

PREPARING CORRECTIONAL RESIDENT/UNIVERSITY  
DEGREE CANDIDATES AS ADULT LITERACY TUTORS

John A. Henschke, Ed.D.  
Chair, Department of  
Educational Studies  
Associate Professor of  
Adult Education  
University of Missouri-  
St. Louis

Continuing Education Specialist  
University Extension  
8001 Natural Bridge Road  
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499  
Phone (314) 553-5946

John H. (Jack) Perry, M.Ed.  
Adjunct Instructor in  
Hospitality Studies  
St. Louis Community College-  
Forest Park

Adjunct Instructor  
University of Missouri-  
St. Louis  
22 Cedarbrook Lane  
Kirkwood, Missouri 63122  
Phone (314) 965-2422

A Paper Presented to the  
Forty-fifth International Conference  
of the  
Correctional Educational Association  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada  
8-11 July, 1990

PREPARING CORRECTIONAL RESIDENT/UNIVERSITY  
DEGREE CANDIDATES AS ADULT LITERACY TUTORS

There is a high degree of educational need in a correctional setting. In one state, 60% of the total number in the correctional setting are unable to read and write. The ratio would not be very different in other states and possibly other countries. The increase of that population is of some concern. In 1925, state and federal prisons in the United States held 79 people per one-hundred thousand population, and in 1985 the number rose to 201 per one-hundred thousand.

If rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism (repeat offenders) are goals of incarceration, then appropriate learning techniques for teaching adult residents in a correctional setting is one important concern of practitioners. Some states have recently discussed the possibility of ruling that no resident shall be released without knowing how to read and write. Other proposals for accomplishing this suggest that added to job training might be a gradual increase in personal responsibilities coupled with institutional monitoring of social behavior through progressively less security consciousness.

During late 1984, the Missouri Eastern Correctional Center (MECC) in Pacific contacted University of Missouri Extension Continuing Education Specialist to inquire if assistance were available from the University of Missouri to initiate a four year Bachelor's degree program for inmates in the correctional setting. MECC had for a number of years provided courses to inmates conducted by the St. Louis Community College at Meramec. Being a community college, however, they were only providing courses for the first two years of college. Thus, the inquiry was: Could the University of Missouri provide a four year degree program in the MECC which would allow the community college to continue its work at the center with the university providing the third and fourth year of the degree program?

Up to this time, the Meramec program was supported by state funds allocated in the budget. The additional program would cost more money. But how much? In the process of investigating all the possibilities, it was discovered that most of the inmates would be eligible to receive Pell Grant monies from the USA Federal Government. Consequently, the new four year degree program was added for almost the same Missouri state dollar allocation as was the two year community college program costs previously. The additional costs for the new program were paid for almost exclusively by the federal dollars because all the participants in both programs were required to go through the federal Pell Grant application process to be eligible for either program.

The degree program which was finally decided upon was a Bachelor of Science in Sociology. This department in the University of Missouri-St. Louis was the most willing to make all the arrangements necessary to bring to the correctional setting all the courses necessary for the degree program. The entrance requirements for students into the degree program were the same as those on the campus.

Following almost two years of planning and negotiation, the program was started in the Fall of 1986. Wolcott (1990) provided the following enrollment data. There were a total of ten courses offered over Fall, Winter, and Summer semesters (two hundred twenty-seven enrollments) with a total of fifty four students participating in one, two, or three semesters.

By the year 1989-1990, a total of twenty courses were offered over Fall, Winter, and Summer semesters (five hundred and four enrollments) with a total of one hundred twenty students participation in one, two, or three semesters.

To date, approximately one hundred eighty seven students have entered into the program and are at different points in pursuit of their degrees. Sixty-six students have begun the program and then withdrawn.

A commencement ceremony was held for the first time in May of 1989. There have been a total of twenty-five students who have graduated. Graduation is scheduled to be held every other year. Twenty-five University of Missouri-St. Louis faculty and four adjunct instructors have been involved with teaching in the program at one time or another.

MECC has allocated one hundred beds for this program. Thus, individual inmates throughout the state eligible for and interested in participating in the program may apply and be transferred to MECC from other correctional centers in the state.

However, Missouri is not alone in providing education for correctional residents. Adult education programs in correctional settings are on the increase in many states and countries. They range all the way from general adult educational offerings to Associates in Arts, and Bachelor of Arts, or Bachelor of Science Degrees, as well as graduate courses and training for becoming literacy tutors or for new jobs. With this increase, an important question needed to be raised, and that was, whether the theories adult educators espouse regarding learner participation and involvement in determining the direction of a person's educational program is applicable with this type of student and in this particular setting.

#### Importance of the idea

If adult education has as one of its goals, the enhancement of the quality of an individual's life as well as the quality of life in society in general, then the way in which correctional residents are taught, (the theory which guides practice as well as the practice itself) is an important contributor to its accomplishment and accompanying results.

Axandorb (1989), a prison inmate, has suggested that prisons damage people. The innate characteristics of punishment are such as to cause pain, a sense of loss and deprivation. The prison subculture is a by-product or informal reaction to punishment and serves as a coping mechanism to both passively and actively offset the punitive measures of pain, loss and deprivation. The inmate subculture is a product of institutionalization and is self-defeating from the outset.

Furthermore, he suggests that over time, inmates become more and more responsive to the enormous demands of this subculture and succumb more and more to the adaptation of anti-social roles as a consequence. Whatever rehabilitation there is occurs in spite of the system. He states, "The chilling fact is that nine out of ten persons incarcerated will sooner or later be returned to the community and many to the same community in which they committed their crime."

One other prison inmate states that instructors must accept the adult, (inmate) learner as a unique individual with problems, feelings, and the capacity to change. Also, that the teacher should not be judgmental about persons who are poor, or rich, have past records, or their appearance and moral values.

Adult educators who have witnessed much of what inmate Mr. Axandorb has expressed, would not find difficulty being sold on the importance of the idea. When that nine out of ten get out, it could be hoped that adult educators have done their bit for society and families, and especially done it well.

#### New approaches tried

During the 1989 winter semester of University of Missouri-St. Louis, a three semester hour undergraduate course for credit entitled: EDUC 308 Undergraduate Institute-Training Tutors of Adult Basic Education Learners. The objective of the course was to train individuals to tutor others in literacy, focusing on the adult as a learner. Seven thousand two hundred of Missouri's 12,000 prison population or 60% is functionally illiterate if not completely unable to read or write. It was felt that the twenty-three people enrolled in the course the first time it was offered could help make an impact on this situation as a result of their participation. Participatory adult learning techniques were employed extensively, including the use of self-directed learning, and learning contracts. The course met weekly on Saturday morning for two and one half hours over a period of sixteen weeks. The authors were instructors of the course.

Learning contracts had been used in at least one other program the authors knew of in a correctional setting and they had been successful. The learning contract covers a full sheet of paper (or more if needed) and has four columns as follows with a practical explanation for each:

Learning Objectives	Resources and Strategies	Evidence of Accomplishment	Criteria and Means for Validating Evidence
What do you want to learn?	How are you going to learn it?	When will you know you have learned it?	What standard did you meet in learning it and who judged the evidence?

The participants had the responsibility of making and carrying out an individual learning contract within the scope of the purpose of the course. In addition, groups of participants focused on one of six interest areas relating to the course content. Each group learned as much as they could about their interest area. Then they had the responsibility to engage the other members of the class in a one hour learning experience of the area they studied. Each one hour presentation was evaluated by the remainder of the class participants and critiqued by the instructors.

Thus, the class was a live laboratory for learning. The presentations were very creative and effectively conducted. The individual learning contracts also reflected serious thought and work.

All of the participants were nearing the completion of a Bachelor's Degree program in Sociology provided by the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The adult learning course was offered as an elective in their degree program, which was the first four year degree program ever offered in this State of Missouri for inmates of a penal facility.

The intention of the State Department of Corrections in providing the course cited above, was to allow the residents who became participants an opportunity to give something of value back to the society which had provided the opportunity for them to achieve a college education. This four year degree program was made possible through federal grant funds and state correctional education budget allocations. The participants would, through the tutor training course, be able to help other residents learn to read and write, thus enabling them to have a better self image, and eventually become responsible citizens. In addition, the local Correctional Education Supervisor had proposed that some money be paid to those who would finish the course successfully and tutor fellow inmates to become literate.

The students were particularly keen on continuing the pedagogical training methods with which they were accustomed. The men raised a hue and cry when told they were going to do their studies in a different manner. However, after two sessions they began to see the value of the method and began responding positively to the adult education approach.

It was with amazing rapidity that the students picked up the adult learning concepts, learning contracts and group projects. For the most part, they did so much more quickly than their graduate school counterparts on the campus. Because their own learning rested on their efforts and not the instructor, their own feeling of responsibility was enhanced. Insights among the men were increased, and personal motivation and investment in the outcome of their learning was multiplied. Midway through the course it became known that no money would be available to pay them for tutoring. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and motivation with which the participants pursued the course throughout was exciting. They produced quality work and prepared themselves diligently.

On an evaluation scale range from twenty to one hundred points, following are the items evaluated and their scores given the course by the participants in the class:

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SCORE</u>
1. Instructors respect learners' capacity for self-directed learning.	100.00
2. Instructors value learners' experience as resource for learning.	97.33
3. Instructors take risks to experiment with new teaching approaches.	94.67
4. Instructors show skill and commitment in learner involvement.	97.33
5. Instructors establish warm, empathic relationship with learners.	97.33
6. Instructors see world of learning through learners' eyes and are good listeners.	92.00
7. Instructors help learners assume responsibility for own learning.	97.33
8. Instructors provide motivational learning climate.	89.33
9. Instructors show concern for learner needs and aspirations.	97.33
10. Instructors demonstrate flexibility in content, use of techniques, and learning process speed.	94.67
11. Course learning objectives are clear.	84.00
12. Course program objectives are clear.	86.67
13. Course content organized relevant to learned needs and manageable for learning.	86.67
14. Amount of coursework appropriate for credit received.	<u>92.00</u>
AVERAGE	93.40

When asked how they could use what they had learned in the course, most answered that they would help others become more assured in accomplishing their own goals. Following are some statements about the impact of this experience upon individual learners as a person:

- Now I think there are very few things I could not learn;
- We are each individuals and have separate learning talents;
- The performance of goals was exceptional and the total learning experience priceless;
- I've collected and increased my confidence tremendously in dealing with adult learners;
- It helped me look at and coordinate my inner and outer self;
- I like the greater degree of responsibility for my own learning accomplishments this course gave me; and,
- I seemed to have learned more and retained more because I picked out learning objectives that were of interest to me.

These results tended to support the funding in the Boucouvalas & Pearse (1985) study that use of the learning contract "tended to eliminate, or at least reduce, game playing of 'make me do it, teach'" and "increased confidence, motivation, and progress of inmates (as well as participation)." It seemed as if W. Henschke's (1989) assumptions were coming true that "if prisoners began to improve in this area of their lives, they will most certainly feel better about themselves. Hence, a positive effect is produced, and the desire to improve in all aspects comes forth."

### Relating to the linkage of research-to-practice

This is only one experience set within a larger context. Further research needs to be conducted to help guide the future direction of this course within the degree program. Should the opportunity be offered to teach the course again, some questions for further inquiry would include: Can or should this approach be extended to other courses in the degree program? Will this teaching/learning approach help residents to overcome recidivism (returning to old criminal habits)? What pitfalls need to be avoided in using this approach? Could some other avenues be devised and used that could be even more beneficial? What are the criteria which should be applied in comparing the result(s) of using this approach and other more traditional college teaching methods?

### Opinions and conjectures regarding outcomes

It is the authors' contention that the normal pedagogical style of instruction lends itself sometimes to just plain memorization, with the resultant lack of deep learning that usually follows. Cheating is sometimes bred by this traditional method at least in the world outside the prison. Creating more anti-social behavior than exists is not the sought after goal.

Observing the inmates demonstrated an improved self-image, a better understanding of individual responsibility, and a heightened determination to increase their learnings for themselves, instead of trying to prove how smart they were in order to impress the other students and the instructors.

A follow up program is essential for a comparative study. As these inmate/students leave their controlled environment for outside residence, monitoring their activities and observing some results pro or con within a short time frame of five years from release date, may begin to indicate their life direction. Such a small group does not furnish enough data for a complete study, but based on subsequent releases of more students taking similar programs, distinct patterns could emerge.

Harold Cushman, MECC education supervisor who indicated in 1986 that the day of the first graduation ceremony of this program would be the ultimate for him, asserted at the first graduation ceremony in 1989 that the program is fantastic and perhaps the greatest accomplishment of his professional career. He said, "Higher educational opportunities can give an inmate much more than a degree. We have so many people that are in here because they have no mechanism for evaluation, they acted on emotion or instinct or in the heat of the moment. Education can turn that around. Whether they use their degree to earn a living or not, what we are doing is educating them to the point that they can evaluate themselves" (Dillon, 1987). Lloyd Hargens, participant in the adult learner course, and valedictorian of the 1989 graduating class said, "If rehabilitation is a realistic goal, education will be its touchstone." (Fitzmaurice, 1989)

If this be the case, then it could move one to dedicate to all the graduating classes of the MECC program, the poetic words of PATHLIGHT:

As Evening Shadows fall across the towers  
pointing fingers through the yard,  
time seems to bend in strange ways.

Dinner, rocky sleep, then eat some grits  
whole thing starts again.

Morning sun shadows fall across the towers,  
pointing fingers out side the wire,  
giving hints of hope where hope is thin.

Library on the hill, are you where my hope is?  
are you, repository of knowledge my last chance?  
With your books clutched to my chest, please help me.  
Enter my mind and guide me out and away.  
Please give me a Life somewhere else.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Axandorb, Maililiw. Recidivism. Unpublished research paper.  
University of Missouri-St. Louis. April, 1989. (Fictitious  
name of author to protect his identity)
- Boucouvales, Marcie, and Pearse, Philip R. "Educating the  
Protective Custody Inmate for Self-directedness: An Adult  
Learning Contract Approach." Journal of Correctional  
Education, vol.36, Issue, September, 1985, pp. 98, 100-105.
- Dillon, MIke and Stephanie Ross. "Prison Inmates Earning UMSL  
Sociology Degrees Behind Walls." Exclaimer. University of  
Missouri and Lincoln University, December, 1986. N.P.
- Fitzmaurice, Leo. "Campus Behind Bars: Prisoners Graduate." St.  
Louis Post-Dispatch. 16 May 1989, Sec. A: 1,7.
- Hartjen, Clayton A. Crime and Criminalization. New York: Krieger  
Publishing Company. 1978.
- Henschke, John A., and Perry, John H. "Use of Appropriate Learning  
Techniques for Teaching Adult Residents in a Correctional  
Setting." In The Proceedings of the Eighth Midwest Research-  
To-Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing and Community  
Education. St. Louis, MO: University of Missouri. October  
12-13, 1989. pp. 89-95.
- Henschke, Wendy S. Education: A Form of Rehabilitation for Prison  
Inmates. A research paper completed for an English 10 course  
at University of Missouri-St. Louis, July, 1989.
- Lipton, Douglas, Robert Martinson, and Judith Wilks. The  
Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment - A Survey of  
Treatment Evaluation Studies, New York: Praeger, 1974.
- "UMSL Courses Are Helping Pacific Prisoners Turn A New Leaf." St.  
Louis Post-Dispatch. 4 May 1987, Sec. B: 4.
- Woolcott, Bette. Letter to John Henschke. 14 May 1990.