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Time to Reframe Politics and Practices in Correctional Education

Volume 2: Chapter Four
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We must accept the reality that to confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short-term benefits-a "winning of battles while losing the war." . . . [We must] provide a decent setting for expanded educational and vocational training.
-Warren Burger, former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court

In the hectic pace of the world today, there is no time for meditation, or for deep thought. A prisoner has time that he can put to good use. I'd put prison second to college as the best place for a man to go if he needs to do some thinking. If he's motivated, in prison he can change his life.
-Malcolm X

There is a compelling logic to provide expansive education and training programs for adults under correctional supervision. In theory, these programs can prepare an underused pool of workers at a time when the nation is facing significant labor shortages. Uniquely, correctional education programs hold the promise of addressing the poor education and literacy skills of a significant percentage of individuals, particularly young, black, and Hispanic adult males. By improving the opportunity for these individuals to secure and retain employment in better-paying jobs, society could reap huge long-term benefits in terms of greater family stability, lower rates of child poverty, reduced welfare payments, lowered crime rates, improved civic life, along with many social indicators of well-being. Correctional education programs have found advocates in such distinctly different leaders as Warren Burger, the conservative former chief justice of the Supreme Court, and Malcolm X, the militant civil rights leader, but the logic of offering these programs remains captive to the ever-changing and unpredictable forces of politics.¹

In 1994, for example, Oregon voters overwhelmingly approved the Prison Reform and Inmate Work Act, a ballot measure amending the state constitution to require that inmates engage in "meaningful work or in workforce development activities" for a minimum of forty hours a week (Oregon Department of Corrections, 1998). This "get-tough" action has had the effect of rejuvenating education and other treatment programming in the state's correctional system over the past six years. In the same year, President Clinton signed the omnibus crime bill, which restricted state and federal inmates' eligibility to secure federal financial assistance in the form of Pell grants for college programs while residing in prison. A national survey published three years later found that "66 percent of the reporting correctional systems indicated that the loss of Pell grants eliminated most if not all of their college course opportunities for inmates" (Corrections Compendium, 1997).

This chapter, an overview of the politics and practices of adult correctional education programs, aims to explain why, after a two-decade spending spree on new prisons in this country, resources for correctional education programs have significantly lagged the rise in the inmate population, which has tripled in size (Maguire & Pastore, 1999) and serves longer sentences than before. It explores whether the public policy shift in correctional philosophy toward incapacitation (the belief that the main purpose of prisons are to remove dangerous individuals from the street) and away from a rehabilitative focus (which some contend never existed) represents an overreaction of political leaders to prevailing public attitudes. Public opinion polling over this same time period has documented strong support for both rehabilitation and incapacitation (Flanagan & Longmire, 1996). I argue that correctional education programs can garner new support when framed as part of an accountability strategy, similar to the Oregon experience, along with the traditional framing of these programs as issues of inmates' rights. Sustained support for correctional education programs will occur only with solid research that demonstrates that these programs reduce recidivism rates—that is, the probability that offenders will be arrested, convicted, or incarcerated for future crimes.

A PRIMER ON CORRECTIONS AND ITS POPULATION

Corrections as a field is little noticed or understood by the general public. While most Americans are at least familiar with the workings of other criminal justice institutions, such as the police or the court system, comparatively few have direct contact with jails, prisons, probation, and parole, the exception being those in urban minority communities. Although the term corrections is often thought to be interchangeable with the term prisons, it actually refers to a variety of agencies and institutions that provide some form of court-mandated supervision of adults

suspected or convicted of criminal offenses. These institutions include prisons and jails, which are both characterized by secure correctional facilities, and probation and parole, which are referred to as community corrections because these programs supervise convicted criminal offenders who reside and work outside correctional facilities. Intermediate sanctions, such as day reporting centers, are a form of community corrections that seek to bridge the gap between secure and community-based supervision programs and are a rapidly growing part of corrections.

Jails are typically short-term correctional facilities run locally by city and county correctional departments. They both detain individuals awaiting trial and incarcerate convicted offenders who have been sentenced to serve time in jail, are awaiting sentencing to prison, or are serving time for a parole or probation violation. Jails house approximately 70,000 inmates held under state and federal correctional jurisdictions. In addition, they perform other functions, such as temporarily holding juveniles or mentally ill people awaiting movement to appropriate facilities (Beck, 2000b). Time in detention in a jail can range from several hours to years. At the close of 1998, the nation's 3,400 jails held almost 600,000 inmates, and the number of total admissions to jails was 15 million (see Table 4.1). Most jails, owing to the short-term stay of their inmates, offer limited educational programs, if any at all. However, some jails do have excellent educational programs. The Orange County Jail in Florida has a comprehensive educational program, complete with vocational programs, for an inmate population with an average stay of only sixty days (Finn, 1997).

Prisons hold convicted prisoners for longer periods of time and serve different inmate populations with different security levels and specialized needs. Maximum-security prisons incarcerate the most violent and serious offenders and are fortified institutions with redundant security measures that carefully control all inmate movement within the facility. Minimum-security facilities typically house less serious offenders or offenders at the end of a longer sentence who have demonstrated good institutional behavior. These facilities may lack a perimeter security fence or wall and provide inmates with much discretion as to their whereabouts and activities. They can include work and education release programs that allow inmates to leave the facility in the morning and return in the late afternoon. Specialized prisons have unique functions, such as detaining inmates who will be deported or incarcerating inmates with special physical or mental medical needs.

At the close of 1998, the nation's estimated fifteen hundred prisons held more than 1.2 million individuals convicted of crimes; 546,000 offenders were released during that year (see Table 4.1). More than 90 percent of

these inmates were incarcerated in state facilities. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) runs ninety-six facilities and incarcerates about 140,000 inmates, fewer than each of the states of California and Texas. Nationally, the average expected length of time to be served for an inmate entering prison grew to forty-three months in 1997 (Beck & Mumola, 1999). In the FBOP, the median sentence is sixty-eight months.

Prisons provide the settings for the most fully developed education programs in corrections. Most correctional education programs fall into the following categories: enrichment programs (art, literature, creative writing), higher education academic programs (liberal arts), postsecondary vocational training programs, General Educational Development (GED) preparatory programs (a few offer alternative high school diploma programs), adult basic education/English for speakers of other languages (ABE/ESOL) programs, and life skills programs. (Life skills is a recent catch-all category that includes such short-term programs as parenting skills, job readiness, anger management, and cognitive skills, a psychoeducational program that attempts to address "thinking deficits.") The order of presentation of these categories reflects the relative degree of institutional and political support that these programs generally garner, enrichment programs enjoying the least and life skills enjoying the most.

Federal legislation in 1994 eliminated many higher education programs based in prisons. Subsequent legislation also restricts offenders convicted of certain drug offenses from receiving Pell grants even after their release from prison. Other important changes include mandatory literacy laws in twenty-six states and at the federal level and restrictions on the use of federal financial aid for offenders. Mandatory literacy laws generally require inmates entering a correctional system who read below a specific education threshold to participate in educational programming for a specified period of time or until they meet the threshold requirements. Most states have chosen the eighth grade as the literacy threshold. Finally, judicial action resulting from class action lawsuits filed on behalf of inmates has mandated a certain minimum level of programming in some correctional systems and individual prisons. The U.S. Supreme Court has generously interpreted Section 1983 of the U.S. Code to allow prisoners to sue correctional officials if prison conditions fail to meet "constitutional standards of physical security, adequate medical treatment, freedom of religious expression, and so forth. Section 1983 litigation is a major portion of the U.S. District Courts' civil caseloads. One in every ten civil lawsuits is a Section 1983 lawsuit" (Hanson & Daley, 1994).

The largest group of offenders under correctional supervision are those on probation, 3.4 million at the close of 1998, who reside outside prison

and jail facilities. Although there is a federal system of probation, the vast majority of probationers are supervised by a state-level department of probation that is often tied to the court system. Probation is a sanction administered by a judge in addition to or in lieu of a sentence of incarceration. This program requires probationers to report regularly to an assigned probation officer about their progress in a prescribed treatment plan that usually involves employment. The duration of probation, frequency of reporting, and mode of reporting (in person or by telephone) depend on the offender's criminal offense and history. Drug testing and electronic monitoring devices that track individuals at all times are security measures frequently employed to ensure compliance with the plan, which is stipulated by the court. Failure to comply with any aspect of this plan results in a technical violation of probation and can lead to the surrender of the probationer for another appearance before the judge, who can then remand the individual for either more intensive probation or to a prison.

Parole is the most politically malleable of all correctional programs and the only one in which the relative share of the correctional population has decreased recently (Maguire & Pastore, 1999). Several states and the federal government have abolished parole (Tonry, 1999). This program, administered by a state parole board whose members are appointed directly by the governor, is offered to selected prisoners who have demonstrated exemplary institutional behavior and pose minimal risk to the public safety based on their criminal offense and history. Inmates who receive parole are allowed to serve the remainder of their sentence while residing in the community. At the close of 1998, more than 700,000 offenders were on parole supervision (see Table 4.1). The supervision process for parole is similar to that of probation.

Because of prison overcrowding, the dividing lines between institutional (prisons and jails) and community corrections (probation and parole) and among local, state, and federal systems has blurred, and many agencies have collaborated to create a host of intermediate sanctions that provide intensive supervision of offenders in the community (Flanagan & Longmire, 1996). These programs attempt to provide courts and correctional agencies with a sanction between prison, which is thought to be overly harsh and ineffective for some inmates, and standard probation and parole, which are considered lax. One example of such a sanction is the day reporting center, which allows offenders to live in the community but requires them to report to a central location every day for treatment programming as well as frequent drug testing. These centers divert offenders from prison and are used by probation departments for their high-risk probationers and by correctional agencies for their low-risk inmates. Over the next several years, intermediate-sanction programs are likely to grow rapidly as offenders with mandatory sentences continue to

crowd out of prison nonviolent, nonhabituated offenders, many of whom have significant substance abuse problems.

Community corrections programs typically do not run their own education programs and rarely mandate education for those they supervise. Typically probation and parole officers require offenders to work and, based on the nature of the offense, to participate in a specified treatment program, such as substance abuse, anger management, or sex offender counseling. Supervising officers for these agencies explain that few judges are willing to remand an offender who is working and participating in specified treatment programs to prison for failure to attend an educational program. Furthermore, they express concern about "overprogramming" offenders who are not only required to work and attend treatment programs but to manage the day-to-day responsibilities of housing, transportation, and, sometimes, child care. The exceptions are younger probationers and parolees (under twenty-one years of age), who may be mandated to attend school. At the state level, departments of corrections, departments of probation, and the state parole boards are often different agencies that fall under different lines of authority. This fragmented system has a deleterious effect on correctional education programs as the correctional population moves among these institutions. An accused offender may begin his correctional experience in a local jail, wind up in a state prison after receiving a criminal conviction, and get parole for good behavior at the same time that he serves a sentence of probation, which might require him to attend a day reporting center. As offenders move within and between these institutions, they rarely are provided a consistent and uniform level of educational programming.

Demographics

At the close of 1998, nearly 6 million offenders were under correctional supervision: almost 1.9 million inmates were in prison or jail, and more than 4 million offenders were on probation or parole (this figure increased to 6.3 million at the close of 1999, according to statistics released as this chapter was prepared for publication). Table 4.1 provides estimates of the corrections population at the close of 1998 by correctional status, race, Hispanic origin, and gender. Table 4.1 also lists the number of offenders released in a given year by correctional category to illustrate the huge number of inmates released from custody each year. Table 4.2 provides the latest inmate census, taken on June 30, 1999, of those incarcerated in the nation's prisons and jails by gender, race, Hispanic origin, and age grouping. It shows that almost 11 percent of black males, 4 percent of Hispanic males, and 1.5 percent of white males in their twenties and early thirties in the U.S. population were incarcerated on that day (Beck, 2000b). Almost one in three black males (32 percent) in the age group twenty to twenty-nine is currently under the supervision of some form of corrections (Sentencing Project, 1999), far

more than the 649,000 black males aged fourteen to thirty-four who were enrolled in two- and four-year public and private institutions in 1998 (Snyder & Hoffman, 2000).

Also, Table 4.2 shows that black females in this same age group are also incarcerated at a much higher rate than white and Hispanic females. As a category, female offenders now constitute almost 16 percent of the correctional population, and their numbers have doubled since 1990. Those incarcerated are often parents who leave children behind in the care of family and foster care. In 1999, almost 2 million children had a parent or close relative in jail or prison, and an additional 5 million had had a parent incarcerated in a jail or prison in the past (Butterfield, 1999). Combined, these children make up a very large percentage of the estimated 14 million children in poverty in this country.

Literacy Needs of Offenders

The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) provides the most comprehensive assessment of the literacy skills and educational backgrounds of prisoners in state and federal prisons in the past twenty years. NALS researchers interviewed and assessed 1,150 inmates selected randomly from eighty state and federal prisons across the country as part of a nationwide survey to measure the literacy skills of the nation's general household population. Although detainees, probationers, and parolees were not surveyed, the results can be generalized with some caution to these other offender populations. The instruments used for the inmate interviews were the same as for the general population, although additional background information was collected from the inmates on their criminal history, participation in prison training and education programs, and prior work experience. Inmates' literacy skills were assessed using the now-familiar NALS rating system of five proficiency levels in each of three different scales: prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy (Haigler, O'Connor, & Campbell, 1994).

The NALS showed that about 51 percent of prisoners had their high school diplomas or equivalents, compared with 76 percent of the general population. Overall, 11 percent of inmates self-reported a learning disability compared with 3 percent of the general population. Seventy percent of prisoners performed in the two lowest levels on each of the three scales, performing most poorly on the quantitative literacy scale. This means that they demonstrated abilities to read and compute but could not apply these skills to situations calling for them to interpret a train schedule or write a letter to resolve a billing dispute. By comparison, approximately 50 percent of the general population performed at these two levels. Table 4.3 compares the performance of prison and general populations on the three literacy scales. In terms of

education program participation, the percentage of inmates enrolled in basic adult education classes, 7 to 15 percent, is quite small compared with the percentage of inmates who, as demonstrated by NALS, could benefit from enrollment in such classes (National Institute for Literacy Web site; Haigler et al., 1994).

Most of the difference in literacy skills between the prison and the general population is explained by differences in sex, age, race and ethnic identification, and educational attainment. Prisoners are overwhelmingly young, minority males with a higher percentage of high school dropouts and a lower percentage of college experience than the general population (Table 4.4). When these factors are taken into consideration, the "performance of the prison population on the three scales is comparable to that of the household population" (Haigler et al., 1994). (Table 4.3 shows the NALS scores for the inmate and the general household population tested.)

Inmates who reported having high school diplomas performed at lower literacy proficiencies than adults in the general population who reported having diplomas. By contrast, inmates and adults in the general population who reported having a GED demonstrated comparable literacy proficiencies (Haigler et al., 1994). Also, on average, white prisoners performed at higher proficiency levels than black inmates, who performed at higher levels than Hispanic inmates. Perhaps owing to the much larger percentages incarcerated relative to their population, black and Hispanic inmates performed at skill levels comparable to their counterparts in the general population, while white prisoners demonstrated lower skill proficiencies than the average white householder (Haigler et al., 1994). Finally, prisoners attained lower levels of education than their parents, and their parents attained lower levels of formal education than others in the general population.²

ISSUES OF CONCERN IN CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

In the national conversation about crime, the prevailing punitive attitude toward offenders obscures the long tradition that has considered the potential of prisons to reform individuals. The terms corrections and penitentiaries capture some of the religious and humanistic goals of the earliest proponents of correctional education, such as William Rogers, a Quaker clergyman who began teaching prisoners at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail in 1789. The emergence of a more formalized correctional education program is often credited to Zebulon Brockway, the superintendent of the Elmira (New York) Reformatory in the 1880s and 1890s. He assembled a professional staff of artisans and teachers and provided individualized academic and vocational instructional plans and physical regimens to prepare his students to lead successful lives on

release. This systemic approach to correctional education treatment was incorporated in Austin MacCormick's 1929 book, *The Education of Adult Prisoners*, one of the seminal texts in the field. MacCormick was also the founder and first president of the field's professional organization, the Correctional Education Association (CEA).

These early advocates for correctional education subscribed to the medical model of corrections, which views individuals' engagement in criminal activity as a function of physical, environmental, mental, and vocational deficits. Viewed in this context, individual treatment plans that included correctional education and other rehabilitative programs would cure criminal behavior. An alternative view is "the balanced philosophy," which considers rehabilitation programming as one of four equally valuable correctional goals, the others being punishment, deterrence, and incapacitation. This approach recognizes that an inmate's ability to succeed after release is contingent on many factors beyond the control of treatment programs. It supports programs based on their ability to contribute to the orderliness of the institution by keeping inmates engaged in constructive activities while assisting inmates who have the motivation to change (Roberts, 1996).

At the risk of generalization, it does seem that in the 1970s many correctional systems, following the lead of the FBOP, the agency under the U.S. Department of Justice that administers the federal prison system, shifted toward the more pragmatic balanced philosophy that continues to reign to this day. This shift is ascribed to many factors, including the publication and wide dissemination of a 1974 report casting doubt on the effectiveness of prison rehabilitation treatment programs (Martinson, 1974) and a reaction to turbulent prison disturbances such as occurred in New York's Attica prison in 1971. Of course, this shift was part of the rise of social and fiscal conservatism in the nation during the 1970s, which was fueled by the distressed economic conditions, a reaction to the social disorder of the 1960s, and the perceived failures of the much touted Great Society programs of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

The most persistent and long-standing challenge that correctional education programs face is the significant decline in relative resources given the sixfold increase in the institutional correctional population since 1973 (Maguire & Pastore, 1998). In a 1994 survey, nearly half of the correctional systems claimed to have cut educational programming in the previous five years (Lillis, 1994). Three years later, a similar survey revealed a funding increase of only 7 percent, which did not keep pace with inflation or the growth of the inmate population.³ While the nation's spending on corrections has soared, prison administrators are under great fiscal pressure to reduce the per diem cost to incarcerate inmates. Correctional education and rehabilitative programs are often seen as

discretionary expenses that can be reduced. The correctional education programs that are in place are subject to the unique correctional environment. For instance, many programs lose students to other programs such as work details that might offer financial benefits or the opportunity to earn prisoners more time off their sentences for good behavior. Correctional education programs depend on the cooperation of correctional officers who let the inmates out of their living units and monitor classroom activities along with performing a host of other duties. Wardens and superintendents who value rehabilitative programs make sure that the incentives are properly structured and that correctional staff willingly and consistently ensure the smooth operation of these programs. Institutions that have top prison administrators who are indifferent to rehabilitation programs and are plagued by labor-management disputes often have poorly functioning programs that are cancelled for a variety of security reasons.

In corrections today, the fluidity of the offender population is also an obstacle to education. At the end of 1998, the country's state and federal prisons were operating at between 113 percent and 127 percent of their rated capacities (Beck & Mumola, 1999), and the scarcity of bed space has led to increased shuffling of inmates between different living units within facilities, between secure facilities within a correctional system, between secure and community correctional programs, and even between different correctional systems. In a much publicized case in 1997, the Massachusetts Department of Corrections flew 140 inmates in the dead of night to prisons in Texas, where there was a surplus of cell space. Although offenders are serving longer sentences-the average length of sentence for inmates released from state correctional facilities in 1997 was almost 25 percent higher (twenty-seven months) than that for those released from the system in 1990 (Beck & Mumola, 1999)-offenders are moving more frequently between institutions. This increased inmate movement has significantly impaired the ability of offenders to complete educational and vocational programs or even demonstrate progress. In a study commissioned in Texas in 1994, researchers found that the average offender did not have enough time remaining on his sentence to complete an adult educational or vocational program because of prior time served in a county jail waiting for a bed in the state prison (Criminal Justice Center, 1994).

Owing to increased inmate movement, substance abuse, anger management, and cognitive-behavioral programs have grown at the expense of basic literacy programs. These programs offer correctional administrators three attractive qualities: they appear to be more relevant to the immediate needs of the offender, they can be offered in relatively short periods of time (typically thirty to ninety days), and they are inexpensive and often taught by nonprofessional staff with minimal

training (Fabiano, 1991; Gaes, Flanagan, Motiuk, & Stewart, 1998). The tendency to forgo traditional educational programs is particularly evident in the new intermediate-sanction programs, where offenders have much less time for treatment programming because of the employment requirements built into the programs.

Correctional education program content is also problematic when considered in the light of the changing needs of employers in the new service-oriented, technology-based economy. The national discussion about educational reform and the need to raise the skill levels of K-12 students and incumbent workers has almost completely bypassed corrections. While the skill levels required by employers for entry-level positions have increased markedly, the range of skills and credentials offered to offenders has actually narrowed with the elimination of many college and vocational programs. These programs gave inmates with secondary diplomas—approximately half of the total inmate population—the opportunity to develop the problem-solving, presentation, computer, high-level literacy, and numeracy skills that have been documented as necessary to succeed in today's economy (Murnane & Levy, 1996). Many correctional education programs have been pruned back to provide GED diploma preparation classes only and offer very little lower- or higher-level literacy instruction. Exceptions to this trend are the correctional education systems in Ohio and Maryland, which have continued to fund college programs in spite of federal cutbacks.

The new service economy is also less hospitable to individuals with criminal histories. A job applicant's record of arrest, criminal conviction, and incarceration provides negative signals to a prospective employer that the individual may possess a host of undesirable attributes. As described in the economic literature on statistical discrimination (Spence, 1973), prospective employers might confer negative perceived group attributes for criminals on individual offenders for whom they have very little other information that might indicate true job potential at the time of screening. Increased tort liability concerns that penalize employers for hiring offenders, combined with greater access to and lowered costs of obtaining criminal records, have led increasing number of employers to conduct criminal checks and discriminate against offenders (Holzer, 1996; Boshier & Johnson, 1974; Albright & Furjen, 1996; Finn & Fontaine, 1985).

POLITICS, PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS, AND RESEARCH

Efforts to reform the country's eighty-five thousand school districts have often been likened to the slow process of making course adjustments in a supertanker; political action in correctional education often takes the form of sinking the ship. In response to the mistaken perception that

inmates were receiving federal financial aid for college at the expense of law-abiding adults, in 1994 Congress barred state and federal inmates from receiving Pell grants and thereby practically eliminated overnight the majority of prison-based higher education and vocational programs. Given that state correctional institutions supervise more than 95 percent of offenders, correctional education and other rehabilitation programs are particularly vulnerable to gubernatorial changes. In December 1996, Georgia's corrections commissioner fired most of the full-time correctional education staff and replaced them with contract instructors as a purported cost-saving measure, losing many programs in the exchange. In 1997, the Tennessee governor ordered cuts in the correctional education program after learning that it enjoyed smaller teacher-to-student ratios and a greater percentage of teachers with doctoral degrees than did the state's K-12 school systems.

It is not hard to explain the susceptibility of correctional education programs to such actions. Offenders represent the least powerful constituency; forty-seven states disenfranchise prisoners from voting, and many prohibit even released offenders from voting (Drinan, 2000). Moreover, offenders' chief basis of support lies within urban minority and white rural populations that exhibit irregular voting patterns and have limited political influence. Even nationally established minority advocate groups have been reluctant to embrace the issue for fear of perpetuating the view that most offenders belong to a minority group.

Argument for a New Strategy: Inmate Accountability

Cullen and Gendreau (1989) and Flanagan and Longmire (1996) describe the paradoxical and changing public attitudes about crime and criminals. They argue that although the American public has become more punitive toward crime and less supportive of treatment programs since the 1960s, the overall support for rehabilitation programs remains surprisingly strong. Cullen and Gendreau posit that although the public favors lengthy prison terms, they will support interventions that hold the promise of returning offenders to society as law-abiding citizens. The researchers believe that most people reject the idea that nothing works (the philosophy that society should lock offenders up and throw away the key) but want assurances of safety. Furthermore, the two researchers indicate that legislators and other criminal justice policymakers overestimate the public's desire for punishment and underestimate its support for rehabilitation. Polling data from the 1995 National Opinion Survey on Crime and Justice seem to support this notion that there is considerable support for rehabilitation programs, particularly for juvenile offenders, when these programs are not posed as alternatives to incarceration (Flanagan & Longmire, 1996). Rather than pushing for rehabilitation as an alternative to the correctional goals of incapacitation and punishment or asserting the rights of inmates to these programs,

supporters of correctional education might argue more effectively that inmates should be held responsible for a weekly regimen, comparable in time and energy with that of working citizens, and that this regimen will best prepare them to reintegrate into society. Correctional education and treatment programs can and should help "normalize" the correctional experience (Harer, 1995a) and teach socially productive skills.

Does Correctional Education Reduce Recidivism?

For the past half-century, researchers in the field of adult treatment programs for offenders have attempted to find statistically significant and causal connections between treatment programming and reduced recidivism in literally thousands of studies. Although there has been some examination of other positive outcome measures for correctional treatment programs, such as their ability to improve offenders' institutional behavior and increase literacy and vocational skills, the search for lowered recidivism rates has been the field's holy grail. Political support for educational programs has been centered squarely on claims to reduce recidivism. Unfortunately, Gaes et al. (1998) explain that education and treatment programs have not been designed or optimized to reduce recidivism: "The design and delivery of educational programs has commonly violated many of the principles of effective correctional treatment. . . . Education programs in prison have not been directed to specific criminogenic needs of offenders, have not been part of a multimodal intervention strategy, have not considered responsivity effects, have not been tailored to address the needs of offenders in different risk classifications, and have not been adequately funded to permit the high doses of educational intervention that many offenders require."

If part of the explanation for the ambiguous findings linking programs to reduced recidivism rates is poorly and inadequately designed correctional education programs, another part is that most of the evaluations of these programs are methodologically flawed. The vast majority of studies are retrospective in nature. They examine programs that occurred in the past and have had no control over what data were collected. Information revealing the true quality of educational program design and the extent of the inmates' participation and progress is often lacking or available only for small numbers of inmates. Because many studies have been conducted by agencies administering the programs, there is also an inherent bias to publish positive findings. The fact sheet on the National Institute for Literacy Web site describes a Virginia study that claimed to find that out of a sample of three thousand inmates, 49 percent of those who did not participate in correctional education programs were reincarcerated compared with only 20 percent of those who did participate in these programs. Such dramatic reductions in recidivism are not found in more carefully conducted studies (National Institute for

Literacy Web site). Most studies fail to consider the fact that educational programs may enroll inmates who are more predisposed to low recidivism rates. This problem makes it difficult for researchers to separate the effect of correctional education programs on recidivism rate reductions if more motivated and better prepared inmates self-select into programs.

The term recidivism itself is open to interpretation and makes the findings of studies difficult to compare. Some studies observe the criminal activity of offenders for only a matter of months following release from prison, and others for years. Some define recidivism to include any further involvement in the criminal justice system. Thus, an offender who technically violates his term of probation because of a failed drug test is statistically equivalent to an offender who commits a new and more serious crime. Other studies employ a narrow definition and include only offenders who are reincarcerated in the same correctional system; they exclude cases in which an offender may be incarcerated in another jurisdiction, a point that also raises the issue of the difficulty of obtaining accurate criminal history, education, and economic information on offenders after their release (Kling, 1999; Needels, 1996).

THREE NOTEWORTHY STUDIES. One of the most comprehensive and sophisticated correctional education studies conducted examined the recidivism rates of a representative sample of 1,205 FBOP inmates released during the first six months of 1987. The author of the study, Miles Harer (1995b), a senior researcher with the Office of Research and Evaluation for the FBOP, found that 41 percent of all offenders "recidivated," which he defined as being rearrested, reconvicted, or reincarcerated within three years of release. He found that recidivism rates were inversely related to participation in correctional education programs. The more education programs successfully completed for each six months of confinement, the lower the recidivism rate was. For inmates successfully completing one or more courses per each six months of their prison term, 35.5 percent recidivated compared with 44.0 percent of those who completed no courses during their prison term, controlling for other important predictors of recidivism, such as age and prior criminal history.

Harer found that the more years of schooling offenders had completed prior to imprisonment, the less likely they were to recidivate. Individuals with only some high school experience recidivated at a rate of 54.6 percent compared with 5.4 percent of college graduates. Similarly, Harer found that offenders who were employed full time or had attended school for at least six months within two years before they entered prison had a

recidivism rate of 25.6 percent compared with 60.2 percent for those who were not so engaged. This study, as the author noted, suffers from some of the methodological problems described previously. The focus on evaluating correctional education programs was ancillary to the study's main purpose to calibrate instruments used by the FBOP to predict recidivism. Nevertheless, this study serves as a model for other retrospective evaluations in the thoroughness of the data collection and the sophistication of the analysis.

A second correctional education study warranting special attention tracked fourteen thousand inmates released from Texas prisons between March 1991 and December 1992 and tallied those who recidivated on or before March 1994 (Criminal Justice Center, 1994). Although the study design suffers from inadequately matched control and treatment groups and an all-too-brief observational period, it uniquely captured the length of time offenders were exposed to education programs, information that was not available in Harer's study. The Criminal Justice Center found that inmates who had logged more than three hundred hours in programs had a recidivism rate of 16.6 percent, while those inmates with fewer than one hundred hours of exposure had a recidivism rate of 24.0 percent. Furthermore, the study found that programming had the greatest effect on inmates at the lower grade levels, though hours of program participation resulted in lower levels of reincarceration for inmates at all grade levels.

The most current research project in correctional education is an ongoing, two-phase, three-state recidivism study involving a cohort of one thousand inmates released in each of the state correctional facilities of Ohio, Maryland, and Minnesota in 1997. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Correctional Education, the first phase of this study involves administering and analyzing a comprehensive education and background survey and educational test of the three thousand inmates. The survey gathered information on the educational, treatment, and other prison experiences of the inmates, along with some personal and family data. The Test of Adult Basic Education was used to gauge literacy levels in math and reading. The second phase of the project involves using state criminal history and probation and parole records to evaluate recidivism rates and labor market performance. According to one of the researchers, Stephen Steurer, early results from the Maryland data indicate that those participating in educational programs show an 8 percent differential in recidivism rates (Stephen Steurer, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2000). The final report from this study is expected in 2001.

Although these studies report rather modest recidivism rate differentials of 7.0 to 8.5 percent, a simple calculation demonstrates the significant potential return on investment for correctional education programs even

at this level of reported success. The chief statistician of the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 41 percent of the 546,000 inmates released in 1998 will have been reincarcerated within three years of release (Beck, 2000b). If this population recidivated at a lower differential rate of 8 percent, or 33 percent, as a result of correctional education programming, 43,680 fewer inmates would be reincarcerated over this period. Assuming the inmates diverted from prison by correctional education programming would have served the average sentence length of twenty-seven months at a cost of incarceration of \$25,000 per inmate per year, the cost savings would amount to almost \$2.46 billion per release cohort over three years. Factoring in the \$1.36 billion estimated cost required to provide a quality correctional education programming investment for the 546,000 released inmates during their average prison sentence (assuming a cost of \$1,000 per inmate per year on correctional education-a much higher figure than most systems' reported expenditures-and a twenty-seven-month average time served), correctional education programming would provide a return on investment of 81 percent over the first three years. These figures do not include the additional savings that would occur as a result of reduced welfare payments and other government transfer programs, as well as the income and sales taxes that these individuals diverted from prison would contribute to the general tax revenue.

LITERATURE REVIEW. A review of the literature on correctional education always begins with a review of more than two hundred treatment studies by Robert Martinson that was published in the journal *Public Interest* in 1974, which hung the skeptical "nothing works" placard over adult rehabilitative programs for offenders. Five years later Martinson changed his mind (Martinson, 1979). In a later series of literature reviews, other researchers found that treatment programs, when properly designed and implemented, did indeed show modestly lower recidivism rates (Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau & Ross, 1983-1984, 1987; Cullen & Gendreau, 1989; Palmer, 1994).

A literature review of sixty correctional education programs by Gerber and Fritsch (Criminal Justice Center, 1994) also found evidence in support of such programs (see also Adams et al., 1994). The authors found credible studies that showed a lowered recidivism rate for participants in precollege adult basic education (ABE) programs and college education programs and found that offenders in vocational programs performed better on a variety of measures, including institutional behavior and employment patterns; in all cases participant behavior was contrasted with that of nonparticipants. Gerber and Fritsch nonetheless added this important caveat: "Other research has suggested that the most stable predictors of recidivism may be age at first arrest, age upon release, ethnicity, gender, living arrangements, family ties,

current income, and history of drug and alcohol abuse. These latter factors are well beyond the control of prison educators. It may be therefore unrealistic to expect prison education to have a substantial effect on recidivism."

The most comprehensive review of the correctional treatment literature for adults and juveniles was commissioned in 1998 and is nearing completion. The CDATE project (Lipton, Pearson, Cleland, & Yee, 1998, cited in Gaes, Flanagan, Motiuk, & Stewart, 1998) is a meta-analysis, a literature review that uses statistical techniques to control for study differences. It aims to review more than fifteen hundred juvenile and adult correctional treatment studies. Based on the results of nine hundred studies in which recidivism is used as an outcome, the CDATE project has found a modest average effect size of .03 to .06 for adult treatment programs, including correctional education. This means that for a given population of offenders whose probability of recidivating is 60 percent, correctional education and other treatment programs can effect a lowering of this rate from 57 percent to 54 percent (Gaes et al., 1998).

NOTEWORTHY PROGRAMS AND IDEAS

Although I have catalogued many of the challenges and problems the correctional education programs face, many excellent programs currently exist.⁴

Maryland

The Maryland Department of Education, which runs the state department of corrections' educational program, deserves much credit for adopting a rigorous and comprehensive data collection system that allows the state to track overall performance by student, program, and prison. Steven Steurer, coordinator of correctional academic education in Maryland and executive director of the CEA, explained that his agency decided to implement the same reporting requirements applied to schools under Maryland's new K-12 school reform efforts to promote greater accountability. Steurer says that he has seen GED pass rates increase from 50 percent to 75 percent and seen more GEDs awarded overall now that the performance of individual prisons can be measured. The state superintendent of schools has also singled out the correctional education program's achievement (Steurer, personal communication, June 29, 2000).⁵

Federal Bureau of Prisons

The FBOP has used a similar strategy to make wardens mindful that they are being held accountable for the performance of the educational programs within their specific institutions. This federal agency, an arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, is highly respected within the

correctional field for many of its innovations, mostly related to its security and prison management practices. The FBOP has the distinction of being the only federal agency that has never had a politically appointed director from outside the agency. Correctional researchers have commented on the consistency in operations between the FBOP's nearly one hundred prisons located around the country compared with most systems operating in any one state. The FBOP has maintained a strong correctional education program in all of its facilities and offers vocational training in seventy-three skill areas. The vocational programs vary in depth from exploratory programs, intended to introduce students to an occupation, to marketable programs, intended to provide students with entry-level marketable skills, to the most intense apprenticeship programs, which are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training.

In 1996, the FBOP's Federal Prison Industries division established the Inmate Placement Bureau to provide inmates released from federal custody with more comprehensive job placement services (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1998). The bureau has actively implemented mock job fairs within the federal penal system, where employers provide inmates with an opportunity to practice their interviewing and job-seeking skills. It is a mock or simulated job fair largely because inmates serving time in federal facilities typically return to different parts of the country; the employers recruited for the fair are located in the surrounding areas of the facility. The FBOP has also encouraged other state and local correctional systems to host job fairs. In Ohio, the Department of Corrections holds actual job fairs, and inmates interview with company representatives for actual position openings that may be available to them upon release. Taking the private-public partnership one step further, the FBOP's Federal Prison Industries plans to launch an initiative whereby employers can identify inmates who have the aptitude and interest to work with them on release and the federal agency will train and relocate these inmates to the federal facility nearest the company.

The FBOP is also the agency that best combines excellent programs with quality research. Its research division is among the most respected and strongest in the correctional field and has published important studies on the effectiveness of correctional education and prison work programs noted in this chapter.

Oregon

The Oregon Department of Corrections, in an effort to comply with the 1994 Prison Reform and Inmate Work Act, overhauled its assessment, treatment planning, case management, and program incentive processes. This agency adopted an automated assessment process that efficiently

identifies offenders' security issues, health problems, education and workforce development deficits, and treatment program needs and records the information in a database that is then used for effective incarceration and transition planning. These plans are developed and monitored throughout offenders' incarceration by institutional counselors. The counselors map out a sequence of daily education and treatment programming amounting to twenty hours a week, along with twenty hours a week of workforce development training for inmates' entire projected length of stay. The workforce training is cleverly structured in graduated steps from institutional jobs, to specific vocational training, to actual job training, and to prison industry positions and is timed to coincide with offenders' release dates (Oregon Department of Corrections, 1998).

In addition, Oregon implemented a reward system to encourage "prosocial" behavior in education, treatment, and work assignments. In the Performance Recognition and Award System, inmates earn points for successfully completing their plans and can use these points to earn canteen money and additional institutional privileges. Institutional misconduct or unsatisfactory program participation leads to the loss of points (Oregon Department of Corrections, 1998). Oregon is also conducting task force meetings involving other correctional agencies to develop the ability to share this information (Mary F. DeLateur, personal communication, March 28, 1999).

Ohio

The correctional "school district" within the Ohio Department of Corrections runs perhaps the largest and most comprehensive correctional education program in the country relative to the size of the state's inmate population. To gain legislative support, those sponsoring the program have provided good data on its effectiveness, including a report finding that inmates in the state system who earned GEDs had lower recidivism rates than those who did not have the GED. Ohio is the clear leader nationwide in the use of technology for the delivery of distance-learning programs in corrections and has developed a sophisticated computer network linking all programs offered. The state has also used this technology to offer an excellent college program for inmates. Furthermore the state correctional system has devoted considerable resources to job readiness and prerelease programs and is developing programs that integrate training, industries, and education (TIE) programs. The so-called TIE model has been part of a comprehensive strategy to prepare inmates for the workforce and has involved the business community.

Canada

The Correctional Services of Canada deserves special mention for the

quality of its programs and research, particularly in the light of Canada's comparatively small inmate population. In Edmonton, Alberta, the Canadian correctional agency has developed a certificate of competence program for various vocational education programs, institutional work assignments, and prison industries that documents the skills demonstrated by students and accredits them through the Continuing Education Division of Concordia College (Correctional Education Association, 1997).

Adult Basic Education Programs

Many correctional agencies across the country have introduced innovative curricula within their ABE correctional educational programs. At the Boston-based Suffolk County House of Correction, instructors have adapted the famous Nebraska's Boys' Town reading curriculum to an inmate population with very low literacy skills. This curriculum, taught in four levels (foundations, adventures, mastery, and exploration), teaches English proficiency by first introducing spelling and phoneme rules and then concentrating on vocabulary development and writing skills through the skillful use of quality literature and technology (personal interview with Debbie Cooper, Nov. 1999).

Reading programs in Milpitas, California, and the Massages program in Waterboro, Maine, are good examples of programs that have infused correctional education with up-to-date ideas circulating in ABE. They have introduced into the prison system the Equipped for the Future curriculum framework developed by the National Institute for Literacy to teach skills that adults need in their roles as workers, family members, and community residents (Lisa Levinson, e-mail communication, Dec. 13, 1999).

The California Department of Youth Authority introduced a mandatory high-skill and high-standard high school diploma as part of its "no diploma, no parole" program. This award-winning program provides strong incentives for youthful offenders to obtain a high school diploma as an alternative to the GED to prepare them better for the workforce and higher education opportunities (Innovations in American Government Program, 1999).

Inmates at the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Faribault are given incentives to attend ABE programs for full days, receiving wages comparable with those paid by industry assignments. In Texas, the Windham school system, which runs educational programs for the state's department of corrections, has attempted to integrate into its adult education and vocational education programming the skills identified in the Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), which identifies the minimum

skills needed for entry-level workers in high-performance companies.

Federal Legislation

At the federal level, the U.S. mandatory literacy law threshold was raised to the twelfth-grade level, and more recent legislation provided additional incentives to encourage inmates to participate in programs. Inmates now must continue to enroll in ABE programs until they demonstrate competencies at the GED level in order to earn time off their sentences, so-called good time. Offenders are also eligible for pay raises in prison industry jobs only if they complete their GED (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1998).

Mandatory literacy laws are mixed blessings. Although they can significantly increase inmate participation, they often serve as unfunded mandates for programs and provide no resources for additional programs. Even the Oregon law, which requires inmates to engage in forty hours of workforce development activities each week, provided very little money after its initial implementation, and program administrators continue to struggle to meet the objectives of the legislation. Nonetheless, as a statement of principle, these laws obligate institutions and inmates to offer and enroll in correctional education programs.

Correctional Education Association

The CEA has developed and promulgated a set of correctional education standards that has been recognized by the American Correctional Association, the main accrediting body for correctional institutions. These standards have also been recommended by several government agencies in the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. The CEA has also trained corrections professionals from around the country to conduct field audits to evaluate the compliance of educational programs with the seventy-eight standards covering all aspects of educational programming, including program budget, instructor compensation, and student assessment procedures, of which twenty-four are required standards. The CEA Standards Committee has continued to develop additional standards and recently issued forty-seven postsecondary education standards that have been used to accredit college-level courses in Ohio. This committee, soon to be called a commission, will shortly be considering additional standards focused on curriculum (Stephen Steurer, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2000).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH

Few of the nation's 6 million offenders under correctional supervision are adequately prepared to live productive and law-abiding lives on release from custody, as evidenced by the high recidivism rates of state

prisoners-62 percent arrested within three years and 41 percent returned to prison-and parolees and probationers. Correctional education programs can and should play a significant role in helping offenders, who on average have poor educational backgrounds, to develop their literacy, academic, and vocational skills and to assist them in a successful transition back into their communities. Unfortunately, these programs now enroll a small percentage of the inmate population, and resources for these programs have significantly lagged the precipitous rise in the offender population, which on average is serving longer sentences. In addition, correctional education programs fail to provide offenders with a continuum of educational treatment services as the offenders journey between and within correctional agencies. These programs also rarely have significant links with ABE programs operating in the community. Finally, the curriculum and standards of correctional education need considerable updating in the light of the increasing skill demands in the nation's economy.

Inadequate resources, programs of inconsistent quality and effectiveness, high student attrition, poor coordination with other institutions, dearth of good data and research, mercurial political support: the litany of problems described in this chapter is not unique to correctional education. What distinguishes the challenges faced by correctional education are related primarily to the institutional settings and the demographics of the populations. By definition, these programs operate within agencies that traditionally view treatment programming as ancillary to their primary goals of care, custody, and control-the oft-quoted correctional mission triad. This gives rise to challenges that frustrate the enormous potential and possibilities of correctional education programs to intervene effectively with students, including a significant percentage of young black and Hispanic males, who have time on their hands, have fewer family responsibilities and face temptations to drop out of programming, and can be mandated to attend programs while under correctional supervision.

In his noted 1964 study, *The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System*, Daniel Glaser identified many of the same problems and challenges faced by correctional education in 1960, when he remarked, "American prisons, especially those for youthful inmates, have been distinctive for the extent of their investment in educational programs." Although the same statement could not have been made in the past twenty-five years, it is all the more remarkable that correctional education as a field has marched forward, through the efforts of thousands of dedicated practitioners and the leadership of numerous government and professional organizations in the face of political support shifting away from these programs. There are countless examples, many unpublicized, of well-designed and well-implemented

programs operating around the country that are making differences in the lives of offenders every day and yielding significant societal benefits. Developing a new political constituency to support and promote effective programs, upgrading and expanding program offerings, and launching more and higher-quality research linking programs to reduced recidivism rates are three of the major challenges that must be addressed to reframe the politics and practices of correctional education if it is to serve a much larger percentage of the offender population with comprehensive educational programs more effectively. Following are specific recommendations on how such reframing might be accomplished.

Policy

- Develop a wider political constituency for correctional education programs. Increased and long-term support for correctional education programs will not occur unless organizations representing those groups most affected by corrections—including African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and the mentally ill—join other advocacy groups for prisoner rights and make this issue a priority for their members. The CEA, the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute's Center on Crime, Communities, and Culture, the Urban Institute, and the Taskforce on Correctional Education, chaired by the board director of the FBOP, along with other groups, should collaborate to help build this political constituency. Given the significant labor shortages in the nation's economy, federal, state, and local business groups might be enticed to participate in this effort as well. Political leadership from individuals such as Arlen Specter, the Republican senator from Pennsylvania, who has been the single most effective legislator at the national level for correctional education, and U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, who has recently raised the issue of the national need to prepare the more than one-half million inmates released from prison a year to reenter their communities, can and should be leveraged to build support for correctional education programs. Meetings and conferences would be helpful to educate these groups and policymakers about the scale of the problem and the potential solutions in the form of stronger and more effective correctional education programs.
- Reframe correctional education as part of an inmate accountability strategy that encompasses education, work, and treatment. Oregon's experience demonstrates the powerful effect of requiring inmates to engage in meaningful workforce development activities for a minimum of forty hours a week on both the correctional system's commitment to adult treatment programming and inmate participation. It also creates a model of correctional education

founded on accountability that is much more acceptable politically than other models. Education, work, and treatment should form the foundation for inmate programming in correctional institutions and should be extensively linked. Heretofore, prison industries and correctional education have not been integrated. Each field has its own professional association, and institutionally these programs are typically operated by different departments (the exception is the federal system). Well-regarded studies demonstrate that participation in prison industry programs contributes to lower rates of recidivism. Prison industries and meaningful work assignments provide excellent experience in modeling the behavior and skills needed to obtain and retain employment. Similarly, better coordination between correctional education and substance abuse, anger management, and other treatment programming will strengthen the effectiveness of each of these programs.

- Promote mandatory literacy laws with high standards. Mandatory literacy laws have proven effective to increase the demand for correctional education programs in the twenty-six states that have implemented them. Unfortunately, they have often served as unfunded mandates for programs that have resulted in longer waiting lists instead of expanded services. Nonetheless, these laws establish an important principle for a correctional system about the importance of correctional education. Taking the lead from the federal system, the laws should require inmate participation in programs until a GED reading and math level is achieved and should tie other institutional incentives such as wages and time off sentence for good behavior to program participation.
- Support increased funding for Specter grants and a relaxation of the age qualifications to age twenty-nine. With the disappearance of Pell grants, fewer postsecondary opportunities are available to inmates. The Specter grants would be a more useful vehicle to replace these funds if they were larger and were available to offenders under the age of twenty-nine. Specter grants are now available only to offenders under twenty-five years of age, and the grant program totals \$17 million for fiscal year 2001.
- Support legislative and administrative efforts to decrease the barriers to employment for individuals with criminal histories. The stigma of a criminal record has become more severe as the economy's service sector has markedly increased in size and as tort liability for harassment and injuries in workplaces has skyrocketed. Furthermore, some states prohibit the hiring of individuals for certain jobs. Correctional education advocates should advocate for programs that mitigate the financial liabilities of employers who hire offenders, such as the Federal Bonding program and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program. The bonding program

essentially insures the employer against any financial loss as the result of hiring an offender; the WOTC provides employers with tax credits to subsidize the employment of offenders during the initial year. Advocates for offenders should attempt to ensure that any laws restricting the hiring of offenders have a basis in public safety. Also, some academicians have recently raised the issue of providing a criminal history amnesty program for nonviolent first-time offenders who agree to participate in further education and treatment programming for a prescribed period of time.

- Provide greater discharge planning and postrelease services for offenders. Correctional education is an important and crucial element that helps offenders make the transition to the community. However, these and other treatment programs need to be coordinated as part of an overall discharge plan that addresses such issues as transportation, identifications (many inmates lose their IDs in prison), housing, and the like. It is crucial that resources be available to offenders postrelease from a correctional facility to continue to assist and support offenders as well as to allow them to continue educational programming.

Practice

- Update and upgrade correctional education programs. Correctional education programs should aim to prepare and equip offenders with the knowledge and training needed to succeed in the current economy. Equipped for the Future and SCANS provide useful frameworks for developing relevant curriculum. Computer and other technology should be integrated into all programs. In addition, correctional education programs should offer transition, or bridge, programs that provide writing and numeracy classes beyond the GED level that prepare inmates for higher education opportunities. The GED, the mainstay of many correctional education programs, is slated for a significant revision and upgrading in 2002. Correctional education programs must consider the necessary pedagogical and curriculum changes needed to prepare students for the GED 2002, which promises to incorporate many of the new high school graduation skill requirements implemented across the country.
- Encourage involvement of the business and private sector in the employment and training of offenders under correctional supervision. Successful postrelease employment will largely determine the ability of offenders to continue educational and treatment programming and to prevent the resumption of criminal activity. Training programs set up in coordination with businesses that agree to hire offenders postrelease, job fairs, and other

initiatives that help offenders gain entry into the labor market should be encouraged. These initiatives also serve a public relations benefit in demonstrating the eagerness of many offenders to work diligently and competently in jobs.

- Provide more information about best practices in corrections, using the resources of the Internet. Because of geographical and institutional isolation, correctional education programs often operate independently. The U.S. Office of Correctional Education, the CEA, and the National Institute for Literacy should jointly promote professionally managed listservs to develop a national discussion on correctional education issues (the CEA has listservs on its Web site). In addition, the Office of Correctional Education should include on its Web site information relating to national and state correctional education standards, descriptions of best practices in the field, and downloadable curriculum.
- Promote CEA correctional education standards and incorporate additional performance criteria. The current standards for correctional education promulgated by the CEA are an excellent starting point to ensure a basic level of performance by correctional education programs. More correctional institutions should be encouraged to adopt and receive certification on these standards. The efforts to expand these standards and add performance requirements with regard to the actual delivery of educational services should continue. Quality educational programs should meet specific performance requirements with regard to enrollment percentages, program offerings, program design, and data collection.

Research

- Support rigorously designed longitudinal studies of well-designed correctional education programs to demonstrate the effectiveness of correctional education in reducing recidivism. The public and policymakers will dramatically increase support for correctional education only if evidence from scientifically valid studies demonstrates that these programs contribute to the public safety and save tax dollars by reducing the recidivism rate. The Office of Correctional Education, which is funding a three-state retrospective study, should consider funding prospective longitudinal studies of existing programs that have the potential-through solid design and implementation of services-to reduce recidivism. In addition, all correctional education programs should collect information that provides accurate information about the scope and quality of their services.
- Establish extensive involvement in the preparations for the second

NALS (the NAAL) in 2002. The 2002 NAAL will serve as the definitive assessment of the literacy proficiencies of a national sampling of offenders in state corrections for the next decade. The 1992 NALS has proven extremely valuable in its literacy assessment of the prison population, as well as in the information collected on family backgrounds, criminal histories, work and education experience, and program participation of offenders. Representatives from the field should participate in developing the survey for the 2002 NAAL. In addition, both the survey and assessment instruments should be made available to correctional education programs to encourage them to align their data collection systems with the NAAL.

- Provide greater support and research for correctional education programs in community corrections that are linked with programs in prisons and jails. Correctional education programs for probationers, parolees, and those under conditional supervision in intermediate sanction are neither well developed nor well understood. Given that inmates in secure facilities often do not complete correctional education programs because of their frequent movement within the corrections system, there is a critical need to offer linked programs in community correctional settings that would allow offenders to continue their education. The Office of Correctional Education can and should play a role in funding initiatives in this area. This is a fruitful area for collaboration between ABE programs and corrections.
- Fund a best practices survey in correctional education. The National Institute of Justice, the National Institute of Corrections, and the U.S. Office of Correctional Education have collaborated on a series of publications highlighting best practices in offender job training, placement, and retention. The field would also benefit from more comprehensive and critical surveys of best practices in adult education correctional programs, vocational programming, and community correction programming. In addition, Oregon's initiatives to revamp correctional treatment programs merit a critical qualitative evaluation funded at the federal level.

Notes

1. Sources of the opening quotes by Justice Warren Burger and Malcolm X are, respectively, Vocational Education in Correctional Institutions, a report based on hearings conducted by the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education, March 1981, referencing Burger's February 8, 1981, presentation to the American Bar Association, and The Autobiography of Malcolm X, written with the assistance of Alex Haley (New York: Grove Press,

1964), p. 396.

2. A complete analysis of the National Adult Literacy Survey of 1992 on prisoners is provided in Haigler et al. (1994) and in a subsequent article by Paul Barton, a senior researcher from the Educational Testing Service, the organization that conducted the survey (Barton & Coley, 1996). The only other national survey of the inmate population's educational background was administered in 1991 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. A survey of fourteen thousand inmates found that only 34 percent had their high school diplomas, and another 25 percent had the GED. This survey did not assess literacy skills.
3. Correctional education is funded primarily through budget appropriations for state departments of corrections and inmate welfare and commissary funds. This latter funding source represents the profits from the sale of commissary items to inmates and, most important, a portion of the surcharges applied to inmates' use of telephones. In most jurisdictions, the fund is restricted to expenditures that directly benefit inmates, such as educational programming. Wyoming uses these funds for scholarships for postsecondary education programs. Texas uses state funds to establish loans to pay for postsecondary programs that prisoners must pay back on release. In the federal correctional system, the Federal Bureau of Prisons uses some of the profits from the Federal Prison Industries to fund vocational and postsecondary educational programs.

Federal programs provide additional sources of funding for correctional programs. Under the original federal Adult Education Act, which was reauthorized in 1988 and amended to become the National Literacy Act of 1991, the U.S. Department of Education required states to set aside a minimum 10 percent of all federal adult education funds for corrections (Elliott, 1998). In 1998, Title II (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) changed the 10 percent set-aside from a floor to a ceiling amount. This same act also changed the amount of funds set aside for vocational programming from a 1 percent minimum to a 1 percent cap, which has markedly reduced the amount of funds for training programs under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act and Job Training Partnership Act. For fiscal year 2000, the WIA provided \$450 million in federal funds to states for adult education programs, of which a maximum of \$45 million can be allocated for correctional education programs.

Some states supplement these federal funds with a portion of their

own state funding of adult education programming. In Massachusetts, the state Department of Education matches the WIA funds for corrections dollar for dollar. The Title I Neglected and Delinquent program provides a significant amount of funds for inmates under the age of twenty-two; the IDEA, Part B's Special Education programs, provides a smaller amount of money for inmates in the same age group who have documented special education needs (Stephen Steurer, personal communication, June 29, 2000). The Bureau of Justice Assistance also funds education programs through the Edward Byrne Memorial Formula Grant program administered at the state level. Showing a greater willingness to fund programs for younger offenders, Congress in 1998 authorized the Workplace and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Youth Offenders. This program was introduced to provide opportunities for postsecondary education for offenders twenty-five years of age and younger who had been significantly impaired by the loss of Pell grant funding. Called Specter grants, after the chief congressional supporter of correctional education, Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania), they were funded for \$14 million in fiscal year 2000 and \$17 million in fiscal year 2001. Finally, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Correctional Education administers a \$5 million life skill reintegration program, which funds ten to thirteen competitively selected life skills programs at different institutions across the country for three years.

In the past several years, the Soros Foundation's Open Society Program has become a significant private funder of correctional education programs. It has funded an innovative higher education and training program for inmates in the Maryland Department of Corrections. The Maryland Department of Education, which runs the correctional education programs for the corrections department, has largely been able to sustain its higher education program through the use of Specter grants and Soros funds as a replacement for Pell grants. The Open Society Program has also funded a number of counselor positions to provide pre- and postrelease services (sometimes called reentry programs) for inmates leaving correctional facilities. Finally, the Department of Justice is considering a major \$145 million initiative to fund reentry courts, which would serve as intermediate sanction programs. These courts would presumably promote correctional education and treatment programs.

In terms of budget appropriations, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that state expenditures in 1996 for inmate prison programs

such as work activities (prison industries and facility support services), correctional educational, substance abuse treatment, and recreation activities amounted to \$1.23 billion nationwide, or 6 percent of the nation's total state prison expenditures, with considerable variation by region. In the northeastern and western regions of the country, state correctional systems devoted 7 to 8 percent of their budget to these programs and spent on average \$1,800 per inmate annually. By contrast, the Midwest and the South devoted only 4.3 percent and 4.1 percent, respectively, of total prison expenditures to such programs, which works out to \$989 and \$634, respectively, per inmate annually. The Bureau of Justice Statistics cautions that these figures may be seriously underreported owing to the inability of almost a quarter of the state correctional systems to break out program costs from general operating costs and to the failure to include costs expended by other state agencies for support programming (Stephan, 1999).

Estimates of the total amount of funding targeted for correctional education programs differ markedly by data source. The lower bound is provided by statistics gathered by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (Elliot, 1998). Its 1998 report indicates that the total correctional education expenditures for adult education programs increased from \$9.1 million in 1986 to \$45.3 million in 1994, with federal and state contributions amounting to \$3.9 million and \$5.2 million in 1986 and \$28.2 million and \$17.2 million in 1994, respectively (Elliot, 1998). Although these figures neither include the cost of vocational, life skill, and postsecondary programs nor account for inflation and the rise in the inmate population, they differ by an order of magnitude with those reported in a 1996 survey of forty-one correctional systems and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The publication *Corrections Compendium* (1997) reported that \$413 million was spent in 1996 by the U.S. prison system. These figures are more in line with a noted correctional education researcher's surveys conducted in 1983 and 1995 (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Woodard, 1987). The disparity in the reported expenditures stems from the Bureau of Justice Statistics caution that many correctional systems track their budget for treatment programs independent of other operations.

4. Before describing some of these programs, I should say something about the way in which such "best practices" are determined in correctional education programs, which, unlike ABE programs, are difficult to visit. In 1998, the American Correctional Association published *Best Practices: Excellence in Corrections*, which

highlighted five correctional education programs. While I do not dispute the quality of the programs selected, the selection process was arbitrary and solicited programs to submit written descriptions of their "best practices" for national competition, which few did. The Oregon Department of Corrections (1998) published a brochure about its rehabilitative treatment programs that the department itself actually titled Best Practices. Few programs are able to offer substantive and objective data that would bolster their claim as conducting the "best practices" in correctional education. Many simply provide program descriptions and goals and do not state whether these programs have been fully implemented or have attained their objectives. Nor do they provide information on program sustainability and longevity.

5. Maryland is also an example of the changing fortunes of correctional education programs. In 1991, the entire correctional education staff in the state received pink slips and faced dramatic reductions in their hours and programs. Through legislative lobbying efforts, the pink slips were rescinded after a considerable fight.

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[Chapter 5](#) ➡