

Education in prison the effectiveness and justification of letting prisoners learn...

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [INTRODUCTION](#) \n \t
2. [HACIENDA LA PUENTE](#) \n \t
3. [THE DEBATE - IS HACIENDA LA PUENTE'S PROGRAM A GOOD IDEA?](#) \n \t
4. [CONCLUSION](#) \n \t
5. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

INTRODUCTION

Overcrowded jails filled with violent inmates. Prisons segregated by race. (deliberate fragment). The California prison system currently holds approximately 316, 000 inmates across 33 state prisons and dozens of other facilities of varying levels of security (CDCR, gov, 2012). More than 30, 000 of these inmates have life sentences. 93% of inmates are male, 7% female; 11. 7% of the prison population of California are parole violators. Almost 39% of the prison population of California is Hispanic, 29% black, 27% white and 6% other (CDCR. gov, 2012).

Parole and sentencing legislation in the state of California is far from unique in its handling of criminals with regards to their prison time. The Determinate Sentencing Law provides the ability for judges to sentence offenders to California state prisons for a set amount of time, depending on the severity of the crime and the verdict itself. The Indeterminate Sentencing Law (ISL), however, offers the freedom to sentence offenders to life with the possibility

of parole. The type of facility where the sentenced inmate goes depends on classification of factors like length of sentence and education, as well as employment and behavior (CDCR. gov, 2012).

This substantial population has, on average, an extremely poor education. The average reading level for an inmate is that of someone in seventh grade, despite the average age of inmates being 36. This is not a problem unique to California; 41% of inmates nationwide and nearly one third of people on probation still do not have a full high school education. College-level courses are much more rarely taken advantage of by prison inmates than the general population, with 11% state prison inmates having attended college of any kind (Harlow, 2003).

A lack of education creates a vicious cycle of criminal activity, as many people are not given proper education and vocational training to give themselves the chance to rise above their standing. Among the most prevalent reasons listed for inmates dropping out of school were academic problems, diminished interest in school, or behavior and disciplinary problems. Some had economic issues that prevented them from dropping out of school. This leads to poor prison education rates, with 75% or more of the state's prison population not having a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003). With no other way to pay the bills or to deal with their own poor situations, these inmates often return to crime. This dangerous Moebius strip of personal and societal destruction can be easily mitigated through the use of education, and prison is the ideal place for this to occur.

Recidivism rates in California are still somewhat high, and remain a continuing concern for those wishing to conduct successful rehabilitation programs. Within three years of being released from prison, 70% of California prisoners often go back to prison, making it the highest recidivism rate in America (CDCR. gov, 2012). In order to lower these recidivism rates, prisons in California have been conducting myriad initiatives to provide inmates with drug treatment, counseling, housing assistance. (asyndeton) Whatever can increase the length of time of a released inmate staying out of prison goes a long way towards keeping them from returning. (antithesis)

With that in mind, there are also many questions that people have regarding the usefulness of educating prisoners. To many, it is an issue of using taxpayer dollars to arguably "reward" prisoners for being in prison by receiving education. Others believe there is no point in educating prisoners, as they will not be receptive to education, or that education is a privilege that should be reserved for those who follow society's rules. However, there are also those who believe that the need for prisoner education is paramount if they are to ever become productive members of society, and that the circumstances that led them to a life of crime could be mitigated or prevented with the receiving of education. The Hacienda La Puente Correction Education Program is but one of these prison education programs that seeks to accomplish this goal.

[The issue of whether or not prison inmates should be afforded the chance to receive an education must be a resounding yes. Due to the overwhelming evidence and research showing the benefits of education towards job

prospects and recidivism, the continued existence and support of prison education programs is encouraged. Regardless of the crimes a person has committed to land them in prison, the myriad societal benefits that can be found from educating and rehabilitating said criminal cannot be overstated.]

HACIENDA LA PUENTE

The Hacienda La Puente Correctional Education Program provides academic instruction at jail sites, including ESL (English as a Second Language), Literacy and Training in Basic Skills, GED equivalency certificate preparation and instruction to help inmates gain Adult School Diploma (Hacienda La Puente, 2012). These programs have a number of beneficial effects on prisoners, not the least of which is important training in the English language, which makes them more viable as employment candidates. Teaching these inmates how to read offers them the chance to benefit from the tools they need to effectively interact with their fellow man, and GED equivalency allows them to at least have a complete secondary school education.

Hacienda La Puente offers Basic Skills Training to inmates which fulfill the life skills defined in the California Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), including reading, writing, spelling and vocabulary (Hacienda La Puente, 2012). Math skills are also included to provide a well-rounded core of education for these individuals. These skills are incredibly important to all individuals who wish to participate in modern American society, as well as adult human beings - to that end, this Correctional Education Program seeks to arm inmates with the skills they will need to succeed on the outside.

The academic curriculum for Hacienda La Puente furthers the CASAS Life Skills category fulfillment, with courses in Health & Safety, Consumer Economics, Community Resources, Government & Law, and Occupational Knowledge (Hacienda La Puente, 2012). These include individualized instruction for each inmate according to their speed, as well as small group presentations by teachers and inmates alike. Current instruction technology is utilized to keep the inmates apprised of advances in consumer and educational technology while they are in jail. Computer-assisted and video-assisted instruction, audio cards and the like are used to streamline education and make it efficient and easy for the inmate to learn.

Hacienda La Puente's efforts toward achieving literacy for their 230, 000 voluntary students are performed through the Correctional Education Literacy Program, in which materials covering all reading levels are provided to inmates, with tutors and classes meant to bring their reading levels up dramatically (Hacienda La Puente, 2012). On top of the academic education that inmates receive as a result of the Correctional Education Program, a wide variety of vocational training is provided as well. The instructors there provide a number of courses that permit practical job training for inmates to make them potentially employable once their sentences are finished. The jobs they can learn are numerous: cooking, carpentry, welding, computer-aided drafting, construction, cosmetology, graphic artist, maintenance, office worker (asyndeton). This manner of vocational training is a very advantageous supplement to the academic training and basic life skills they are learning from the other programs Hacienda La Puente offers; not only do

they get the chance to catch up with the rest of their peers on an educational level, they get the chance to have a marketable job skill to legally and legitimately sustain themselves once they are out.

Hacienda La Puente's program has proven itself to be highly effective. In a single year, over 600 GED certificates were handed to students of the Correctional Education Program, as well as around 6, 000 academic & vocational certificates (Hacienda La Puente, 2012). The program has also received accolades from the Educational Testing Service in Pasadena, California, naming it one of the most exemplary literacy programs in the United States. Given the huge turnover rates and graduation statistics of the Correctional Education Program, it is safe to say that the program itself is working immensely well.

THE DEBATE - IS HACIENDA LA PUENTE'S PROGRAM A GOOD IDEA?

The Hacienda La Puente program's mission is predicated on the idea that everyone, no matter who they are, deserves the right to expand their minds and scope of knowledge. The idea of education as a human right is paramount to the notion of correctional education; regardless of the crime that the inmate has committed, they must be allowed to improve their knowledge base if they so desire. It is extremely difficult to reintegrate into civilian life, particularly if one was offered limited life skills and academic education to begin with. Those who forfeit their place in society are the ones who desire it the most (isocolon). The benefits of education are immense to anyone who seeks them; a greater understanding of the world, society,

language, math and more allows for a greater arsenal of skills with which to navigate the course of life. To that end, everyone should be given the opportunity to seek out the skills needed to survive. Convicts in particular have a unique stake in learning these life and job skills, as gaining employment and using many other services becomes much more difficult with the stigma of a prison sentence upon you (absolute phrases).

The practicality of the program must be clear, both from a recidivism standpoint and a human rights standpoint; it is unequivocally a good thing that more people are more educated. Having a higher education has been shown to significantly decrease recidivism rates; education programs are meant to provide inmates with basic life skills and academic skills they need to survive once they are outside the prison system (Harlow, 2003). Often, having marketable job skills will also help; the vocational programs and courses offered by education programs like Hacienda La Puente go a long way toward providing legal means to make a living.

Gang violence and the like often comes about through providing disenfranchised youths with little education a way to make money and support themselves; purposefully avoiding school as they do so, they do not receive the same level of education that citizens normally do. Many individuals take the opportunity given to them in prison to learn, one that they would not have necessarily taken in civilian life; many state prisoners who lack a high school diploma have a high likelihood of taking classes after going to jail (Harlow, 2003).

Much of the debate regarding correctional education lies in the subject of monetary allocation - many of these programs, including Hacienda La Puente's, are funded through the California state government, using taxpayer dollars. Many people feel ripped off, disenfranchised, angry; they do not want to pay for someone else to receive an education who they feel does not deserve it (asyndeton). What people do not realize is that, upon release, these inmates have to reenter the real world, and have the opportunity to both support themselves and give something back to the community. (cleft sentence). Given that reintegrating into civilian life is extremely difficult, as the scarlet letter of prison time looms over even the most qualified and educated individuals, convicts should be given whatever tools they need to succeed and better themselves for the moment they get out of prison.

Race and ethnic inequalities often lead a higher proportion of blacks and Latinos ending up in jail; this is corroborated by the vast majority of California prison inmates belonging to ethnic minorities (CNCR. gov, 2012). Furthermore, more minority inmates lack a high school diploma or equivalent education than white inmates, often due to institutionalized societal pressures that make schools a much less appealing option. However, once in prison, they are given the opportunity to learn and gain an education; in this way, some of these racial and ethnic inequalities in terms of education can be addressed and mitigated. If a higher proportion of minority students are educated while in prison, this has the potential to provide more educated minorities in the civilian world once their time has been served.

The heart of the debate also lies in whether or not punishment or rehabilitation should take priority in a prison setting. To many, prison is a place where bad people get locked away; where they can be kept away from the rest of society and prevented from harming anyone else. On many levels, this is true - however, one of the most important goals of prison is and should be rehabilitation: sequestering inmates away so that they might be trained and treated to respect their circumstances, and be instructed in the proper way to behave in civilized society. To that end, prisoners must be offered this type of education; if they do not receive it, there is nothing to prevent them from returning to their old lives, as they have not been given an alternative. This just leads to more death. More crime. More chaos. (deliberate fragments)

What correctional education can do is turn these individuals, who have already given up hope on the system to the point where they are willing to defy it, a way to make a life for themselves within society. By teaching them ways to succeed and learn while still following the rules, they can keep themselves out of prison and give back to the community, all while pursuing their innate human right to learn and grow as people. Who was once a broken lawbreaker can become a happy, law-abiding citizen. (isocolon). It is with this in mind that correctional education programs such as Hacienda La Puente's must continue and be given full support. (cleft sentence)

CONCLUSION

Given this information, and the benefits to inmates that adult education programs like the one Hacienda La Puente offers, it is safe to say that

correctional education offers substantial resources to inmates that they can use once out of prison. However, the question remains: do they deserve these benefits? They committed crimes, some might say. Some have raped, murdered, stolen; suddenly, they are receiving what might be better educations than many people on the outside (asyndeton). This fills people with righteous indignation; they feel that the point of prison is not to be punished, not kept in a steel hotel where they get to receive a free higher education or job training at their dime. They want to see people pay for their actions, not work to get paid (antithesis). However, these people must see past their own self-interest and look towards the greater good, as well as the basic human rights of the inmates to expand their potential and learn as much as they can about how to survive in civilized society.

¶The prisoners benefit greatly from having this type of education program available to them (noun phrase). Having received a college degree while in prison, they can move forward to have productive lives following their sentence (absolute phrase). Inmates with a voice and new skills to use on rest of the world (deliberate fragment). What detriments they have provided to society in the past they can help repair with their work in the future (isocolon). Whether it be teachers or janitors or businessmen or artists, even inmates have their own value and must not be abandoned to the system (polysyndeton). Understand the nature of their crime, but recognize their continued value (antithesis). The government and taxpayers must give them support, solace, help (asyndeton). It is the future that we must consider

when supplying this lost demographic with the means to learn and grow (cleft sentence).

Works Cited

" Correctional Education." Hacienda la Puente Adult Education Corrections. 2012. Web.

.

Harlow, Catherine W. " Education and correctional populations." Bureau of Justice Statistics.

U. S. Department of Justice, 2003. Print.

Medders, Kimball. " Why We Teach in Prison." California Department of Corrections &

Rehabilitation 2008. Web. .

" Prison and Education Statistics." California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation. 2012.

Web. .