

Reducing crime rates
raising the education
of prisoners
education essay



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Is it possible to reduce crime rates by raising the education of prisoners? If so, would it be cost effective with respect to other crime prevention measures? The motivation for these questions is not limited to the obvious policy implications for crime prevention. Perhaps if we estimate the effect of education on criminal activity we may be able to shed some light on the magnitude of the social return to education.

Crime is a negative activity with enormous social costs. Given the large social costs of crime, even small reductions in crime associated with education may be economically important.

Researchers (Lochner and Moretti, 2003) have done some investigation to show how education generates benefits beyond the private returns received by individuals. Some other researchers (for example, Acemoglu and Angrist, 2000) and Moretti, 2002, 2003) have also investigated how education generates benefits beyond the private returns received by individuals. Yet, little research has been undertaken to evaluate the importance of other types of external benefits of education, such as its potential effects on crime.

In a study carried out in the United States by Huang, Liang and Wang (2003), they noted in their findings that the changes in the U. S. crime rate were co-existent with two significant developments in the U. S. labor market: the sharp decrease in the earnings of young unskilled men in the 1980s and the rapid decline in the aggregate rate of unemployment in the 1990s.

This immediately raised the question of whether or not the two events were related in some way. Of course, such a connection might be expected to hold on a priori grounds. The reason was that according to microeconomics, the

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decision of whether or not to engage in criminal activities was a time allocation problem. As such, changes in the opportunities available to workers in the formal labor market had a direct impact upon the crime rate, by affecting the opportunity cost of criminal behavior.

Yet, despite this compelling logic, few theoretical models have been constructed to date that can be used to address these connections more formally. This is particularly surprising, in view of the

large body of empirical work that indicates that not only labor-market opportunities affect criminal behavior, but the crime rate itself also affects labor-market opportunities[2].

Perhaps the most robust finding in this literature is the documented negative correlation between market wages and crime. While Grogger (1998) estimated that a 20% decline in the (youth) wage lead to a 20% increase in the crime rate, Gould et al. (2002) documented that changes in the wage accounted for up to 50% of the trend in violent crimes and in property crimes.

Studies by Raphael and Winter-Ebmer (2001) and by Gould et al. (2002) also indicated that there was a strong positive link between the unemployment and crime rates[3]. Close empirical relationships were also observed between the rate of crime and human capital acquisition. Indeed, several studies including Witte and Tauchen (1994), Lochner (1999) and Lochner and Moretti (2001) also indicated that achieving a high school education significantly reduces criminal behavior.

Ripley (1993) also believed that recidivism rates drop when the education programs are designed to help prisoners with their social skills, artistic development and techniques and strategies to help them deal with their emotions. Ripley further stressed the importance of teaching moral education as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills. He believed that the works of Harold Herber (1970) and Benjamin Bloom (1956) have fostered the importance of teaching critical thinking and reasoning skills to all learners, especially those that are considered to be at risk.

Gerber and Fritsch (1993) evaluated the outcomes of the adult education programs in prison. They distinguished among academic, vocational and social education and concluded that prison education programs lead to a reduction of criminal behavior, continued education after release from prison and fewer disciplinary problems in the prison setting. In addition, inmates who choose to participate in these programs have lower recidivism rates than those who do not participate.

Despite the many reasons to expect a causal link between education and crime, empirical research is not conclusive. It is therefore important for me to cite, in this first section of this review, supporting literature that makes a case for education in prison. With this in mind, I will include some research that states the benefits of education in prison; support the idea that meeting the learning needs of young adults (in prison) is dependent on appropriate learning strategies in a specially designed curriculum (to encourage learning new skills); and that young adults in prison who participate in the curriculum (training activities) will be motivated to learn and behavior change will be facilitated.

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Education in prison

Reduces violence

Noguera (1996) in his paper *Reducing and Preventing Youth Violence: An Analysis of Causes and an Assessment of Successful Programs*, stated that for many youth, the experience of serving time in a large detention center may actually increase the likelihood that they will commit violent crimes again in the future. From his research, Vacca, (2004) stressed the point that the right kind of educational program leads to less violence by inmates involved in the programs and a more positive prison environment. Granoff (2005) agreed that educational programs have been met with enthusiasm by the inmates themselves and have shown a proven means to reduce instances of violence within prisons.

Reduces recidivism

Brewster and Sharp (2002) have found that academic education within prisons is more effective at reducing recidivism than many other types of programs, such as work programs and vocational education. Even more specifically, research by Harer, (1995) and Brewster & Sharp, (2002) indicated that programs that stressed achieving educational outcomes, such as General Educational Development (GED)[4]attainment, rather than just the process of education are more successful. In addition, other researchers (Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003; Steurer & Smith, 2003; Brewster & Sharp, 2002; Fabelo, 2002; Norris, Snyder, Riem, & Montaldi, 1996; Harer, 1995) have stated that those inmates who successfully attained a General Education Diploma gained a better chance of not recidivating because

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achieving that goal put them on an equal level with other high school graduates when searching for a job

Lowers crime rates

Machin, Marie and Vujic (2010) stated in their research that there are a number of theoretical reasons why education may have an effect on crime. From the existing socio-economic literature there are (at least) three main channels through which education might affect criminal participation: income effects, time availability, and patience or risk aversion. For most crimes, one would expect that these factors induce a negative effect of education on crime. For the case of income effects, education increases the returns to legitimate work, raising the opportunity costs of illegal behaviour. Time spent in education may also be important in terms of limiting the time available for participating in criminal activity. Education may also influence crime through its effect on patience and risk aversion. Here, future returns from any activity are discounted according to one's patience in waiting for them.

Affects decisions to engage in crime

Researchers (Usher, 1997; Lochner, 1999; Lochner and Moretti, 2001) have emphasized the role of education as an important determinant of crime. Education has a multiple role in deterring crime: it raises skills and abilities and then improves labour market perspectives thus implying a higher opportunity cost of crime and it has a non-market effect that affects the preferences of individuals. Becker (1968) stressed in his research that an increase in law-abidingness due to education would reduce the incentive to enter illegal activities and thus reduce the number of offenses.

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Studies conducted by Freeman (1991, 1996), Grogger (1995, 1998) and Lochner and Moretti (2001) attempted to clearly identify the relationships between crime and education. Most of the contributions on the effects of education on crime stressed how education raises individuals' skills and abilities, thus increases the returns to legitimate work, raising the opportunity costs of illegal behaviour. But there exist benefits from education that are not taken in account by individuals, this implies that the social return of education is higher than its private return (Lochner and Moretti, 2001).

Education has a non-market effect that affects the preferences of individuals. This effect ("civilization effect") makes criminal decision more costly in psychological terms. Lochner (1999) uses a two-period model to look at some simple dynamic relations between education, work and crime. In his paper, he emphasized the role of human capital accumulation on criminal behavior and the results confirm that graduating from high school directly lowered the tendency to participate in criminal activities. In a successive joint research, the results obtained allowed Lochner and Moretti (2001) to conclude that education significantly reduces criminal activity.

Provides a different outlook on life

Education may also alleviate the harsh conditions of confinement or "pains of imprisonment" and reduce prisonization, the negative attitudes that are sometimes associated with incarceration. Deprivations of prison or imported criminogenic norms lead to prisonized subculture norms that favor attitudes hostile toward the institution and supportive of criminal activities. By

providing safe niches and a more normalized environment, education may provide a basis for reconstruction of law-abiding lifestyles upon release from prison (Harer, 1995).

In the foregoing pages, emphasis was placed on the importance of educating inmates because it is fundamental to the rehabilitation and correction of offending behavior and criminal behavior. Miles D. Harer (1995) went a little deeper into his research to explore the theory that correctional education has a normalizing effect on offenders and brief information on his findings are shared below.

Harer's Study: Education's Impact on Offending and criminal behavior

In 1995 Miles D. Harer conducted a study Prison Education Program Participation and Recidivism: A Test of the Normalization Hypothesis, which explored the theory that correctional education programs have a “normalizing” effect on offenders, that increases prison safety, reduces recidivism, nurtures pro-social norms, and negates the effects of “prisonization”. [5]

In his study he found that education programs served to occupy the inmate's time productively, thus limiting the negative influence of prisonization, and further served to socialize and resocialize inmates toward acceptance of prosocial norms. In other words, it was not that specific diploma or certificate programs reduced recidivism, but it was the normalization process that took place in the classroom that was in part responsible for reducing recidivism.

His study found that there was approximately a 15 percent greater rate of recidivism among offenders with no educational participation than offenders who participated in [merely] . 5 courses during each six-month period of their incarceration. The study further found that the greater the rate of participation the lower recidivism rates dropped.

He used these findings to underscore his point regarding the potency of educational experiences in helping inmates to develop the pro-social norms required for successfully reentry into society. A concrete example of Harer's theory might look something like this: An offender from an urban area participates in a horticulture program. In the horticulture program he learns core abilities (that is, thinking creatively and critically, working productively, communicating clearly, working cooperatively, acting responsibly), from his instructor he sees, learns and models pro-social behaviors, and mature coping skills. By participating effectively in the program's requirements he learns the all-important skill of working in compliance with a system. Upon release, he returns to his urban community. Jobs in horticulture may be scarce in this area, but the transferable skills he obtained by participating in an educational program (of his own selection and that held his interest) would serve to make him a more valuable employee than someone who failed (while incarcerated) to obtain this collection of mature coping skills.

This scenario is a key point in understanding correctional education. It is more important to provide a wide enough variety of programming so the offender has an educational opportunity that has personal validity and provides the offender with a self-identified satisfying outcome.

This study makes a case for education in prison because the research conducted has indicated that it reduces prisonization and nurtures prosocial norms, a process which prepares offenders to be a ‘ citizen’ of society and for a particular community when they leave prison.

In order for education to be meaningful and effective, the learning needs of inmates must be considered. A framework for addressing these needs must be developed with learning strategies that will be effective and will encourage the learning of new skills. We will explore some possible ways in which this could be achieved.

Meeting the learning needs of young adults (in prison) is dependent on appropriate learning strategies in a specially designed curriculum (to encourage learning new skills)

Conspicuously absent from the research literature in the area of education is a discussion of a theoretical explanation for the connection between education and offending. Also, what I have not been able to find in the literature is a framework of learning strategies or curriculum that have been tried and have been proven effective.

Despite this shortcoming, there are many possible ways education (that meets the learning needs of inmates) may encourage the learning of new skills. Some of these possible ways may include the improvement of cognitive skills, the use of appropriate learning strategies and a specially designed curriculum to meet learning needs. In this second section of the review, I will look at the contributions that some researchers made in these areas, including Bloom’s taxonomy. I will also draw upon the work of Malcolm

Knowles' for appropriate adult learning strategies, Jerome Bruner's work that addresses learning needs relevant to curriculum, Gagne's conditions of learning and its implications for instruction and since prison is a "community", I will include the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's communities of practice.

Making a case for Improvement of cognitive skills

One mechanism by which education will theoretically affect recidivism is through improvement of inmate cognitive skills. The way individuals think influences whether or not they violate the law (Andrews & Bonta; MacKenzie, 2006). Deficiencies in social cognition (understanding other people and social interactions), problem solving abilities, and the sense of self-efficacy are all cognitive deficits or "criminogenic needs" found to be associated with criminal activity (Foglia, 2000; Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau & Cullen, 1990; MacKenzie, 2006).

The contribution of Bloom's taxonomy in improving cognitive skills

As we see from the research conducted, emphasizing the need for the improvement of cognitive skills in inmate education is very important. But before these researchers - and many others during their time - there was someone who advocated for a holistic form of education which included cognitive development. This person was no other than Benjamin Bloom (1956) who developed Bloom's Taxonomy with one of the goals being to motivate educators to focus on all three "domains" of the educational objectives. These "domains" were listed as cognitive, affective and

psychomotor. For this review I will briefly summarize the three domains to highlight the skills inherent in each one.

Skills in the cognitive domain revolve around knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking of a particular topic. Traditional education tends to emphasize the skills in this domain, particularly the lower-order objectives. There are six levels in the taxonomy, moving through the lowest order processes to the highest.

Skills in the affective domain describe the way people react emotionally and their ability to feel another living thing's pain or joy. Affective objectives typically target the awareness and growth in attitudes, emotion, and feelings. There are five levels in the affective domain moving from the lowest order processes to the highest.

Skills in the psychomotor domain describe the ability to physically manipulate a tool or instrument like a hand or a hammer. Psychomotor objectives usually focus on change and/or development in behavior and/or skills.

Even though Bloom and his colleagues never created subcategories for skills in the psychomotor domain, other educators have created their own psychomotor taxonomies[6]that help to explain the behavior of typical learners or high performance athletes.

For the curriculum I am hoping to develop (based on the learning needs of inmates), Bloom's educational objectives (and more specifically its sub-

categories) will play a very important role in determining the differentiation of curriculum topics and their application.

Other research about the importance of cognitive skills

Other research examining inmate cognitive skills demonstrate a connection between executive cognitive functioning (ECF) and antisocial behavior.

According to Giancola (2000) ECF is defined as the cognitive functioning required in planning, initiation, and regulation of goal directed behavior. It would include such abilities as attention control, strategic goal planning, abstract reasoning, cognitive flexibility, hypothesis generation, temporal response sequencing, and the ability to use information in working memory.

From this perspective, education may be important in reducing crime because it improves the ability to use and process information. Some researchers and educators (Batiuk, Moke and Rountree, 1998; Duguid, 1981; Gordon & Arbuthnot, 1987) argue that the importance of education and cognitive skills may be in its ability to increase individuals' maturity or moral development. For example, academic instruction can help instill ideas about right and wrong, and these ideas may be associated with changes in attitudes and behaviors.

Taking all of these suggestions into consideration, improving inmates' cognitive skills will require strategies that are suitable for teaching adults. With this in mind, I will seek some guidance from Malcolm Knowles' theory of adult learning strategies.

Meeting adult learning needs through adult learning strategies.

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Malcolm Knowles (1973) was among the first to propose the theory of the andragogical model and in this approach he used the term “ andragogy” to label his attempt to create a unified theory of adult learning. In 1984, he expanded his four assumptions to six assumptions of learning (theory and process of andragogy) to better explain the needs of the adult learner.

In order to develop a framework to meet the basic learning needs of young adults in prison through adult learning strategies, I will explore the theory of Malcolm Knowles’ andragogical model to be guided by the suggested strategies.

Knowles’ theory of the andragogical model proposes that (a) the adult learner is self-directed, that is, the adult learner makes his/her own decisions and is responsible for his/her own actions; (b) the adult learner has had numerous experiences based on the variety and scope of the adult learner’s life roles, so the adult learner has the experiential foundation on which to base his/her learning; (c) the adult learner is ready to learn, so the adult learner seek answers to what he/she specifically need to know; (d) the adult learner is oriented to learning and this orientation may be task-based with a life-centered or problem-centered component to learning; (e) the adult learner is motivated to learn and this motivation may stem from internal forces that cause the learner to gain self-confidence, recognition, improved self-esteem, and a better quality of life; (f) the adult learner need to be responsible for his/her decisions on education, that is, involvement in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

With these adult characteristics in mind, the resulting curriculum design will need to be process-based rather than content-based. This process design will allow the instructor to act as a facilitator who would link numerous resources with the adult learner. Following this line of thought, I will now turn to Jerome Bruner to draw upon his ideas to link the learning needs of inmates to a curriculum relevant to their needs.

Linking learning needs to relevant curriculum

Jerome Bruner (1959, 1960) a true instructional designer, suggested that a learner (even of a very young age) is capable of learning any material so long as the instruction is organized appropriately, in sharp contrast to the beliefs of Piaget and other stage theorists. Like Bloom's Taxonomy, Bruner (1960) suggested a system of coding in which people form a hierarchical arrangement of related categories. Each successively higher level of categories becomes more specific, echoing Benjamin Bloom's (1956) understanding of knowledge acquisition as well as the related idea of instructional scaffolding.

In accordance with this understanding of learning, Bruner proposed the spiral curriculum, a teaching approach in which each subject or skill area is revisited at intervals, at a more sophisticated level each time. He advocated that these fundamental ideas, once identified, should be constantly revisited and reexamined so that understanding deepens over time. This notion of revisiting and reexamining fundamental ideas over time is what has become known as a "spiral curriculum." As time goes by, students return again and

again to the basic concepts, building on them, making them more complex, and understanding them more fully.

Bruner (1960) recommended the cognitive-development approach to curriculum design because he suggested that learning and cognitive development are complex events in which the learner may be engaging in any of several activities. Included are interacting with others, manipulating objects, using signs and symbols, constructing mental models and observing and noting the actions and reactions of others.

To be effective in the cognitive development approach, we would have to look at the learning objectives and see how the different learning objectives relate to the appropriate instructional design. In order to achieve this, I will now turn to Robert Gagne's conditions of learning and implications for instruction.

Conditions of learning and Implications for Instruction

Gagne's (1965) theory of conditions of learning has several implications for instructional technology. The design of instruction involve: analyzing requirements, selecting media and designing the instructional events.

Additionally the instructor must keep in mind the following learning concepts when developing methods of instruction: (a) Skills should be learned one at a time and each new skill learned should build on previously acquired skills; (b) The analysis phase must identify and describe the prerequisite lower level skills and knowledge required for an instructional objective; (c) Lower level objectives must be mastered before higher level ones; (d) Objectives must

be stipulated in concrete behavioral terms; and (e) Positive reinforcement should be used in a repetitive manner.

Gagne's (1965) work has made significant contributions to the scientific knowledge base in the field of instructional technology particularly in the area of instructional design. He outlined several steps that should be used to plan and design instruction. These include: (a) Identifying the types of learning outcomes; (b) Each outcome need to have prerequisite knowledge or skills that must be identified; (c) Identifying the internal conditions or processes the learner must have to achieve the outcomes; (d) Identifying the external conditions or instruction needed to achieve the outcomes; (e) Specifying the learning context; (f) Recording the characteristics of the learners; (g) Selecting the media for instruction; (h) Planning to motive the learners; (i) Testing the instruction with learners in the form of formative evaluation; (j) Using summative evaluation to judge the effectiveness of the instruction.

Although objectively analyzing the condition for learning Gagné says: “ Since the purpose of instruction is learning, the central focus for rational derivation of instructional techniques is the human learner. Development of rationally sound instructional procedures must take into account learner characteristics such as initiate capacities, experimental maturity, and current knowledge states. Such factors become parameters of the design of any particular program of instruction” (Gagné. 1987. p. 5)

From Bruner's cognitive approach to curriculum design (a proposed teaching approach in which each subject or skill area is revisited at intervals) to

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Gagne's conditions of learning we continue to build a platform and make a case for the development of a curriculum to meet the learning needs of young adults in a prison context. Since prison is a "community", I will borrow from the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger because their characteristics of communities of practice will provide guidance for the practical aspect of the curriculum that is to be developed.

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's communities of practice

According to Etienne Wenger (2007), three elements are crucial in distinguishing a community of practice from other groups and communities and he proposed them as "the domain", "the community" and "the practice".

In "the domain" a community of practice is something more than a group of friends or a network of connections between people. It was designed to have an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and as a result, a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other, thus creating "the community".

At "the practice" stage, members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources which include

experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems-in short a shared practice. Getting to this stage takes time and sustained interaction.

As is seem from the above, a community of practice involves much more than the technical knowledge or skill associated with undertaking some task. Members are involved in a set of relationships over time (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98) and communities develop around things that matter to people (Wenger 1998).

In order to develop a curriculum with learning strategies that would meet the needs of adult learners in a prison setting, the foregoing theories, studies and models have been reviewed. The reason is that no one learning theory can possibly address all the complexities found in the various settings and contexts in which learning can occur.

Since this review is undertaken to lay a foundation for the development of a curriculum to meet the needs of inmates that would lead to behavior change, I now turn to the third section of this review which will look at facilitating behavior change through motivating inmates to participate in curriculum activities.

Young adults in prison who participate in the curriculum (training activities) will be motivated to learn and behavior change will be facilitated.

The term motivation is derived from the Latin word movere, meaning “ to move.” So, in this third section I will look at the contributions of Reginald Revans (1982, 1983), John Keller (1984), Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen (1975), Albert Bandura (1986), J. B. Watson (1913), James O. Prochaska, and

Carlo C. DiClemente, (2003) whose theory, methodology and strategy could be used to “ move” inmates, provide stimulus and give direction for behavior change.

A tool of motivation: action learning

Reginald Revans’ (Revans 1982, 1983) developed the Action Learning[7]methodology which holds many similarities to learning communities[8]developed by Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98). If it is to be distinguished, action learning is basically the small components that create the main team involved in a learning community. It is a learning approach that is used to work with, and develop people, while working with them on a real project or problem. Participants work in small groups or teams, along with a learning coach, and learn how to take action to solve their project or problem, and in the process, learn how to learn from that action.

What makes action learning important to the curriculum I am seeking to develop is that it is designed for learning to take place in small groups or “ action” groups.

The first part of action learning is creating action groups based on programmed learning, “ the expert knowledge” and learning or real world experiences. These are small groups, generally consisting of 3 or 4 people. Emphasis is placed on diversifying these small groups so that each group is best equipped to contribute to the learning community.

A learning coach is designated for each group. (Together, the learning coaches also form a group). From there, a project group leader is chosen. Both the project group leader and the learning coaches act as organizers, facilitators and overall motivators for the action groups

The model of Action learning involves learning from experience through reflection and action with the support group. It is important that the groups remain constant and have duration, which would provide the opportunity to establish themselves over a solid time period. This is a model that could be useful in the prison setting.

Sustaining motivation in the learning process

In support of motivational learning for inmates, it is also important to include aspects of John Keller's (1984) ARCS Model of Motivational Design