

INMATE EDUCATION

**JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA
2002**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education programs are among the many programs offered by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to prepare offenders for community living. CSC's Mission, Core Values and Strategic Objectives, along with the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Commissioner's Directives of CSC and CSC's case management process, provide the authority for correctional education in Canada.

All federal institutions in Canada offer education programs, including Adult Basic Education (Grades 1 to 10), Secondary Education (Grades 11 and 12), Vocational, College and University level programs. CSC gives priority to Adult Basic Education. Education programs are a priority in the correctional plans of all offenders who have achieved less than a grade 10 education or require skills upgrading to participate in vocational or CORCAN (work experience) programs.

Inmate students present significant challenges to educators. Poor self-concept, low achievement levels, learning disabilities and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) all present serious challenges to correctional education. However, research into correctional education has revealed some characteristics of effective correctional learning environments.

First, inmate students have often had prior negative education experiences that have resulted in low self-confidence and negative attitudes about learning. Therefore, effective correctional education programs need to improve offenders' attitudes about learning, which have often contributed to illiteracy and under-education. Prison educators need to inspire confidence in inmate students about their ability to learn. Inmate students' negative experiences in mainstream education also suggest the need for unconventional teaching methods.

Second, correctional education for individuals with learning disabilities and/or FAS needs to be quite structured. In addition, students with FAS and learning disabilities also have difficulty retaining information. Repetition is critical. Computers and other electronic teaching aids can help these students retain information.

Other characteristics of successful correctional education programs include program content that is relevant to the lives of inmate students, and which is sensitive to cultural learning differences. Offenders have unique and varied education needs. In order to better meet the needs of inmate students, a range of teaching methods should be employed.

It is also critical that correctional education programs meet the adjustment and employment needs of offenders. Therefore, education programs should teach job skills and cognitive skills that will help offenders become productive, law-abiding citizens.

Correctional education has many potential benefits. Generally, studies show that prison education is associated with reduced recidivism. In fact, one study found that inmates who participated in inmate education programs reduced their reincarceration rates by 29% compared to inmates who did not. Other associated benefits include fewer institutional behaviour problems, further education

following release and increased employment. However, for correctional education programs to be successful, it is critical that post-release follow-up and support be provided for offenders.

While a 1996 audit concluded that CSC appeared to offer education and vocational training to offenders in need of such programming, the Auditor General identified a gap in services to offenders making the transition from the institution to the community. At that time, over 95% of CSC's employability training resources were spent in institutions. Therefore, almost no funding was available for education programs after release. Recently, CSC has implemented several programs in the community to bridge the transition from institution to community. By doing so, CSC maximizes the number of offenders it can offer educational programs to, thereby, illustrating the importance of educating offenders in Canada. Correctional education programs are an absolute necessity if the chances of offenders obtaining employment and becoming law-abiding citizens upon release from prison are to be increased.

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INTRODUCTION

Education programs are among the many programs offered by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to prepare offenders for community living. CSC's Mission expressly states:

The Correctional Service of Canada, as part of the criminal justice system and respecting the rule of law, contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control (Correctional Service of Canada, 1997, p. 4).

CSC's Mission is supported by a number of Core Values and Strategic Objectives. The provision of education programs is outlined by Core Value number 2 and Strategic Objective number 2.4. CSC's Mission, Core Values and Strategic Objectives, along with the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Commissioner's Directives of CSC and CSC's case management process, provide the authority for correctional education in Canada (Lilly, 1996).

Education programs are offered in Canadian correctional facilities to aid in the rehabilitation of offenders. Upon admission to correctional facilities, federal offenders typically have very low average education levels. Given the high correlation between early school leaving and unemployment, it is not surprising that many offenders report inconsistent employment histories. This is problematic because unemployment and a lack of education are risk factors that make a person more susceptible to becoming involved in crime. Furthermore, these factors also contribute to post-release reoffending, thereby increasing recidivism rates. Thus, correctional education programs are an absolute necessity if the chances of offenders obtaining employment and becoming law-abiding citizens upon release from prison are to be increased.

THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF INMATE STUDENTS

The inmate student presents significant challenges to educators. Federal offenders undergo standardized testing upon admission to correctional facilities to determine the grade level achieved by the offender or at which the offender functions (Correctional Service of Canada, 1999). Over 82% of offenders test below the high school level upon admission to correctional facilities (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001). In addition, 37% of inmates have an education of grade 9 or less (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999, p. 9). Therefore, correctional education programs need to be tailored to the education levels of offenders, beginning instruction at an offender's current achievement level.

Furthermore, learning disabilities pose a challenge to prison education because they are more prevalent among offenders than the general population (Fisher-Bloom, 1995). Between 5% and 10% of the general population have learning disabilities, whereas the incidence of learning disabilities among offenders in federal institutions is between 7% and 25% (Lysakowski, 1980, Folsom, 1993, as

cited in Fisher-Bloom, 1995). Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) may also be more prevalent among the correctional population, although this prevalence has not yet been established by the research (Correctional Service of Canada, 1998). The presence of learning disabilities and FAS among the correctional population requires that educational programming be sensitive to the special educational needs of these groups.

Finally, offenders often have a history of failure in school, which typically leads offenders to assume that they will not succeed in their present schooling (Mason, 1993). Offenders' beliefs that they will fail in school will seriously limit their ability to learn by ruining their self-confidence and willingness to learn. Therefore, offenders' beliefs about their potential for success in school must be addressed in any inmate education program.

EFFECTIVE CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTS

To be effective, correctional education programs must meet the unique needs of inmate students. Poor self-concept, low achievement levels, learning disabilities and FAS all present serious challenges to correctional education. Fortunately, research into correctional education has revealed various characteristics of effective correctional learning environments.

First, effective correctional education programs need to improve offenders' attitudes about learning, which have often contributed to illiteracy and under-education (West, 1994). In order to improve inmate students' learned notions about their ability to succeed in school, Mason (1993) recommends that prison educators help inmate students to understand why they previously failed in the school system. Educators should try to point out concrete examples of the student's present successes to encourage the belief that the student can be successful. In addition, inmate students' achievements in correctional education programs should be based on competency (i.e., meeting goals and objectives) rather than on comparison with other students (i.e., bell curves), since "adult students in the prison system have no doubt been told clearly many times that they are not as good as most and clearly have no desire to hear it again" (Mason, 1993, p. 77). Therefore, inmate students' negative experiences in mainstream education suggest the need for unconventional teaching methods (John Howard Society of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (JHSLM), 1995). For example, one study has indicated that inmate students prefer community tutors over other instruction possibilities (John Howard Society of British Columbia, 1992, cited in JHSLM, 1995).

Second, correctional education for individuals with learning disabilities and/or FAS needs to be quite structured (Carmichael-Olson, 1993; Fisher-Bloom, 1995). Students with learning disabilities are easily distracted and do not function well in unstructured group sessions. "Therefore, group leaders should use a relatively structured format, directive questions and constant monitoring to remain on topic and involve these offenders" (Fisher-Bloom, 1995, p. 22). FAS and learning disabled students also have difficulty retaining information (Carmichael-Olson, 1993; Fisher-Bloom, 1995). Repetition, therefore, is critical. Computers and other electronic teaching aids such as tape recorders can help these students to retain information (Fisher-Bloom, 1995).

Ultimately, correctional education for individuals with FAS needs to teach functional skills. Instructors of FAS students should ask the following questions: “What do they need to function in the community? What job skills do they need? How can they learn communication and predictions skills?” (Carmichael-Olson, 1993, p. 8). FAS is often characterized by poor reasoning skills. Therefore, education programs should strive to teach FAS students cause and effect prediction skills and assist these individuals to become independent, functioning members of society.

Third, effective literacy programs have been found to contain program content that provides valuable information relating to the offender’s future life in the community, such as nutrition, housing, parenting and employment (Ryan, 1991, as cited in Lilly, 1996; Thomas, 1993). Reading materials should be relevant to the lives of inmate students (West, 1994). Inmate students should be given the choice of subjects, audiences and materials to bring meaning to instruction and to promote individual responsibility for learning (Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (S.I.I.T., 1990). For example, an inmate student newspaper could be used as an inspirational tool by promoting student responsibility for learning to write (Hadden, 1993).

Other characteristics of successful correctional education programs include sensitivity to cultural differences and language instruction for offenders with poor English (Lilly, 1996; S.I.I.T., 1990). In Canada, the inmate population is multicultural and there are distinct cultural learning differences. Therefore, “correctional educators need to obtain skills related to multicultural instruction” (Platt et al., 1993, p. 68). Instruction and teaching materials that are sensitive to cultural learning differences have been found to be more effective in promoting achievement (Gooden, 1993, Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974, Witkin, 1962, as cited in Glasgow, 1994; S.I.I.T., 1990). Educational programs need to be delivered in a language understood by inmate students, as a program can only be effective if students understand the content (Dillon, 1995). Lessons also need to be modified to accommodate different learning styles (S.I.I.T., 1990).

Offenders have unique and varied educational needs. In order to better meet the needs of inmate students, a range of teaching methods and techniques should be employed, including both individual and group instruction. Staff training is the first step in ensuring that the principles of successful correctional education programming are applied in every prison classroom.

Clearly, there are many diverse obstacles that impede the efforts of educational programs in correctional facilities, such as FAS, illiteracy and multiculturalism. In order to remove these obstacles, researchers gather information to determine what initiatives will ensure maximum effectiveness of any correctional program aimed at rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism. A summary of such work by McGuire & Priestly (1995) suggests that the following conditions should be present in any form of correctional intervention:

1. *Risk Classification.* In more effective programs there is a matching between offender risk level and the degree of service intervention, such that higher risk individuals receive more intensive services, while those of lower risk receive lower or minimal intervention.

2. *Relationship to recidivism.* It is essential to separate client problems or features that contribute to or are supportive of offending from those that are more distantly related, or unrelated, to it. This principle underpins direct work on offending behaviour. If the purpose of a program is to reduce reoffending, there should be a focus within it on changing the specific attitudes, relationships or habits that are known to give rise to recidivism.
3. *Responsivity.* Both clients and staff have a wide range of learning styles. Programs work best when there is a systematic matching between styles of workers and styles of clients. But, “on balance the learning styles of most offenders require active, participatory methods of working, rather than an earlier didactic mode on the one hand or a less, unstructured, ‘experiential’ mode on the other” (p. 14).
4. *Community base.* Programs located in the community on balance yield more effective outcomes. This is not to dismiss institution based work, but the findings do imply that proximity to individuals’ home environments has greater prospect of facilitating real life learning. This point requires clarification and amplification through further research.
5. *“Treatment modality.”* Effective programs are: (a) multimodal (i.e. they recognize the variety of offender problems); (b) skills oriented (i.e. designed to teach client problem solving, social interaction or other types of coping skills); and (c) drawn from behavioural, cognitive or cognitive behavioural sources.
6. *Program integrity.* Effective programs are those in which the stated aims are linked to the methods being used. Adequate resources are available to achieve these aims, and staff are appropriately trained and supported. There is an agreed plan for program monitoring and evaluation, and these activities take place and are systematically recorded (McGuire & Priestley, 1995).

However, when formulating education programs, effectiveness is only one factor among many others that must be addressed. For example, it is critical that correctional education meet the adjustment and employment needs of offenders:

Offenders are not in prison because they cannot read. Acquiring a General Equivalency Diploma, although worthwhile, is only a small part of the solution. We must recognize that offenders need to learn job skills and to develop thinking strategies that will help them avoid committing crimes (Platt, Bohac, & Barnes, 1993, p. 68).

Having taken into account all of the above factors, education programs help inmates to avoid committing crimes, thereby, lowering recidivism. For example, one of the largest and most comprehensive studies ever conducted that assesses the impact of correctional education was carried out on a sample of inmates released from incarceration during 1997 and 1998 in three US states (Steurer, Smith & Tracy, 2001). A total of 3,170 inmates were divided into two groups that contained 1,373 educational program participants and 1,797 non-participants. A follow up period of three years was used during which rearrests, reconvictions and reincarcerations of the two groups

were recorded. The studies scientific strength is enhanced by the studies large sample size and consideration of over 500 variables that pertain to correctional education. Unfortunately, most studies that examine the impact of educational programs are criticised because participation in education programs in correctional facilities is voluntary and motivation of participants may account for lower recidivism rates of participants. However, no significant difference in motivation of participants and non-participants was found from comparing questionnaires designed to measure motivation of the two groups. Results of the study show a 13% reduction in rearrests, a 21% reduction in reconvictions and a 29% reduction in reincarcerations. The high reduction in reincarcerations means that every dollar spent on education in the three states returns more than two dollars to the citizen in reduced prison costs.

COGNITIVE SKILLS TRAINING AND RECIDIVISM

Effective correctional programs are based on sound theories of criminal behaviour that attempt to lower recidivism rates (Porporino, Fabiano & Robinson, 1991). For example, studies have shown that offenders tend to be impulsive and lacking in self-control (Porporino et al., 1991). Therefore, it is critical that education programs address offenders' thinking patterns in order to reduce recidivism among inmates. CSC's Cognitive Skills Training Program is based on the Cognitive Social Competence model of criminal behaviour. The program educates and assists offenders in developing skills, values and attitudes that research has shown are needed to foster pro-social behaviour (Ross & Fabiano, 1985, Zamble & Porporino, 1988, as cited in Porporino et al., 1991).

Ongoing research has upheld the findings of preliminary evaluations showing that offenders who have participated in the Cognitive Skills Training program have demonstrated significant improvement in a number of cognitive skills areas, such as an appreciation of other people's perspectives, more pro-social thinking patterns and less impulsive behaviour (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995; Porporino et al., 1991). Further, offenders who have participated in the Cognitive Skills Training program were found to have lower rates of recidivism than the comparison group (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995; Porporino et al., 1991).

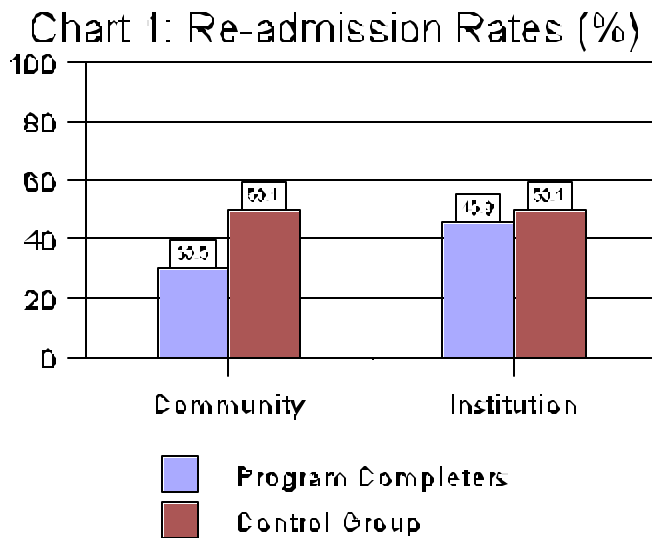
CSC has conducted the most comprehensive study on the impact of Cognitive Skills Training on post-release recidivism among Canadian federal inmates. This study included one of the largest sample sizes to date, and incorporated experimental research techniques in the study of a highly structured correctional intervention. The study examined three separate groups of inmates: a control group, program completers, and program drop outs (program drop outs will not be included in this paper), all of whom either took the program in the institution or in the community. The control group consisted of inmates who met all the requirements necessary to participate in Cognitive Skills Training but were placed on a waiting list specifically so that they could be used as a control in the research (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995). In the study, recidivism was defined as "a readmission for a technical violation of a conditional release or a reconviction for a new offence within the first year following release" (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995) and, when this definition was used, it was evident that recidivism was reduced for inmates who received Cognitive

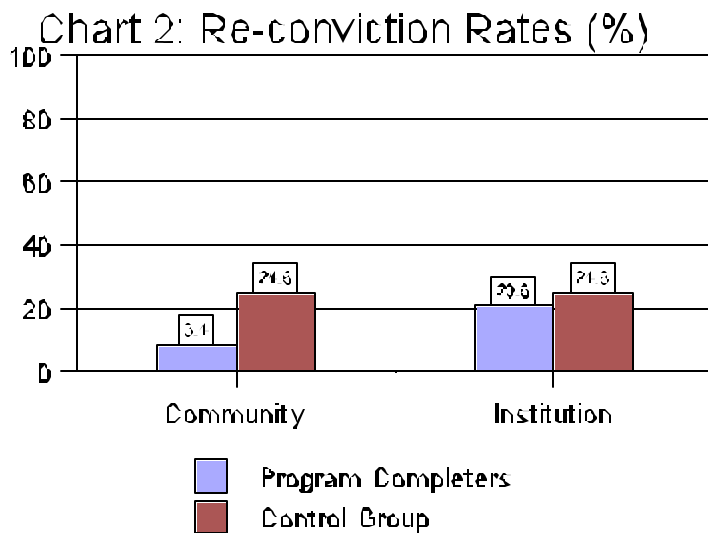
Skills Training. In fact, there was an overall reduction of 11.2% in readmission associated with program completion.

Unfortunately, this decline was not as significant as the 30% overall reduction that initial research had reported (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995). However, in-depth analysis of CSC's research reveals that two specific groups of offenders reported reductions in recidivism exceeding 30%. The first group consisted of offenders who had committed certain types of offences, mainly sexual and violent offences, and the second group consisted of offenders who had received cognitive skills training in a community setting.

Community Setting

One of the most significant declines in recidivism was recorded for offenders who completed the program in the community. Participants in community based Cognitive Skills Training programs had greater success than initial research predicted and were readmitted to a correctional facility at a rate of 30.5%, a drop of close to 15% in the rate of readmission when compared to participants who received Cognitive Skills Training in institutions. Furthermore, the reconviction rate for new offences was 8.4% for the community based graduates, a drop of over 12% in the rate of readmission when compared participants that received Cognitive Skills Training in an institution (see figures 1 and 2). Declines of this magnitude were not present when Cognitive Skills Training was done in the institution.





Support for community based programs is not new in the criminal justice system. The Auditor General’s 1996 audit of federal government agencies concluded that CSC appeared to be offering education and vocational training to offenders in need of such programming (Auditor General, 1996). However, the Auditor General identified a gap in services to offenders making the transition from institution to community; over 95% of CSC’s employability training resources (i.e., education, vocational and employment programming) were spent in institutions. Therefore, almost no funding was available for education programs after release.

Since 1996, CSC has implemented more programs in the community (G. Stewart, Executive Director at John Howard Society Canada, personal communication, May 16th, 2002). Some examples include a carpentry shop in Moncton and several short term community employment projects that take place from time to time. WorkSITE (Work Skills, Instruction, Training, and Employment), a program that offers assistance to offenders seeking employment in the community, has experienced significant growth with the opening of 25 programs across Canada since 2001 (E. Henderson, member of the Senior Communications Counsel at CSC, personal communication, May 23rd, 2002). All of these programs offer support and assistance to offenders in the community setting (Correctional Service of Canada, 2002).

Indeed, the success of community based programs could be due to a multitude of reasons, some of which are mentioned in the Correctional Service of Canada study:

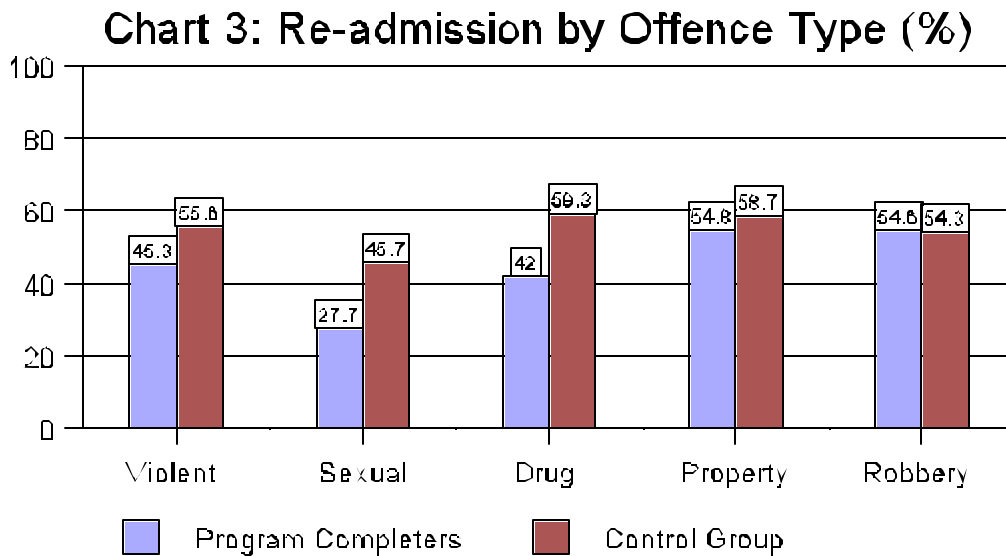
Community based Cognitive Skills Training may exert a powerful supervision effect because offenders are more frequently in contact with correctional authorities. The regularity of their exposure to pro-criminal [sic] models in a friendly programming setting may be an important adjunct to the supervision they receive from parole officers. Community programming may simply serve to increase an offenders

exposure to social contacts. It is also likely that parole officers can play a greater role in reinforcing the treatment gains made by offenders when the programming occurs in the community (Correctional service of Canada, 1995).

CSC appears to believe that community based Cognitive Skills Training is effective for two reasons. On the one hand, the exposure to correctional authorities could have a deterrent effect through contact and supervision over the thirty-six two hour sessions that accompany Cognitive Skills Training. At the same time, the community program may foster societal reintegration by affording the participant more societal contacts and allowing parole officers to provide positive reinforcement for progress in treatment. Either reason, or a combination of the two, promotes the use of Cognitive Skills Training in a community setting, and CSC notes that “the promising findings for community settings suggests that methods for enhancing the capacity for delivery of the program in the community should be examined” (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995).

Sexual and Violent Offences

Cognitive Skills Training is also useful in lowering recidivism rates for sex offenders. Although sex offenders composed only 11.1% of participants in the CSC study, they reaped the greatest rewards from Cognitive Skills Training. For program completing offenders, about 27% were readmitted compared to 45.7% of the control group, nearly a 20% reduction in the rate of readmissions for program completers (see figure 3). Some degree of relative success is also found when comparing the readmission rates of sexual and/or violent offenders to non-violent offenders who participated in the program.

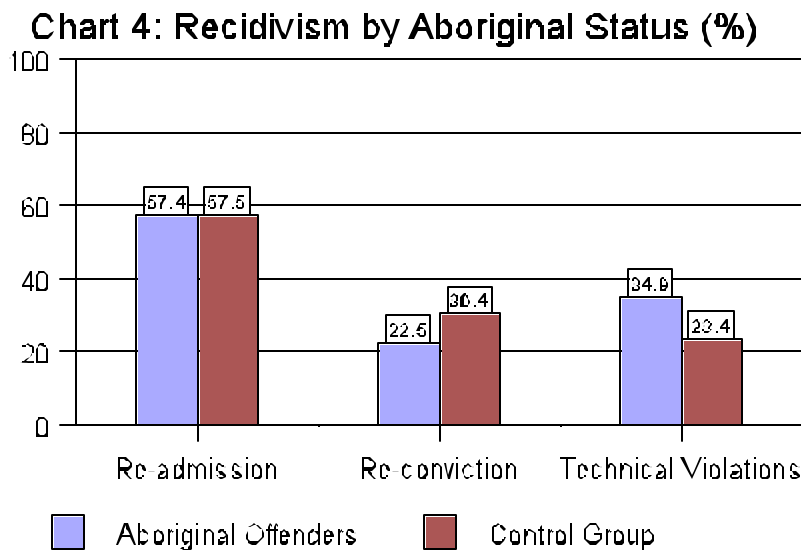


Also, a 57.8% reduction in reconvictions for sex offenders who completed Cognitive Skills Training was observed when compared to non-completers. These facts are not only relevant because they distinguish offenders of certain offence types who benefit the most from Cognitive Skills Training,

but also because sex offenders and violent criminals are sources of fear for much of the public. Thus, the public well being and a sense of safety can be enhanced by using the program.

Aboriginal Status

In addition, aboriginal status of the participant also determines whether Cognitive Skills Training will lower recidivism. Initial research into the impact of Cognitive Skills Training on aboriginal offenders has shown that readmission rates remained constant whether or not they completed in the program (see figure 4). However, reconviction rates for aboriginal inmates did drop after the training was completed. Interestingly, for reasons not evident in the data, technical violations increased by approximately the same amount that reconvictions had decreased after program completion for aboriginal inmates.



Even though research findings indicate that Cognitive Skills Training reduces recidivism, it must be remembered that there are also many positive aspects of the program that are not reflected in the scientific analysis. Cognitive Skills Training coaches and correctional staff notice positive changes in the behaviour of inmates who participate in such programs.

Anecdotal evidence offered by Cognitive Skills Training coaches provides rich examples of how inmates have unexpectedly and sometimes creatively

applied a recently learned skill to solve a typical difficulty which emerges in the course of institutional life: requesting privileges, avoiding confrontations with other inmates, avoiding negative influence of others, accepting negative outcomes without violent reaction. For example, correctional or case management staff have described instances involving inmates who, contrary to well-established patterns of impulsive or inadequate responding to environmental cues, surprise staff by reacting calmly or constructively when faced with a difficult situation (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995).

Clearly, Cognitive Skills Training allows inmate interactions to flow more easily without violent reaction. Therefore, Cognitive Skills Training may be responsible for creating a safer environment for all inmates by promoting harmony in a setting often characterized as violent and chaotic.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN FEDERAL PENITENTIARIES

The objectives of the educational programs offered by CSC are as follows:

1. To provide offenders with provincially accredited or certified programs which meet their identified education needs to assist them to reintegrate into the community as law-abiding citizens.
2. To provide appropriate library services similar to those in the community, while meeting the needs of the correctional environment.
3. To facilitate continuity in educational programming when offenders are transferred between institutions or are released to the community (Correctional Service of Canada, 1999).

All federal institutions offer education programs (Correctional Service of Canada, 2000). The education programs available to federal offenders are Adult Basic Education (Grades 1 to 10), Secondary Education (Grades 11 and 12), Vocational, College and University level programs. CSC gives priority to Adult Basic Education (Correctional Service of Canada, 1999), and, in terms of the helpfulness of ABE, those inmates surveyed in the 1995 National Inmate Survey gave the following ratings: 10% (poor), 21% (fair), 39% (good) and 31% (excellent). Inmate respondents rated the helpfulness of other education programs as follows: 10% (poor), 20% (fair), 39% (good) and 31% (excellent). Also, according to the survey results, 46% of inmates surveyed had been involved in Adult Basic Education (ABE), and 37% had been involved in other education programs at their present institution (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995a). Education programs are a priority in the correctional plans of all offenders who have achieved less than a grade 10 education or require skills upgrading to participate in vocational or CORCAN (work experience) programs.

Education or vocational training costs about \$7,500 per year per inmate enrolled in such programming (Correctional Service of Canada, 2000). Offenders can be required to pay some or all of the cost of their post-secondary education (Correctional Service of Canada, 1999). The institution may pay a portion or the full cost of post-secondary education for an offender if the following criteria are met: (1) the offender meets the Ministry of Education's criteria for enrollment in post-secondary education, (2) the offender has successfully completed previous education programs, (3) the course is a priority in the offender's correctional plan, (4) the provincial education organization which offers the course is both recognized and accredited and (5) the cost is within the institution's budget limits.

In 2000, the average annual cost of incarcerating an inmate in a federal correctional institution was \$66,381 per year for men and \$110,473 for women (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001). The expenditure incurred by CSC to provide post-secondary educational programs is worthwhile when one considers that inmates who participate in these programs are readmitted into correctional facilities at a lower rate than inmates who do not. When faced with the choice of paying incarceration costs or encountering the relatively minor expense of \$7,500, it proves to be more economically sound to implement post-secondary education programs. For example, a study that examined readmission rates for federal inmates who engaged in a post-secondary Prison Education Program (PEP) that operated in four British Columbian penitentiaries between the years 1973 and 1993 found that "only 25% of the 654 subjects recidivated [were readmitted to a federal correctional facility] in the three years following their release, a 50% reduction compared to the Canadian recidivism rate" (Duguid, Hawkey & Knights, 1998, p. 91).

It is important to note that not only is the reduction in recidivism economically efficient, but post-secondary education programs offer social benefits as well. Graduates of post-secondary education programs are committing fewer crimes upon release, and this contributes to societal safety. Post-secondary educational programs in correctional institutions have beneficial economic and societal implications.

Research also suggests that government funding may be necessary to ensure the delivery of post-secondary educational programs in correctional institutions. For example, an American study examined how the elimination of the Pell grant, a grant specifically for correctional students, has been followed by the elimination of several educational programs in US institutions. The program hit hardest by the cut backs was the post-secondary programs. The study reports that, "in the first academic year after inmates were excluded from Pell funding, inmate enrollment in PSCE [Post Secondary Correctional Education] programs decreased 44 per cent" (Tewksbury, Erickson & Taylor, 2000, p. 44). As a result, the number of institutions offering post-secondary education programs decreased from 82.6% to 63% in the same year (Tewksbury et al., 2000). Therefore, it is evident that the elimination of government assistance to inmates for post-secondary education leads directly to the elimination of the post-secondary education programs themselves. Ultimately, their closure results in a loss of the economic and social benefits mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, some people are disturbed by the notion of a convicted offender receiving a free education, especially when many people outside of the system must struggle to fund post-secondary education. However, when they

are informed about the way that correctional post-secondary education programs contribute to their personal safety and a reduction in economic costs, they may reevaluate their opinion.

THE IMPACT OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

Correctional education has many potential benefits. For example, “adult education in prison could lead to a reduction in criminal behavior, to post release enrollment in education, to better post release employment history, and to fewer disciplinary problems” (Gerber & Fritsch, 1995, p. 120). Generally, studies show that prison education is associated with reduced recidivism (Lilly, 1996; Correctional Service of Canada, 1995; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Taylor, 1989; West, 1994). For example, a study by Gendreau (1993, as cited in Lilly, 1996) found that effective correctional education programs reduce recidivism among participants by 25% to 80% (50% average).

As mentioned previously, most offenders have low education levels and an unstable employment record upon admission to correctional facilities. Education programs have the potential to increase the employability of offenders and improve their chances of securing employment in the community. While the link between employment and law-abiding behaviour has not been conclusively established, unemployment is believed to be a risk factor associated with initial involvement in crime as well as recidivism. For example, a CSC study found that, at the time of arrest, 69% of federal offenders were unemployed (Motiuk, 1996). A study on the relationship between unemployment and repeat offending found that one year after release from federal penitentiaries, unemployed men were more likely to re-offend than employed men, 41% versus 17% respectively (Gillis, Motiuk & Belcourt, 1998). Correctional education, therefore, needs to address not only the literacy, thinking skills and basic education needs of offenders, but also their employment skills needs. This is especially critical given that the nature of the workforce is changing to demand higher skilled workers (Human Resources Development Canada, 2000). It is estimated that slightly over 70% of new jobs created by 2004 will require post-high school training (Human Resources Development Canada, 2000). In Canada, occupations requiring post-secondary education are expected to grow at above average rates, while those requiring high school or less are expected to grow at below average rates between the years 1999 and 2004 (Human Resources Development Canada, 2000). Given the low average education level of federal inmates upon admission and that an estimated 47% of inmates do not have a steady employment history (Gillis et al., 1998), correctional education programs are an absolute necessity if the chances of offenders obtaining employment upon release from prison are to be increased.

DISCUSSION

Prison education can be a controversial subject. Some regard education as a privilege that inmates do not deserve. However, through the evaluation of available research, it is obvious that education programs in correctional institutions are beneficial for all parties involved, including all members of society, government, and individual inmates. Societal benefits encompass the reduction of crime and

violence in our communities resulting from lower rates of recidivism. Also borne out of lower recidivism rates are the economic efficiencies that government enjoys by reducing expenditure on the outrageous costs of incarceration. Finally, benefits are also enjoyed by the individual inmates who participate in education programs. Enhanced self esteem and the gift of hope that accompany a prison education are concisely expressed by an Eastern New York correctional facility inmate who states:

On a more personal note, college programming has kept me busy and productive, has given me career choices and has allowed me to plan for the future. Most of all, it changed my life by giving me hope (Parker, 1996, p. 21).

Clearly, the implementation of inmate education is a win win situation. Therefore, the continuation of educational programs in correctional facilities must be maintained for the betterment of society as a whole.

Furthermore, many studies recommend that a community base for education programs should be used. In terms of lowering recidivism rates, inmates involved in education programs do better than those inmates who are not involved, and those who participate in community based programs do best of all. When programs are offered in the community, they have the greatest success and the benefits discussed earlier are increased. Thus, the need for more community based programming cannot be ignored.

For correctional education to be given priority, it is necessary to convince legislators that correctional education reduces recidivism (Platt et al., 1993). Platt et al. (1993, p. 67) caution that "this cannot be done with promises; it only can be done with cost-effective programs and data that attest to savings from reduced recidivism." After all, the ultimate goal of corrections is to assist offenders to become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, a goal that is arguably possible through the education of inmates.

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