier. They have benefited from superior resources in order to open the window on a subterranean world of confinement that few people know.
Reforming the Study of Criminology and Criminal Justice

The notion of reform is nothing new in the academic disciplines of criminology and criminal justice. One might even argue that the entire field was originally conceived in an effort to provide civilized legal solutions to socio-economic conflicts. However, we are shocked by the number of criminologists, who while they claim to be experts, have little or no first-hand experience with prisoners. The result is criminology and criminal justice writing which is dominated by academic technicians that manipulate data sets and publish statistical trivia from the safety of their offices. Unfortunately, much of this number crunching, which masquerades as objective science, only obscures the truth and supports the functions of managerial elites. The analytical interpretation of aggregate data does not replace the need to go to the streets, visit penal institutions, and observe and interview the victims of the criminal justice juggernaut (Gordon, 1990).

We have argued for the primacy of ethnographic methods, or for those which involve speaking, observing, or interacting with prisoners. This methodology requires researchers to take some chances, to get a little “dirty,” as they sample reality, and even, although this may be considered an “academic felony” or “scholar’s sin,” to get emotionally involved with their subject. Objectivity is an illusion that illustrates the class privilege and social distance of the armchair technician from the sordid lives of criminals and convicts. In contrast, the prison ethnographer, by entering prisons and spending time with convicts, and by learning to understand their concerns as legitimate, surrenders any pretense to being value free. He or she becomes partisan (Gouldner, 1968), as it should be. Once you have spent enough time behind the walls and seen the way human beings live in animal cages, and listen carefully to what prisoners say, researchers will know why they have to take a side.

An Invitation to Join Us: Changing Corrections

Unfortunately, the primary focus of correctional work has been on controlling prisoners rather than providing them with services, programs, and opportunities for personal growth. The real problem is finding ways to control the abuse of legal authority that allows the state to imprison millions of poor, minority, and young people by criminalizing common, non-violent activity and behavior (Ross, 1995/2000, 2000; Richards and Avey, 2000).

The convict perspective suggests several policy recommendations for civilizing corrections, lowering the rate of recidivism, and reducing the number
of men and women in prison. We advocate the following: dramatic reductions in the national prison population by reducing prison sentences for prisoners; reduction of prison time for good behavior; the requirement that all prisoners have single cells or rooms; better food and clothing; vocational and family skills programs; higher education opportunities; voting rights for all prisoners and felons; voluntary drug education therapy; an end to the use of prison snitches; and the termination of the drug war. These recommendations will be further developed and debated by colleagues concerned with the humanitarian reform of criminal justice.

Indeed, there will be more research that will be conducted and essays written from a Convict Criminology perspective. We already have plans for a number of prison studies. Additionally, perhaps those who are still in the closet, ex-cons with Ph.D.s who do not want to reveal their status, ex-convict graduate students, or members of the criminology/criminal justice community, may feel empowered by this discussion. We invite you to join us.

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Stephen Richards and Jeffrey Ian Ross have co-authored Behind Bars: Surviving Prison, 2002, and have co-edited Convict Criminology, 2003.

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Response

What Have We Learned?
Hopefully to Fight the Good Fight

Jon Marc Taylor

I have thought long and hard about what this “response” should say. What have we learned that speaks to professors and students, activists and prisoners, and former prisoners endeavoring to understand and explain education in prison? What has been the value of producing this edition of the only prisoner-focused academic journal on the North American continent?

Perhaps Patrick Rafferty says it best when he shares with us the mission of *Out of Bounds* as being the “hope to dispel some of the misconceptions that surround prisons and prisoners.” This is a noble, never-ending task made all the more important by the need to “clear the shadows on the walls” as Tiyo Attallah Salah-El so passionately expresses it when he employs Socrates’ allegory of the cave (so apropos to understanding the stereotypes of prison) to give us a new way of thinking about prison abolition. Abolition is a long-term goal that must be organized nationally and internationally—strategies determined, tactics affected—because it is fundamentally about changing a mindset.

I do not wholly agree with the concept of complete abolition. There are people in here with me who need to be locked away for society’s protection, as well as for their own safety. Sometimes jail is the only option. Observing my fellow convicts dispassionately, though, I see few who need to be banished behind walls and wire. Even the wardens of America’s prisons, a conservative yet arguably well-informed group of professionals, reason half of their charges could be released without threat to the public safety (Simon, 1994).

So, what have we learned? We have learned about the general dismal state of education in prisons. As Steve Ainsworth tells us, “the system has been designed to thwart our efforts to expand our minds,” and education programs, such as they are, anemically struggle with a myriad of institutionally induced problems. Daniel Harris illuminates the well-known fact that the most prevalent problem facing prisoners is illiteracy itself. This fact has been known since the inception of the Pennsylvania system nearly two centuries ago. What has changed? Today we have computer-assisted learning, the re-institution of tutoring programs, and GED studies; however, just as they have in the past,
these programs exist without enough support to make a significant impact on the overall critical need. The more the song changes, the more the tune has remained the same for most of the men and women incarcerated on this continent.

What have we learned? David Deutsch points out that "students" are essentially no different on the inside than on the outside. Prisoner college students effectively function as role models for other prisoners. Volunteers are highly respected by the prison population for their selfless giving and caring. Daniel Graves notes that education programs exist more out of administrators' acquiescence than their full support. Ironically, Charles Terry's collegiate journey commences in the penal apparatus as a "transformative journey" and Steve Richards observes, "prisons are an ideal place to begin college study."

What we have learned, been reminded of, is that the human spirit is indomitable. My soul ached as I reviewed these essays detailing the same problems, the same failures of support, and the same philosophical mendacity of the system's needless repression. My spirit likewise soared at the courage expressed by the authors' experiences, and their determination to continue. Not just to rise each day and face another in the seemingly endless grayness of doing time, but to stand and demonstrably rail against the destructive stupidity and ignorance of the criminal justice system, and to fight the good fight even with the knowledge that one is "blowing spit words at battleships," as my mentor Ross Van Ness piquantly describes many of my similar efforts. What we learn again is about the hope born and nurtured in the womb of an ever-expanding exploration of classical, liberal education.

I, too, have been transformed by the ameliorative effect of education within these misanthropic keeps. I know the power of grace that comes with theorem well taught, expostulations well declared, and a historical arch outlined well with all its antecedent relationships and consequences to this day and time. I know the power these things have on freeing the mind from the confines of the immediate drudgery of existence and the insidiously caustic hate of prolonged imprisonment. The classroom has become for me, as it has for many others, my sanctuary. Charles Huckelbury describes how the classroom "expanded my constricted worldview" and "I looked forward to the dialogue with the professors, real people who treated me like, well, a real student." Educators have become my real-life heroes. I want to be like these individuals. They are my personal giants in the pantheon of socially honorable and caring people.
What this edition teaches us again and again is that if the education is there, if prisoners are motivated, if their efforts are supported, prisoners will take advantage of these opportunities. Prisoners will change, even in spite of our pasts or immediate perceptions. We can learn to become more humane, socially conscious citizens that strive to complement and cooperate with the larger community, rather than to continue to prey upon it and ultimately upon ourselves.

"J'accuse!"

Just under the surface of the positions expressed in these essays is another message. They teach us that passivity in the defense of a righteous cause achieves nothing in the political arena. It is in the coliseum of representative government where our failures to participate are exploited. This klaxon was sounded at the 57th International Correctional Education Association Conference when David L. Werner, Director of Educational Programs in Corrections at La Verne University, delivered a shot across the bow of this sinking ship of political passivity (Werner, 2002).

Werner accused the Association of running away from the “largest increase in incarceration and in the rates of incarceration that the United States and Europe have ever seen.” Educators have run “from a vituperative and vengeful public attitude about crime and criminals fueled by politicians who have found that public anger against crime can lead to electoral victory.” Moreover, their retreat to the supposed safety of the shadows has “not done us any good.” Education budgets are ravished, wholesale correctional education programs are closed, college opportunities for prisoners in the U.S. have been reduced overall by three-quarters because of the demagoguery eliminating prisoners’ Pell Grant eligibility. Canadian prisoners lost post-secondary programs at the stroke of an administrator’s pen. All the while, the Correctional Education Association has been “sitting on its hands, afraid to offend anyone and psychotically afraid of drawing attention to itself.”

Having been a minor participant in the battles against the slash and burn politics and tactics of the conservative era, I can understand the reasoning behind the Association’s strategy of anonymity, fearing the potentially lethal consequences of being targeted as the soft underbelly in the ignoble War on Crime. More than once I have seen media hatchet jobs (“Dateline”), poorly informed advocates (“Burden of Proof”) or positive portrayals (“60 Minutes”)
spun into negative diatribes against education in prison. In some instances, quiet, behind-the-scenes lobbying postponed the banishment of educational programs or achieved partial programming restoration. Examples of this are the fact that it took a decade-long campaign to exclude prisoners from qualifying for Pell Grants and the partial restoration of post-secondary education for prisoners between eighteen and twenty-five years of age under the Youthful Offender Post-Secondary program. These, however, were holding actions, a defensive strategy in the larger struggle for effective educational opportunities. Good, hard-working people who stridently believe in the social value of correctional education and the human worth of prisoners themselves, made these strategic, low-key choices when faced by the tsunami of the Reagan-Bush-Gingrich punitive agendas.

Perhaps these were the best choices and any strategy would have failed when marshaled against the vitriolic negativism and Machiavellian scapegoatism of the past two decades. By letting others set the agenda, though, we have had no choice but to react, trying to protect what little we hold so dearly. By anyone's measure, those strategies have failed, leaving the state of prison education in as dire of circumstances as the days of Attica.

If we are going to go down, let us do so kicking, fighting and screaming for what is right for all of society. I doubt that the condition of education in prison would have been worse if a vociferous defense had been waged. Now with a conservative majority controlling all facets of the American government, the initiative must be ours to seize, or we will be forced further back into the corner of ever more darkened cells. When other prisoners ask me why I write and struggle, making no apparent difference, I respond that sometimes making a record of the wrongs, of bearing witness to the stupidities is all one can do. Fight the good fight is an honorable choice and offers a better chance of success than quiet solitude in the meek hope of not being hurt for not being heard.

After the 2002 elections, pundits prognosticated that we are in for a period of retrenchment. My reaction is that in the sphere of criminal justice it has been that way for over two decades, regardless of which administration and party is in power, with the only present difference being that it is clearer what we face. Fine. I would rather have my opponent openly before me than feeding me pabulum as nothing changes or as things actually get worse.

Patricia J. Williams, in her column for The Nation, “Diary of A Mad Law Professor,” recognizes the struggle and proposes a strategy of engagement
rather than apathy (Williams, 2002 December 2). First, she suggests, we need
to know what we are up against. That is easy: more time, more prisons, less
education, fewer paroles, and greater social trauma for all. Second, we need
to pull our heads out of the sand, stop fretting, and get on with the struggle.
Quit wringing our hands and lamenting among ourselves; advance a line in the
proverbial sand and protest for it. Third, we need to find allies to advance our
causes. When thoroughly briefed, colleges, universities, adult educators, and
a myriad of related associations should be willing to support expanding
educational opportunities. Since minorities disproportionately compose the
prison populations, their representative groups (e.g., La Raza, NAACP, Urban
League) can be educated to support our goals as part of their overall antiracism
strategies. Fourth, we cannot underestimate the impact of the media to get our
message out. We can learn to play the game better than the opposition. We
need to prepare our talking points, facts, and rebuttals. For instance, Rady
Cypser of CURE-NY (Cypser, 2002) takes this approach: instead of saying the
knee-jerk responsive phrase of “college classes for inmates,” he accurately,
yet obliquely, refers to them as “post-GED education opportunities.” Fifth,
make noise. There is nothing more useless than a silent minority. Effective
minorities do not have much of a voice by definition, but there is no need for
us to bite our own tongues for fear of being impolite. Our best arguments will
be met with retorts like: “Who are you to question your betters, to dare to
deal, to be so ‘censoring’?” I do not think we should expect to be granted the
dignity of being considered a threat; rather it is more likely that we will be
brushed off as “mediocre” or as “having no agenda.” We should not make the
mistake of spending more time watching our words than theirs.

Returning to the purpose of this response, what have we learned? What we
can learn is that positive struggles continue to be made by many individuals
both inside and out. What needs to be done is to coordinate our wide-ranging
abolitionist and reform objectives. Most of all, what we have learned is to
advance without trepidation. We are meant to lose anyway; it is expected of us
to fail. With nowhere to go but forward, and underestimated by our foes of
repression, we might as well strive valiantly for our beliefs. What we have
learned is that it is worth engaging in the Good Fight.

“When you’ve been locked out,” as Patricia Williams observes, “there is no
thinking but ‘outside the box.’ Go be brave. Get mad. Speak up. And dig in for
the long haul.”
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My first experience in the New Hampshire State Prison for Men took place on a gray January day; the temperature was hovering at three degrees above zero. I arrived for my “training session” with security at one o’clock. I, along with two male colleagues, was here to learn about the inmates we would be teaching. Now, you have to understand that one of my colleagues is a Harley-riding, long-beard-flowing, dressed-all-in-black, professor of literature; a man of “arts and letters” who is known for exclaiming to students “the unexamined life is not worth living,” for his never-wavering belief that Marilyn Monroe was and always will be the sexiest woman who ever lived, and for living by the motto “Question Authority.” We gathered together, my colleagues and I, in an office with the security officer, and the forty-five minute introductory lesson was off and running. The officer told us, “All inmates are scammers and will do anything they can to take advantage of you.” As an aside he offered, “I don’t really see why you are doing this.” “The Professor” just raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms over his chest as the officer continued. He let us know that we were going to be dealing with the “lowest of the low,” and that “there wasn’t much hope for them.” I sat back in my chair and watched as my colleague began to engage the officer. You see, our resident man of the sixties just could not pass up an opportunity to engage in discourse about the value of learning, of exploring the world around us, of the necessity for humans to look beyond themselves as well as at themselves—all wonderful aspirations worthy of discussion. So he began to talk, to question as only he can, and the officer lost control of his session. When he was finally able to wrestle it back, he looked a bit dazed.

Just as I thought we were going to be allowed out of the office that was getting smaller by the minute, the officer turned to face me. He said there was one last thing that I should know, “Since you’re a woman ...” He launched into an oration about what I should do in case there was a riot and I was held hostage. He gave vivid pointers on what to do if I thought I was going to be raped. He said, much to my horror, “The best thing to do is throw-up on your self, that way you’ll stink so much they won’t want you.” The Professor interrupted and said that he thought that would prove highly unnecessary, and the officer said, “Well, that’s true, but you can never tell with these people.” I seized the opportunity, thankful for the diversion, and told the officer that I
understood completely. That conversation was done as far as I was concerned. Thus, I was introduced to the underlying hum heard throughout the corrections complex: these people are a waste of time. This philosophy pervades the system; it is the "why-should-they-get-an-education-for-free-when-I-will-have-to-work-two-jobs-and-go-into-debt-to-put-my-son/daughter-through-college-perspective", and I could not have disagreed more completely.

At that time, I had been teaching for fourteen years. I had taught in inner city schools, worked with immigrants, students with specific learning disabilities, students from the barrios of New Mexico, and adults who came to education late in their lives, and I had done just fine. A classroom is a classroom, plain and simple. It does not matter where it is, or who is sitting in those chairs or at those desks. I could not fathom a world as this security officer saw it; I would not believe that this was a waste of my time. In my years of teaching, I have seen students who were culturally deprived. Students who had never been introduced to the world of art, good literature, and philosophy, and whose limited experiences served to hold them in a world of ignorance that often led to anger. These students had walked into my classroom over the years, and I watched as they evolved once their horizons were expanded. I know, without a doubt, that once you open someone's eyes to new ideas, new experiences, once you raise their consciousness, they cannot help but be profoundly changed.

The following Wednesday at around 12:30 in the afternoon, I turned off my car, locked the doors, and made my way toward a system that I knew little about. The NHSP is red brick and razor wire, a throwback to the late 1800s, and on a frigid January afternoon it looked about as bleak as anything could look. I walked up to the door, hit the buzzer, and waited for the lock to click. I walked up a flight of stairs to the waiting officer, just outside the visiting room. He checked my ID and pointed to a door that led to the yard. I looked at him strangely; at least, I am confident that my face must have betrayed my confusion. I expected to be escorted to the classroom, but here he was acting like I was on my own. I had been there once before, with my little group of colleagues, so I thought I could find my way, but ... I headed toward the door, and just as I reached for the knob, he said, "Watch out for the platform; the wind is wicked strong."

I walked out through the door and onto a platform that was open on all sides; this was what would become the education department, but for right now it was a part of the old prison block that had been gutted down to the steel beams. I walked across that platform to the stairs and while it only took twenty
seconds, I was frozen to the bone. I walked down the stairs and turned left, then I walked down a sidewalk that crossed the open yard. Next came the ramp system that would take me past the chow hall and other doors that led to places I did not need to know about. Then another set of stairs which would take me back down to the yard and from there I would walk the fifty yards to the back door of the industries building. I was clearly in another world, a void, and I could not help but think, as I walked among these incarcerated men, of the words of the security officer. I refused to believe that the faces I saw were unredeemable. I refused to believe that education would make no difference: I held fast to the concept that my students would benefit from this experience, if I could only find my way to the classroom. But, I was nervous. As an outsider, thinking back on the experience, I can tell you that it was surreal.

So the trip in was uncomfortable, but then prison is uncomfortable, so it seemed fitting. I made it to my classroom, and I use that term loosely, in the middle of the industries complex. We were housed in a huge room with open ceilings approximately twenty feet high, and giant fans came on at timed intervals. It was a challenge to battle the fans; in fact, it became comical. They would come on, my voice would rise to overcome the noise; they would stop, my voice would drop, but not always soon enough. What a way to command attention. My first class was filled to the maximum, and when I walked in the door, twenty-three students of varying ages and backgrounds greeted me. I was teaching a required writing class, something that most people would rather avoid. I handed out the syllabus, and as always I heard the groans and moans of my students. My course requires things that students endeavor to avoid at all cost: reading their work out loud, and rewriting. Like most students of writing, they want it to be done perfectly the first time, but that is not possible, for it is the rewriting, the reexamination of our writing that brings the expansion of ideas and the evolution of critical thought. My students would come to embrace this process, but they did not know that yet.

On that cold afternoon, those students and I embarked on a journey, one that would alter each of us, albeit in different ways. I was the guide, but it would be unfair for me to ignore the fact that I learned as much, if not more, than my students, and I am confident that they learned a tremendous amount. My students have often heard me say, “We all have stories to tell.” Well, the stories I heard in the five years I taught writing at the “big house” were funny and thoughtful and heartbreaking, and oftentimes filled with recognized human frailty, and the telling of these stories was life altering. Through writing, these
men analyzed their views, refined philosophical points of view, and came to understand that they had control over their lives. Education is, after all, an empowering experience.

For probably the first time in most of these men's lives, they were being asked to examine with great care some of the most powerful essayists on record. We talked about Martin Luther King's attitudes, about being an oppressed society, and their thoughts on the subject were insightful. We discussed Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and I could feel their experiences through their writing; I could see an awakening awareness. They read Alice Walker and Thoreau and E.B. White, and with each piece they read, with each discussion we had, it was obvious that they were beginning to see themselves as students, as writers. Writing by its very nature is difficult because it forces the writer to expose him- or herself by showing the reader how a particular subject is viewed, a task that leaves the author wide open. Students of writing have to be willing to separate personal feelings from their observations, and that is difficult in most circumstances, but these men rose to the occasion in spite of their stultifying surroundings, and the reward for that effort was tremendous growth.

The diligence of the non-traditional students is well-documented, and in the early years of my involvement in this program, before the funding was pulled out from under the wide and varied programs that were available to prisoners, I found students who were hard-working, thoughtful in their writing, and prepared for each and every class. I had to be on my toes with this group. One student, a man doing life without parole, with twenty-six in, had taken it upon himself to learn grammar, and he came to each class with his *Warner's* in hand, pages marked with questions. In my five-year tenure, even after he could no longer afford to take classes, I never saw him without a book in his hand and a question on his lips. He is a life-long learner, someone who has spent his entire adult life in a system that was designed to kill him young. He is fit, both physically and mentally, and he brings a sense of humor and intense curiosity to all that he does. He would, and does, tell anyone he encounters that education has altered his worldview; it has expanded his horizons beyond the prison walls.

Prior to this experience, I would not have said that I had led a sheltered life, but clearly, with all I saw, all the stories I heard while teaching at NHSP, that would be a lie. I was sheltered, and I lived a life with opportunity; for me, college was a given and a must. In contrast, I met men, most of whom were
still fairly young, who had literally grown up in the system. I met a man in his later thirties, who had been incarcerated off and on since he was nine. That this man was sitting in a college classroom was testament to his hard work. He had gotten his GED in prison, no simple task when you consider his fragmented educational background along with the recognition of undiagnosed significant learning disabilities. The work was painstakingly slow; it had taken him years, but he made it. His essays were thoughtful and soul searching, and his response to the essayists he encountered had a profound affect. He wrote about oppression and second-class status and where it could lead if it were not for what he was learning and the changes that were taking place within him. He was one of the many success stories I encountered during my tenure; he is one of the many who have found education the key to success in the outside world. They have grown as individuals, they are better equipped to solve problems; they have developed an understanding of the world; they are employable.

My professional experience confirms that an education can never be taken away. Once a concept is internalized, it is there for retrieval at any time. It changes the way you see the world; it changes the way you see yourself. My students have often heard me launch into a discussion about the need to allow learning to happen, to encourage it. It is vital. People who are educated are obviously better prepared to become contributing members of society. It seems so simple.

As a society, it would be in our best interest to help those who are incarcerated to find better ways to survive in this cruel world. So many of the men I encountered in the prison system were undereducated, and came from homes that were unable to provide the basic needs for human survival, much less a nurturing environment that modeled the kind of behavior society values. These men were clearly culturally and educationally deprived, living in an environment that is devoid of stimuli. This is a dangerous combination.

Intervention is necessary, not a luxury. How can we expect prisoners to re-enter society as productive individuals if we are not willing to help with the necessary acquisition of skills and information? To people who say convicted murderers do not deserve to be educated, Eddie Ellis, former prisoner and president of the Community Justice Center in Harlem says, “That’s a very short-sighted, narrow-minded and self-serving argument. Why? Because most are ultimately released, and people who acquire education are less likely to become recidivists” (Pfeiffer, 2000). That the recidivism is clearly affected by
higher education is not in dispute, but while being in possession of a college degree contributes to a lower recidivism rate, the general public does not want tax dollars paying for prisoners to attend college (ibid.).

However, reduced recidivism is not the only benefit. Prison officials report that the prisoners who are involved in educational programs are more easily managed, present fewer problems, and are less of a threat to their counterparts and staff. So, why is it that these programs have been hit so hard?

The public has been duped. They have been led to believe that crime is out of control in this country, and yet the crime rate is lower than it has been since the 1950s. The public has been coerced into believing that we must “get tough on crime,” and that means longer sentences, super max prisons, and an attitude that says we should just let men and women rot in prison. The reality, however, is quite different. We know for a fact that education does make a difference. The data are there to support the contention that when we offer the opportunity for men and women in prison to explore the world beyond the walls, they are changed in ways that can make all the difference in the world.

In 1994, when federal funding for higher education in the United States was taken away from prisoners, and Pell grants were no longer an option, I was saddened beyond belief. It seemed so short-sighted. But, I was not surprised. I had learned much about the system during my tenure at NHSP. I had watched the clash between education and security. I witnessed educational events being cancelled on a moment’s notice for “security reasons.” I had seen guards flex their muscle and return men to their cells without provocation, thereby undermining the educational process, and I had watched as men were treated with disrespect and left with little or no human avenue for defense. I have questioned the value of this course of action. With so many men and women incarcerated in the United States today, and considering the very real prospect that most will be returned to the same neighborhoods that we walk through every day, why would we not as a society want them to be as prepared as they can to make that transition?

As anyone who has ever done time knows, prison is a boring, mind-numbing place. Prisons provide a perfect breeding ground for anger, frustration, and apathy, but I have seen what can happen when people are offered a role in their future. Goethe said, “If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become as he ought to be and could be.” These men and women, when treated as students and writers, have much to gain. When given the opportunity, those
with desire, those with a willingness to do the necessary work can alter their course. Society can only benefit from this enlightenment. We should be funding programs that will enhance each prisoner’s chance of survival in the world upon release. We should be encouraging learning at every opportunity rather than warehousing humans to the benefit of no one; it is expensive and the rate of success is abysmal. After all, what have we got to lose?

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When Stephen Duguid sent me a copy of his new book, I eagerly set to work on it: this was the long-awaited study on the University of Victoria–Simon Fraser University Prison Education Program, which I had worked in from 1981 to 1984, under the aegis of the University of Victoria, and from 1984 to 1990, under SFU. The program was cancelled in 1993 and, ironically enough, that was the very same year that Duguid and his research team received a very substantial Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Strategic Grant to investigate the “transformative capacity of education” when offered to people on the margins of society; in this case, adult male prisoners. When university programs in prisons were shut down by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), the “positive” aspect was that Duguid’s research team was thereby able to acquire the complete administrative and academic records of the program, including the University of Victoria records from 1972–1984 and SFU records from 1984–1993, as well as the administrative records kept by university staff at each of the four prison sites in which it operated (Kent, Matsqui, Mountain, and William Head Institutions). It was the comprehensive nature of this evaluation of university prison education programming in British Columbia over its twenty-year life-span that made this research project so special.

Duguid’s landmark study raises, in the final analysis, a number of searching questions about new ways to proceed in terms of our theorizing about university programs in prison. I had already made it clear in “Response,” my debut article in *JPP* (Murphy, 1998), that I disagreed with commentators such as Ray Jones and Brian D. MacLean who had argued that the SFU Program was, at best, an “unintended collusion with the penal apparatus” (Jones, 1992), or, at worst, “a strategy of control by prison administrators under the guise of a liberal rehabilitative ideology… and evaluated not on its pedagogical merit, but on its efficacy of reducing recidivism” (MacLean, 1992). As I pointed out then, and as Duguid makes patently clear at several key junctures in *Can
Prisons Work?, there was no ideological party line to be followed. There were some who actively advocated the cognitive–moral development strategy, and there were those like myself who worked on the principle that the critical thinking dimensions of what I taught more than justified themselves. We need to move beyond these old and tired mock debates with their naive adoption of a “purist” (indeed often “puritanical”) would-be moral highroad when it comes to university-level prison education: that any so-called perceived collaboration with the powers-that-be is somehow theoretically debilitating and morally reprehensible. MacLean’s views cited above appeared in a 1992 article; the next year all university programming in Canada’s prisons was terminated. Neither party can claim victory, Pyrrhic or otherwise, when there is nothing left to argue over. Duguid’s study affords us the opportunity in our post-mortem reflections to assess just what worked and what did not in terms of the politics and pedagogy of university prison programming in Canada, and, implicitly, what might be the most profitable routes to pursue in the future.

Duguid’s theoretical framework is shaped by an interdisciplinary focus on the prison as the archetypal Enlightenment project in which there is reasoned application of various strategies to make sense of issues of social deviance, and indeed, to “cure” such deviations from a posited norm. This history of ideas approach affords a “lens” whereby we can critically re-examine our principle ideas about how prisons function. Duguid’s triad of Voltaire, de Sade, and Rousseau is permutated throughout the study in order to throw a critical searchlight on various paradigmatic approaches to the corrections enterprise. Voltaire represents a “fatalistic” view of human nature in which deviance and crime are regarded as, alas, the kinds of things humans tend, repeatedly, to do. De Sade’s position is characterised as “one which may enjoy more current popularity, namely, that deviance is inherent in all, embedded in human nature” (12). Rousseau’s views are, in Duguid’s assessment, the ones which have proven most influential in determining the views which dominate the modern correctional enterprise; namely, the affirmation of “an essentially ‘good’ human nature and that reform of selves is possible via a combination of personal reflection and reform of society and its institutions” (16). Duguid’s own argument is confessedly linked to a “more romantic version of Rousseau” which blends reason and passion and “retains the modernist universalist ideal that citizenship is possible even with the most troubled of our peers if we appreciate their complexity, treat them with respect, and demand reciprocity—treat them, in other words, as subjects rather than objects” (18).
These fundamental theoretical supports for Duguid’s argument run throughout his study, and create a stimulating contextualization of the question of prison and educational programming, often generating intriguing metaphorical conjunctions. For example, my favourite, in which Galileo’s telescope that opened up our view of the heavenly bodies is coupled with Bentham’s panopticon, which turned a lens on the body politic in order to objectify those deemed in dire need of discipline and control. I have summarized, albeit very briefly, this aspect of Duguid’s intellectual contextualization of Can Prisons Work? for, although the rest of my discussion will focus on a closer examination of the narrative of the rise and fall of university prison education programs in Canada, with primary emphasis upon the SFU Program, readers should at least be aware of the rich texturing of ideas which accompanies and shapes this central discussion.

**The Opportunities Model and the Rise of University Programming in Prisons**

Duguid lucidly explains how and why the so-called “medical model” dominated corrections thinking in the period from 1945–1975. This model was psychologically driven, and placed the fundamental responsibility for “deviance”—the “disease”—upon the individual. The “cure” would then be effected by regarding the prison itself as a sort of hospital in which, as Duguid terms it, “insight wars” will be waged by therapeutic professionals who will fight for control of the prisoner’s mind and soul. The insurmountable problem confronting the advocates of the medical model was that they could only liken the prison to a hospital; it was only a simile. They had finally to admit a prison simply could not be turned into an authentic therapeutic community.

At this critical juncture appeared a series of sweeping rejections and detailed critiques of the would-be goals of the medical model, the most famous of which was Robert Martinson’s “nothing works” essay of 1974, which Duguid’s own title ironically echoes. Add to this Jericho-like clarion call the major works by Norval Morrison (The Future of Imprisonment, 1973) and Michel Foucault (Discipline and Punish, 1975), and there is a clear demarcation of the point at which the medical model collapsed before the critiques of its failure to reduce recidivism through rehabilitation. In short, the very nature of prison itself is now recognized as being the fundamental problem which frustrates and negates
any reconstructive efforts because of its repressive representation of self as merely an object of "corrections."

The new model was labelled "opportunities," which signalled a belief, however provisional and qualified, that corrections would now look upon offenders as being able to appreciate and understand their own actions, and hence would be able to choose sensibly and rationally what options—or "opportunities"—they wanted to pursue in terms of prison programming (be it life skills, vocational training, or education). Duguid insightfully summarizes the implications of this new "model": "the opportunities approach, for all its duplicity and contradictions, did nevertheless create a space for activities that were both subversive and progressive" (76). And the site par excellence of such contested space was the alternative community of a university program pursuing a critical dialogue with prisoners as student subjects via the traditional course offerings found in a liberal arts curriculum. Into the "programmatic vacuum" (90) left by the collapse of the medical model stepped "new faces" (98), those of university prison educators (such as myself), who at that point had no real familiarity with or understanding of prisons. Duguid's study here expands its context to deal with the history of prison education, and to set up a comparative analysis of similar developments in university prison programming under the opportunities model in the UK and in the US. My focus will, however, remain fixed on the U.Vic/SFU program in which Duguid and I both worked, and on the chronicling of its rise and fall which constitutes the essential narrative line of Can Prisons Work?

Over a twenty-year period (1972–1993) this program was indeed highly successful and even claimed to "work" in the sense the word is used in Duguid's title, namely, in terms of reformation and rehabilitation. The "sensational results" of the 1979 survey of prisoners who had been in the program (albeit a small sampling of only seventy-three), been released, and not re-offended, showed a recidivism rate of only fourteen percent, well below the average of forty-plus percent. Indeed, the founding father of the U.Vic (SFU) program, the CSC administrator Dr. Parlett, argued in his Ph.D. work with Professor Douglas Ayers of the University of Victoria that educational offerings would "hide," as it were, a number of moral and cognitive lessons beneath the study of the initial offerings in literature and history. Such end-directed programming is clearly able to accommodate itself within the boundaries of the supposedly discredited and abandoned medical model. Duguid's analysis emphasizes that the CSC "persisted in talking about education in prison as a means of moral
reformation” and then astutely counsels us not to assume naively “that policy and even paradigm shifts are total victories or ever necessarily conclusive” (125):

This probing into the effects of the university experience shifted from a preoccupation with moral development, but it did continue throughout the twenty-year life of this program, thereby setting it apart from virtually all other similar programs, and for that matter, virtually all prison programs per se. (124)

Some qualification is, however, needed. While this professed intent may have been part of the program’s strategic rhetoric in order to “sell itself” to the CSC authorities, this view did not by any means constitute a party line. It was, in fact, this difference of opinion amongst teaching staff which created a “kind of creative tension that made the program particularly vibrant” (126). Many of us advocated education per se; moreover, it is difficult to agree completely with Duguid’s characterization of this program as set dramatically apart from all others in this regard. Yes, a certain “intentionality” was foregrounded in the literature dealing with the program, but was this fundamentally different than justifications made for similar programming ventures in the UK and US? The “good in itself” argument which others and I maintained did not preclude the additional sense that our courses affected positively the choices our students would make in other contexts, both within and without prison. Is not this the implicit assumption behind humanities and liberal arts courses offered outside prison, where the context is such that we do not need to justify our very modus operandi?

Duguid proffers a Rousseau-like “confession” which points to the much more complex realities inherent in the nature of education, moral or otherwise, in prison. He self-deconstructs his own earlier speculations about a “general theory” derived from the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg on moral education and developmental psychology:

Seven years after my initial foray into theorizing about prisoners I had already begun to equivocate, fearing that the prisoners were “too complex a group about which to generalize,” and the theory of cognitive development requiring too much levelling of prisoners to common stages and too little differentiation. (87)
This “foray” is linked to Duguid’s opening statement in his Preface to the effect that he had “retreated to the humanities realm I know the best” and away from “general theory” of the social sciences sort. Duguid’s key point is that instructors in university programs, including, of course, the U.Vic–SFU one, believed in the “transformative power” implicit in their course offerings, which, whilst not claiming to be a panacea, could provide “the first steps into a new way of thinking about oneself in relation to others and to society” (131). And then comes his major point: “All this was, of course, incredibly complex and thus all but incomprehensible to correctional bureaucrats—not because they were in any way incapable of such comprehension, but rather because they needed simpler, more elegant explanations to satisfy both politicians and the public (120).

THE MEDICAL MODEL REDUX AND THE DEMISE OF UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMING IN CANADA’S PRISONS

The resurrection of the medical model in the guise of the new cognitive skills programming model supplied just such a wished-for series of simplified (hence “intelligible”) explanations, ones which certainly satisfied correctional professionals, though their endorsement by politicians and the general public still remains somewhat more problematical. Duguid explains why correctional bureaucracies were increasingly dissatisfied with a perceived “lack of consistency and lack of order implicit in this cacophony of programmatic activity within the prisons” (179). In Canada, for example, the Sawatsky Report (1985) on offender support programs railed against the eclecticism of the opportunities model and instead advocated an explicit linkage between offender need and program delivery. University programming, for example, was no longer deemed “core,” but a nice extra to offer—if resources permitted—to while away the time for those in maximum security institutions.

The CSC chose cognitive development over formal education models and the moral lessons approach as the foundation of a resurgent medical model that would soon sweep away all opposition forces. The university program model in BC contained all three of these educational strands, and hence was inadvertently complicit in its own demise because of its very success in these areas, as was recognized by Robert Ross, the chief architect of the new cognitive skills model. Ross and his researchers stressed that their new model was not a “magic bullet,” and that its success would depend in large part on
the other offerings that were made available in conjunction with it. This ideal synthesis of research from various points on the correctional education spectrum was, again, too complex for those in corrections who chose cognitive skills over other educational approaches for the obvious reason that it was more "correctional" than the other options. Corrections staff would now be trained to offer these "short courses" or new training modules which (supposedly) would specifically target particular offenders' "criminogenic needs" (the new mantra of CSC professionals), and bring about effective "treatment."

The CSC bought into this model because it reasserted its hegemony over an assortment of various program offerings, and supplied a much-needed morale booster to its own staff, who were now integral to the delivery process itself. In 1990, cognitive skills were officially adopted by the CSC as the jewel in the crown of their new programming ventures; indeed, one might at this point retranslate the CSC acronym to have it stand for the "Cognitive Skills Corporation." The writing was on the wall; in 1993, all university programming in Canada was terminated.

TO SIR, WITH LOVE

The heart of the matter in Can Prisons Work? is the comparative analysis of the success rates of university programming when set against those generated by the cognitive skills program—a sort of high-noon ideological/pedagogical shoot out—to extend the guiding metaphors behind Duguid's argument. The common ground shared by both program evaluations is the recidivism prediction device developed by the CSC over a fifteen-year period, SIR, or Statistical Index on Recidivism. The "global" results determined from the 654 student-prisoners whose records were analyzed in depth were indeed impressive:

The SIR predicted a failure rate of 42 per cent for the group of 654 former prisoner-students (meaning that 275 of the men should have been returned to prison for a new offence within three years of their release, about average for North American prison systems), but in their actual post-release lives only 164 of the men were returned to prison, a failure rate of only 25 per cent. (134)

The sophisticated analyses of Duguid's research team took into account, via SIR, the issue of self-selection which had been used to challenge the validity
of the earlier studies carried out for the U. Vic Prison Education Program in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. These "global" figures do not, however, as Duguid points out, tell us anything about specific mechanisms whereby such education programs were successful in particular cases, with certain types or categories of prisoners, nor do they engage the other critical issue of contextual circumstances which might have determined individual success or failure.

Let us leave these factors for a later comment and move directly to the comparison of these 1996 results with the 1995 evaluation of the cognitive skills program, as formulated in the *Robinson Report* (1995). Duguid points out differences in methodology between the two studies (issues such as "control groups," length of follow up, and definitions of recidivism), but nevertheless concludes: "as evaluations go, these two efforts were remarkably similar even though done independently of each other" (211). This is where things get very interesting. Assessing the evaluations, Duguid concludes that though the CSC has declared the cognitive skills program to be a success, "the actual data make the claim a difficult one to sustain" (211) in two key areas; firstly, the recidivism rates for cognitive skills participants was only in a minor way (11.2 percent) better than the control group, far less than predicted, and, secondly, cognitive skills did not show any effects on subjects termed to be at high risk to reoffend by SIR. Duguid's critical judgments here are carefully modulated in order to ensure an even-handed appraisal. He points out how Robinson circumvented the rather obvious conclusion that cognitive skills simply does not work as well as is claimed by declaring that all the subjects undergoing evaluation could be deemed "high risk." Duguid underlines how "implausible" all this rhetorical sleight-of-hand is since it so obviously subverts the SIR system which was developed by the CSC from findings based on their own prisoners. Duguid does acknowledge some "positive results" in the *Robinson Report*, but the inevitable conclusion, one an even-handed assessor cannot escape, is that "the research on the cognitive living skills program is 'not a pretty sight' and unlike earlier, more speculative predictions, these data have remained buried in a government of Canada report, and not touted in the learned journals of academia, let alone the popular media" (213).

On the other hand, not only is the data on success rates in terms of recidivism very impressive in the university program research, but the study goes on to explain in detail the mechanisms whereby it works, and the contextual factors that lead to success in particular instances; for example, in certain high-risk categories. Duguid's key points here are, in essence, the same as
those intuitively put forward by teachers in the program such as myself who were not tied to any particular school of theorizing; it is, however, very satisfying to see these results supported by such scrupulous and exhaustive research that can demonstrate that a culture of academic achievements is good in itself; that special emphasis should be given to students who are clearly making significant progress; that participation in the program as an alternative community within the prison is the very essence of the program itself; that extracurricular activities of all sorts, especially theatre, enrich the context of change; and, finally, that further involvement with education after release plays a decisive role in enhancing post-prison success rates. Now we can confirm, in a conclusive fashion, what we always knew to be true phenomenologically: to treat people (prisoners) as equals, as fellow human beings, will always win out over the "corrections model" of the "other" who needs "treatment" and is coerced to adopt the views "prescribed" by the authorities. The very last words of Duguid's study are a very brief testimonial of a new student in the university prison education program who states, with pleasant surprise, that you can "act yourself" and are accepted by the instructors just like "they would anybody on the street" (267). Such teachers might have started off as Duguid earlier termed them as "penological amateurs" (129); to their credit, even after they were prison-wise, most of them never lost the root sense of "amateur," of someone who pursues something for the love of it—"To Sir, With Love," indeed.

The very subtitle of Duguid's study points towards an ideal "I—thou" relationship (as developed in Martin Buber's work); however, there are certain limitations inherent in Duguid's methodology which necessarily prevent the full embodiment of such principles. Whereas Duguid can say early on that "it is the lives of these men—as criminals, prisoners, and parolees—that provide the visceral substance of the book" (16), it is apparent as one reads through Can Prisons Work? that the heart of its argument involves a number of statistical conversions which, while not by any means eviscerating the substance of the book—these men's lives—certainly does attenuate the sense of their presence as particular subjects speaking in their own voices. The fictionalized case histories, abridged and summarized throughout the study, are designed to compensate for the inherent methodological limitations of a social science grid posited upon a numerical accounting of various categories, but they are only partially successful in this regard since they are third-person renditions in which the subject is inescapably recast in the role—and grammatical position—
of object. Duguid is certainly aware of these in-built limitations: at one point, in a telling aside, he confides to the reader that he feels stifled by the abstract nature of the interpretation of statistical results and the concomitant contestation of theories. And in the most Rousseau-esque of such confessions, Duguid confides to the reader that at one point in his career he left teaching in prison “in part because of an increasing inability to see my prisoner-students as individuals as opposed to types or categories” (87). However, the key point remains that Duguid’s refrain throughout his study is a passionate plea for acknowledging the complex reality of the nature of crime and criminals (and of human beings generally), and that any overly simplified theorizing will not be an adequate representation of such phenomena. We needed to have the statistical information which Duguid’s study delivers: it is a vital strategic and rhetorical tool for defending the value and function of university prison education programs.

**A QUESTION OF ADVOCACY: O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?**

And just what is the answer to the above query? This: crying in the wilderness, unless we can get the right people to listen to the message of Duguid’s book. We need to make the findings of *Can Prisons Work?* work for us in the lobbying for the reinstatement of university programs in Canada’s prisons. We know now, in a definitive and conclusive way, that the new “gospel” of cognitive skills, embraced by the Correctional Service of Canada with religious fervour, does not work anywhere nearly as well as its adherents would have us believe. As Duguid suggests, it will only be a matter of time before another Martinson of “nothing works” fame comes along and matter-of-factly points out some of the more obvious flaws and omissions in the Emperor’s New Wardrobe. But is anyone actually listening? If the CSC buried the unflattering results of the *Robinson Report*, are they not just as likely to turn a deaf ear to the results of Duguid’s study, which show that university programming in prisons, particularly in conjunction with community support on the outside, has a much greater chance of producing “working citizens” than any other method we know of? This would unfortunately appear to be the case; in a recent conversation, Duguid said that in the two years since the publication of his book he has had no response at all from CSC policy administrators about his study’s findings, that there has only been “a dead silence.”
We, prisoners and their advocates, need to find ways to ensure that these findings do become part of a revitalized debate about the role of education in prison programming. We need to lobby for the reinstatement of university programming in Canada’s prisons; we need to educate prison administrators, politicians, and the general public about the need for such programming. The present CSC Commissioner’s penchant for declaring the Canadian prison system the “best in the world” (shades of Voltaire’s Pangloss) makes no sense when there are no fully-integrated programming options covering basic literacy skills, upgrading, technical-vocational training, and university-level educational offerings. University programming has managed to survive in the US and, ironically enough, articles endorsing its efficacy in reducing recidivism rates appear regularly in Forum, the CSC’s flagship publication for correctional research in Canada. CSC programming needs the credibility and legitimacy that comes from outside agencies; it cannot rely solely on in-house offerings and unsubstantiated claims for the effectiveness of their programming. The quixotic tilting at prisons must go on; we must continue our lobbying for the reinstatement of university programs in Canada’s prisons.

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The aim of this book,” writes contributor and editor Howard Davidson, “is to advance the conventional discourse on prison education with the development of critical perspectives” (3). The book accomplishes this with multifarious aplomb. In thirteen chapters, an appropriate sum given the nature of the enveloping negative environment chronicled, the reader is introduced to a plethora of voices from multiple North American prison systems, varying decades of experience, insights from and for both genders, and perspectives ranging from the outsiders teaching within, to the insiders educating their fellows trapped within. The spirit of Paulo Freire, as poignantly set forth in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and other liberation theologists permeate the submissions. No collection of education stories better captures the dynamics, heartaches, maddening frustrations, and most of the potentialities of education in the penal setting than the compilation in *Schooling in the “Total Institution”*. Davidson clearly sets forth the purpose of the book in the opening chapter, “Possibilities for a Critical Pedagogy in a ‘Total Institution,’” by outlining how the prevalent theories of functionalism, the opportunities model, cognitive development, as well as neoliberal perspectives on deviance, all come up wanting in accounting for the empowerment that higher-level thinking skills imbue in the prisoner-student. The difference, Davidson postulates, between liberal and critical pedagogies is that where the former fails to connect the individuals’ alienation to their dehumanization within the social construct, the latter leads to their realization, and preaches that collective constructive action can create “alternative futures.” Davidson, and the rest of the contributors, by varying examples, repeat this underlying theme: empowerment through prisoner education is transformative, effectively changing the student from victim of structural/economic circumstance and self-destructive ignorant compliance, to active rational-thinking citizen. It is the culmination of not simply liberal pedagogy, but it takes the step beyond to political education; in short, to “critical consciousness.”

Prisoner education is “half-sham,” and students are able to grow and graduate in spite of, rather than because of, support from the controlling state apparatus. This is the central point of Chapter Two by Jim Thomas, “The Ironies of
Prison Education,” and a theme touched upon repeatedly throughout the essays. Not just the structural to uniquely obtuse impediments to delivering prison education are detailed, but more importantly, the methods that failed to circumvent these restrictions. The point highlighted in this chapter is one of even larger consideration beyond the classroom itself. “Prison education cannot be fully implemented,” Thomas concludes, “without a dramatic transformation of the philosophy of punishment in North America” (39). Indeed, after more than two decades of my own existence in the crucible of the modern American penitentiary, most of that tenure advancing through the ranks of post-secondary education, this is a fundamental conclusion with which I experientially concur.

The contributors, in each of their informative voices, continue to educate the reader to the “bad parent” behavior of current correctional practice, as reported in Gay Bell’s and Therasa Glaremin’s Chapter Three. Continuing with the critical analysis of how various models (medical, opportunities, and cognitive deficiency) provide a rationale from which teaching literacy to prisoners is legitimized, Michael Collins, in Chapter Four, comments that “a functionalist orientation to literacy permits alternatives if only because the correctional ethos really masks a widespread indifference about the welfare of prisoners” (61). This is a point I also have observed: the stark dichotomy between state correctional educators parroting Adult Basic Education and General Education Equivalency curriculums, and contracted (usually) higher education teachers employing more student-centered, critical thinking pedagogies.

In Peter Linebaugh’s Chapter Five contribution, “Freeing Birds, Erasing Images, Burning Lamps: How I Learned to Teach in Prison,” we learn from a social historian the pivotal reason why criminologists, ironically more than all others, should teach in the penal setting. Entering the wilds of Borneo, the scientist learns from the natives, in contradiction to the pervasive popular propaganda, that prisoners are not that different than traditional students, or from the sons and daughters of those outside the walls and wire of the artificial social construct of the penitentiary. Linbaugh writes:

Whenever I entered prison and the gates clanged shut behind me and after I entered the society of the prisoners, I felt welcomed and every effort was always made to make me feel at home … Of course, I felt fear, but that fear left when I left the guards. The guards live in fear; it is a part of their working conditions. The second feeling I had was
this. Although this was home to a mass of uniformed people whose individualities in clothing, grooming, behavior, and body language were severely curtailed, I had never been so struck by individualities as I was struck by them in prison. For good or evil, the inside shone out. (70)

This becomes a countervailing insight that the scholars of crime should be the first to imbib in their teachings—not the last of the academies, as has morosely been the case in the increasingly socially irrelevant field of criminal justice studies.

This theme of “breaking through the myths” is continued by one of the rare criminologists who venture into the statesvilles to educate prisoners as well as himself. In Chapter Six, “Teaching ‘Criminology’ to ‘Criminals’,” Edward Sbarbaro makes one of many observations that made me smile in forlorn recognition of the ironies of prison education, when he notes that it would be more difficult to bring doughnuts into the prison, than it would the infinitely more dangerous Marxist ideas of the counter-political revolution to western economic theory. Educational development within the world of the prison becomes a “dialectical process,” as noted in Dante Germanotta’s fascinating Chapter Seven. He offers miniature educational case studies of Malcolm X and Richard Cepulonis that vividly demonstrate the transformative power of education within the misanthropic repression of the state penal apparatus. Germanotta chronicles the persistent dilemmas for the educator and illuminates the structural limitations imposed on students, compelling the “development of strategies in both teaching and learning that bring unique challenges to the formal educational enterprise” (119).

Schooling in a “Total Institution” continues to offer vignettes into unique educational practices with the story in Chapter Eight of INSIGHT, INC., predominantly a financially self-sufficient B.A. program offered through the University of Minnesota. In this story, Robert Weiss makes the tellingly ironic observation that too much success by rehabilitative programming (i.e., when prisoners become apostles of the dominant culture ideology and mores) is viewed as an insubordination of sorts by the functionaries of the very system that is tasked with “rehabilitating” them in the first place. Perhaps only convicts can fathom the logic in that “correctional” obstinacy. In Chapter Nine, Edward Sbarbaro, the only double contributor, briefly reviews the history of education in jail and penal settings in the cause of political activism (IWW, Black Power
Movement, and intifada), and notes the "accidental praxis" that occurred in the zeitgeist shift from the rehabilitative to just-deserts model that conversely gave prison college programs more independence from penal control. Sbarbaro observes there is a largely unexplored "history of political education in prison that has been an effective mechanism in the struggle for social justice" (145).

In his "Communitarian Critique" in Chapter Ten, Peter Cordella delves into the comparison between atomistic and communitarian societies, and how the sensate versus ideational cultures they represent are affected by the educational process. It is Cordella's analysis that the evolving process imparted by higher education to "the ideational transformation of prisoner-students demonstrates the potential for critical pedagogy in prison education" (154). Moreover, it is this next level that elevates the person from one of lockstep, blind consumer of self-centeredness to one of community inclusive consciousness that frees the person from the blinders of atomization. This chapter is a hard read that deserves multiple readings and meditation to comprehend fully.

Juan Rivera's Chapter Eleven, "A Nontraditional Approach to Social and Criminal Justice," moves beyond the outside teacher venturing in to educate the unwashed masses to those who "don't need no stinkin' ba-hd-jezzes" (my paean to the classic bandit line from The Treasure of the Sierra Madre) educating them: the essential culmination of empowerment and fulfillment of Freire's pedagogical philosophy. Or, using the philosophical explanations provided by Cordella, these imprisoned men are moving beyond the atomized to communitarian perspective. Rivera describes the communitarian program utilizing a nontraditional approach, solely organized by and for prisoners and their transformation to caring, involved citizens. His essay outlines the program design and its history, description of the classes (three types with unique perspectives: Afrocentric, Latino-centric, Liberation Theology), a sample curriculum, and a five-step reconciliation phase (recognition, responsibility, reconstruction, reconciliation, and redemption). This is followed by a discussion of opposition from the administration and some prisoners who believe prisoners cannot learn anything of value from another con (i.e., "green syndrome"). The issue of the interplay of racism is also addressed. Rivera explains "the aim of the program is to help prisoners to embrace a new vision of themselves, to transform their criminal attitudes into socially and politically conscious ones, and to return them to their communities equipped to rebuild them" (169). Truly noble goals that are hard to object to, but goals that those with correctional
programming experience know all too well are rare and fraught with longevity uncertainty.

In Chapter Twelve, Karlene Faith crosses the continent, extending back more than two decades to another cultural time to “The Santa Cruz Women’s Prison Project, 1972–1976.” This is a fascinating story of the building, transcendence, and extinction of a briefly-lived opportunity that captures all the essence of the best of post-secondary correctional education. “[W]e engaged in ‘education as the practice of freedom, as opposed to education as the practice of domination’ .... [W]e could do no better for ourselves than to support their reclamation of their lives” (190). Amen. One of the most helpful observations Faith makes in analyzing the failure of the program’s survival is that perhaps the teachers erred in not setting up separate courses for the guards, or encouraging the women to open up certain classes to mixed (prisoner/staff) enrollment. This action would have co-opted the multi-faceted support for the ongoing operation of the program, and political influence with the administration of the prison and bureaucracy of the department as well. (During one semester, in two classes, a mixed student body was enrolled in the Indiana State Reformatory / Ball State University program, and functioned surprisingly well to everyone’s enlightenment.) The Santa Cruz story reverberates twenty-five years later with the continued tremulous survival of current volunteer staffed and donated administrative support (i.e., free of tax-funded allocations such as Pell or TAP grants) for higher education opportunities. For example, the survival of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility / Marymount Manhattan College Program (BHCF/MMCP) in New York remains a very real concern. While history is informative, it is not destiny. One of the significant differences between the Santa Cruz and Bedford Hills programs is that from its creation, the BCHF/MMCP has had the active involvement and substantial support of the prison’s superintendent, whereas the Santa Cruz program was in perpetual conflict with the prison’s administration. What troubles both programs, however, is the acknowledged problem of volunteer exhaustion. For purposes of comparing past and present programs, much can be learned from Faith’s contribution.

My personal favorite is the final chapter, “Jailhouse Lawyers Educating Fellow Prisoners” by Julian Stone, most likely because I identify with the author’s experiences. Recrossing the country back to Walpole in New England, the story is period contemporary with the Santa Cruz program. Stone self-discovers and describes all the facets of successful program delivery in the
misanthropic prison milieu: the design of administrative interference protection (in the liberalization aftermath of Attica), needs survey, curriculum development, student evaluations, and continuous course modification. There is a classic self-conscious evaluation of the evolution from lecturer to teacher to instructor as coach that is one of the most succinct and heartening descriptions of praxis I have read. Coming from individuals society traditionally considers malevolent incompetents, the story of prisoner as successful, caring teacher is that much more illuminating. Julian even describes the humorous incident of how he "arranged" the clandestine printing of course completion certificates, had the superintendent co-sign them, and then distribute them at the graduation ceremony.

As much as these chapters are individually stimulating, sharing important stories from the gulag of North American corrections, stories that in my experience are rarely shared, much less so many bound by one spine, the most troubling aspect of Schooling in a "Total Institution" is the collective age of these stories. Unfortunately, many of the chapters have vague or no references as to when the experiences took place. I take exception to this because, as exampled in many of the chapters, correctional programs have relatively short lifetimes. Not only do administrative policies change and funding sources evaporate, philosophical correctional practices shift as well, which in turn can result in wholesale program extinctions.

As a specific example, the highly innovative and independent INSIGHT, INC. program in Minnesota, reported in Chapter Eight, ceased to function several years ago. If I had not known this, inspired by this submission, I would have commenced follow-up research into what was truly an interesting program. In more general consideration, the juggernaut of Reaganomics pushed the tidal wave of the Just(ice) Deserts criminal justice policy, cresting against the fragile ivy towers of post-secondary correctional education with the elimination of prisoner Pell Grant eligibility and the subsequent closing of the majority of prison college programs in the United States by the mid-1990s. The unanswered, and largely indiscernible aspect of this book, is how current are the experiences described? More to the point, how many of the programs are still viable?

That said, in wider focus, the freshness of the programs described becomes largely irrelevant. The greatest value of this book is in its sense of hope. The hope that educational programming can and does work in so many places, in so many ways, by so many good people—both inside and outside of the walls—
against such philosophical, bureaucratic, and personal odds. All of us need encouragement from time to time. A pat of the back, a word of praise, even official recognition of a job well done is all-too-very rare in the penitentiary. Isolation from the world beyond affects both the prisoners and, to a lesser extent, the employees. The day-in and day-out drudgery of prison grinds on everyone, and the struggle to provide and keep alive the few positive programs becomes so wearying. To read about others sharing similar circumstances, even if eventually failing to maintain their offerings, becomes comforting: to realize one is not alone, to be encourage by the successes, and to learn from the mistakes.

By this collection, Howard Davidson achieves what he sets out to do. The ultimate course of education is to pass the torch from teachers directing students, to students becoming self-educating, self-questioning, and searching about the world around them. This book repeatedly demonstrates the invigorating power of critical pedagogy and the articulation of teachers and prisoner-students as “eternal protestors.” Herein lies, by the intelligent riot, the hope for any transformative success in the morass of the prison-industrial complex.

**Jon Marc Taylor** is co-editor of this volume of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* with a sustained contribution of articles on prison education published in *JPP*, the *Journal of Correctional Education*, and elsewhere. He recently published the second edition of *Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada* (Biddle Publishing, 2002). He can be reached at 503273, 1115 East Pence Road, Cameron, MO 64429.
Behind Bars: Surviving Prison
By Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards
Reviewed by Greg Newbold

In the summer of 1997, Jeff Ross and Steve Richards, professors at the University of Baltimore and Northern Kentucky University respectively, became inaugural members of a new subgroup within the American Society of Criminology. ASC is the largest criminological organization in the world, and the new subgroup was named Convict Criminology. Consisting principally of a small group of ex-cons who had moved on to become college professors, the objective of the Convict Criminology group has been to promote scholarly research into crime and criminal justice that is informed by people with first-hand knowledge of their subject. Jeff Ross and Steve Richards both have experience of prisons. Jeff is a former correctional worker, Steve is a former maximum-security federal prison inmate, and it is that perspective that lies behind this book. Behind Bars is the first title this pair has produced together, but it has quickly been followed by a jointly-edited volume Convict Criminology, a collection of writings by ex-convict criminologists.

Behind Bars is a guide to living in prison in the United States. Although primarily intended as advice for incoming first-timers and those at risk of such an outcome, the practical advice the book offers will, of course, be of immense interest to criminologists, correctional workers, and others concerned with the social dynamics of prisons. Consisting of thirteen chapters in four parts, the book takes the reader step-by-step through the incarceration process. Beginning with arrest, the authors tell readers about what is likely to happen if they get busted, about their rights and about how these rights may, or may not, be applied. Sound advice is given about what to do and what not to do if arrested, about various options that may be presented and about the pros and cons of such options. There then follows a discussion of federal and state prison systems, with a particular emphasis on federal custody.

Section Three takes readers behind the wire and tells them what to expect if they ever get sentenced to time. More sound, practical advice is given about how to act in those critical first days, who to speak to, who to avoid, and about various situations that are likely to crop up. The first thing that most novice prisoners worry about is the threat of robbery, assault, and sexual violation. Ross and Richards give candid and valuable advice about what to do when such situations occur—because they almost certainly will. There is a
fine line between responding in a way that will earn you respect, and one that may get you killed. They also provide an interesting run-down on gangs, and the types of gangs that exist in various parts of the country, together with some information about the various roles that gangs are likely to play in the politics of an institution.

Finally, there is a section on what it is like getting out: the exhilaration of unaccustomed freedom followed by the trauma, especially for long-termers, of adjusting to a complex, fast-moving, and often hostile world. Perhaps one of the most valuable sections of the entire book, this section gives wise guidance on how to stay out once you have got out. The pitfalls that so many ex-cons stumble into are traversed, along with the problems a person is likely to experience with employers, landlords and parole authorities. The powerful message is clear: staying out is not going to be easy.

The book ends with an interesting glossary of prison terms and a handy catalogue containing the names and addresses of twenty-five prison reform and prisoner welfare agencies.

As an ex-drug dealer who did time in a maximum security prison in New Zealand, the principal impact of *Behind Bars* for me is the essential inhumanity that pervades the American criminal justice system. The book reinforced an impression I have gained from touring at least two dozen American penitentiaries during my career as a professional criminologist. In America, far more so that in New Zealand, you really do lose a great part of your personal identity if you get arrested and sent to jail. Very quickly you become part of the fuel that energizes a great, lumbering machine; it burns you up and spits out your remnants at the end. But the problem does not finish right there. Monitoring usually continues until expiry of the entire sentence, with authoritarian parole structures and draconian recall criteria ensuring that fully half of all prisoners will be reincarcerated within one year of release—often for petty parole violations. To the extent that parolees can be locked up for misdemeanours that no other citizen would be jailed for, it is a system that is geared to assisting ex-convicts to fail. The difficulties that new releases have staying out are exacerbated by a public that is generally suspicious of, and intolerant towards, those who have fallen afoul of the law.

Jeff Ross and Steve Richards have written a useful and interesting book, in simple language that is as compelling as it is engaging. They present a rare and somewhat blunt view of what really goes on inside those high walls and fences that many of us drive past every day on our way to work. *Behind Bars* is an
important addition to modern criminological literature and should be essential reading, not only for potential prisoners, but also for those whose job it is to deal with convicts after their liberty has been taken away.

Greg Newbold is a sociology professor at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. In the late 1970s he served five-and-a-half years in New Zealand prisons for selling heroin. Since then he has written six books and fifty book chapters and journal articles, and frequently advises government agencies on matters of criminal justice policy.
Call for Papers

Volume 15: Special Issue on Prisoners and Politics in Our Time

Being a prisoner or former prisoner does not necessarily isolate a person from being concerned with major social, political, and economic events and ideas. Contrary to dominate beliefs, current and former prisoners are able to become actively involved in political issues. If information is allowed into the prison, some individuals read extensively and participate actively during their incarceration. In some cases, one’s active involvement preceded his or her incarceration, or important social, political, or economic events may be directly related to a person’s conviction. Most certainly, these events can have a direct impact on prison conditions, prisoners’ rights advocacy, sentencing and parole decisions, the availability of programs, and access to information.

The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP) is planning a special issue on prisoners and former prisoners’ concerns with social, political, and economic issues of our time. Articles may be about issues that directly or indirectly affect prison conditions, prisoners’ rights, sentencing and parole, policing, the politics of incarceration, and other aspects of criminal justice systems. Articles may also be commentaries on these issues, regardless of the exact nature of the individual’s relationship to the issues. Of particular interest are topics on political prisoners, human rights, prisoners of war, social justice, social control, and commentaries on social, political, and economic theories and practices. Examples of major issues would be racism, sexism, globalization, the war on drugs, free speech and popular dissent, the prison industrial complex, privatization, neo-liberalism, radicalism, capital punishment, political prisoners in North America and internationally, AIDS, and other health issues.

Prisoners and former prisoners are encouraged to submit papers, collaborative essays, discussions transcribed from tape and book reviews. This special issue will be published Fall 2005 as Volume 15. The deadline for submissions is December 15, 2004. If you have an interest in submitting a paper, we would appreciate receiving a letter that describes in general terms your topic. This helps us to anticipate the issue’s contents. JPP does not publish fiction or poetry.

Articles should be between 1,000 and 10,000 words. They may be handwritten legibly, word processed, or typed. JPP publishes articles in English,
French, and Spanish. You may elect to write anonymously or under a pseudonym. For references cited in articles, attempt to provide the necessary bibliographic information. Refer to references cited in any journal or articles published in JPP for examples. We will provide details when we receive your letter. The co-editors, Howard S. Davidson and Rashad Shabazz, will review your submission. Selected articles are corrected for composition and returned to you for approval before publication.

Interested in writing on other topics? JPP encourages you to submit articles for other editions of JPP on a wide range of topics concerning the politics and experience of crime and punishment.

Send your letter and/or manuscript to Howard Davidson, Box 54 University Centre, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 (Canada) or by e-mail to hdavid@ms.umanitoba.ca
About the Cover Art

Bryan Seymour was born in York, Ontario, in 1956. He became interested in art when he was about six years old, drawing cover art for assignments. While in prison in Ontario on and off between 1974 and 1984, he learned how to silkscreen and to paint with acrylics. Working with acrylics appealed to him because of the quicker drying time, less toxic smell, and versatility. The content of Bryan’s work varies with the medium he works with. Also a carver, he finds inspiration in the lighter aspects of life; his paintings are inspired by the more somber aspects of his persona.

Solitude

I painted this about ten years ago, when I was working at home. Being in a busy family with two daughters, with many people coming over to the house all the time, it was difficult to get any peace. I needed time for myself.

This painting is about my search for solitude when chaos was happening all around me. I used one of my daughter’s dolls as a model for the painting, and went from there.

Bryan’s artwork has been displayed at different art shows in the lower mainland of British Columbia, and won an honourable mention at the Fort Langley show.

Solitude
22" x 34"
Acrylic on artboard
1994

Bryan currently lives in Sicamous, British Columbia. If you are interested in discussing or acquiring Bryan’s work, he can be contacted through the JPP Editorial Board.

Photo of cover art by Cathie Douglas.