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Federal Probation

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This Issue in Brief

Guiding Philosophies for Probation in the 21st Century.—What does the future hold in store for probation? Authors Richard D. Sluder, Allen D. Sapp, and Denny C. Langston identify and discuss philosophies and goals that will emerge to guide probation in the 21st century. They predict that offender rehabilitation will become a dominant theme in probation but that it will be tempered by concern about controlling offenders to ensure community protection.

Identifying and Supervising Offenders Affiliated With Community Threat Groups.—Gangs and community threat groups have placed a new breed of offender under the supervision of U.S. probation officers. Are the officers adequately trained in special offender risk-management techniques to provide effective supervision? Author Victor A. Casillas analyzes gang and community threat group issues from a district perspective—that of the Western District of Texas. He defines and classifies community threat groups generally, relates the history of gangs in San Antonio, and recommends organizational strategies for identifying, tracking, and supervising offenders affiliated with community threat groups.

Community Service: A Good Idea That Works.—For more than a decade the community service program initiated by the probation office in the Northern District of Georgia has brought offenders and community together, often with dramatic positive results. Author Richard J. Maher presents several of the district's "success stories" and describes how the program has built a bridge of trust between offenders and the community, has provided valuable services to the community, and has saved millions of dollars in prison costs. He also notes that the "get tough on crime" movement threatens proven and effective community service programs and decreases the probability that new programs will be encouraged or accepted.

Community-Based Drug Treatment in the Federal Bureau of Prisons.—Author Sharon D. Stewart provides a brief overview of the history of substance abuse treatment in the Federal Bureau of Prisons and discusses residential treatment programming within Bureau institutions. She describes in detail the

community-based Transitional Services Program, including the relationship between the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the United States Probation System, and community treatment providers.

The Patch: A New Alternative for Drug Testing in the Criminal Justice System.—Authors James D. Baer and Jon Booher describe a new drug testing device—a patch which collects sweat for analysis. They present the results of a product evaluation study conducted in the U.S. probation and U.S. pretrial

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Improving the Educational Skills of Jail Inmates: Preliminary Program Findings

BY RICHARD A. TEWKSBURY, PH.D., AND GENNARO F. VITO, PH.D.*

IT IS widely recognized that the United States has one of the highest rates of crime in the world. Criminologists have suggested that crime is the result of other social problems. One of these factors is education. Typically, Americans lag behind most other industrialized nations in their national level of education. We are dismayed and offended by media reports of international studies that show that Americans are less educated than our competitors in the international marketplace. Thus, we are both an undereducated and highly criminal society. The link between our crime rate and our educational level presents what seems a clear, and logical, clue to the "crime problem."

However, there is an intervening variable between a lack of education and a high rate of crime—employment. There is a link between employment and incarceration. Austin and Irwin (1990) report that 64 percent of prison inmates have no specific job skills and more than one-half have never held a legitimate job. We can assume that this link depends on illiteracy.

Incarcerated Americans have high rates of illiteracy. The Correctional Education Association estimates the illiteracy of adult American inmates to be 75 percent (Herrick, 1991). Using 6th grade achievement as a cutoff, Ryan (1990) suggests that half of America's inmates are illiterate. Others have estimated the average reading level of incarcerated offenders as at or below the fifth grade level (Cookson & Carman, 1987; Loeffler & Martin, 1982). Typically, well over one-half of all prison inmates have not finished high school. Even when they have completed portions of their formal education, their skills lag two to three grade levels behind what the individual completed in school (Fox, 1987). Among juvenile delinquents, Brunner (1993, p. i) found that "reading failure is most likely a cause . . . for the frustration that can and does result in delinquent behavior."

Such data imply that criminality is a functional substitute for a legitimate career. Several studies have established a relationship between underemployment, a career criminal lifestyle, and low basic educational skills (Cantor & Land, 1985; Sviridoff & Thompson, 1983; Thornberry & Christenson, 1984;

Blumstein et al., 1986). The societal costs of this relationship have a dual impact. First, society suffers from the victimization itself. The second, indirect cost is that of imprisonment itself. The cost of imprisonment (not including law enforcement and judicial costs) for illiterate inmates in 1983 was estimated at over \$6.6 billion annually (Cantor & Land, 1985).

If offenders are to return to their communities and maintain law-abiding lifestyles, they must be provided with a variety of readily accessible tools. Critical among these tools are formal educational skills. Instead of providing released inmates with subsistence incomes, it may be more beneficial to provide job skills before release and assistance in securing employment upon release. Such efforts are seen as desirable not only by theorists, but also by adult offenders (Glaser, 1983; Rossi et al., 1980).

The jobs of the future will demand greater educational skills. Workers will need greater proficiency in math, spelling, grammar, computer technology, problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, and organizational and personal skills. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 75 percent of all jobs will soon require post high school training. According to the *Training and Development Journal* (1988):

Workers are being challenged as never before by an expanding range of skill requirements. To be successful today, workers must be able to work with less supervision, identify sophisticated problems, and make crucial decisions. Today's jobs demand not only skill in reading, writing, and computation but much more. Employers want a new kind of worker with a much broader set of skills—or at least a strong foundation of basics that will enable them to learn on the job. They seek employees skilled in problem-solving, listening, negotiating . . . as well as skills in knowing how to learn. Without these essential skills, the workforce, including entry-level, dislocated, and experienced workers, will have difficulty adapting to technological changes. Successful job transitions and career growth are also beyond the reach of an ill-prepared workforce. The most devastating impact of these skill deficiencies falls on the disadvantaged. Already outside the economic mainstream, they struggle to get jobs or to avoid being displaced. But poor skills further block their path to today's more demanding, well-paying work. They are pinned to the bottom of the economic heap.

In Louisville and Jefferson County (the site of this project), approximately one-fourth of the adults over age 25 do not have a high school diploma or GED (1990 Census data). A recent billboard in Louisville reveals the extent of this problem. It reads: "No matter how big we make this, 400,000 adults in Kentucky still can't read it." According to a survey by the Kentucky Literacy Commission, 70 percent of Kentucky employ-

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ers require proof of high school completion as a condition of employment.

Educational programs are most commonly argued as central components for pursuit of rehabilitation. Education is also necessary in the pursuit of successful community reintegration. The growth of self-esteem is a basic tool in the both the establishment and maintenance of a law-abiding lifestyle. For example, educational pursuits are important in building self-esteem and intrinsic rewards among offenders (Michalek, 1985; O'Neil, 1990; Parker, 1990; Roundtree, Edwards, & Dawson, 1982; Toch, 1987).

In America's prisons, these goals are pursued by providing basic literacy and high school level educational programs (Maguire, 1992). Apparently, educational programs are also spreading to serve American jails. Grande and Oseroff (1991) reported that educational services were offered in only 20 percent of American jails. Through June 30, 1992, almost 70 percent of the Nation's largest jails offered educational programs. Over 9 percent of the jail inmates participated in them (Beck, Bonczar, & Gillard, 1993, p. 8). The actual content and format of educational offerings in jails vary widely (Whitmore, 1988). The most typical offerings are GED preparation, adult basic education (ABE), life skills, and vocational training or job placement skills. It is essential that jail inmates are exposed to these programs to acquire the necessary skills for a successful return to the community. Since essentially all convicted offenders pass through jails (often directly to the streets), educational programs should be offered within jails.

In the prison system, correctional education programs have grown and the level of expenditure per student has increased (Ryan & Woodard, 1987). However, in the jails efforts continue to lag far behind the programming options available to other inmates and at other educational levels. For instance, the Federal Bureau of Prisons established its first mandatory literacy program in 1982. Initially, it required inmates to display a 6th grade literacy level. Today, a high school equivalency literacy level is the standard (McCollum, 1992). Furthermore, in 1987 92 percent of the states offered at least some form of college opportunities to prison inmates (Ryan & Woodard, 1987). By 1990 more than 35,000 inmates in 772 correctional facilities were enrolled in post secondary correctional education programs (Stephan, 1992).

Of course, there are significant practical differences between jail and prison inmates which directly affect the opportunities for educational programming options. Jails serve short-term populations and lack the space available (even with overcrowding) in prison facilities. Jail inmates also lack the incentives of parole and good-time credit sentence reductions avail-

able to their prison counterparts. However, their sheer number, proximity to the streets, and high illiteracy rate make jail inmates a prime target for educational programming.

Educational programs benefit jail inmates. Generally, jail inmates become involved with educational programs for two reasons. First, they believe that education will help them secure employment upon release. Second, their participation can build self-esteem as they realize that they can handle the program (Michalek, 1985; Reed, 1982; Roundtree et al., 1982). Inmates have reported a preference for courses that require participation and discussion (active learning styles—e.g., computer-assisted instruction) as opposed to passive models of instruction (Yarborough, 1985). Finally, there is some evidence that educational program involvement (both college and GED) does reduce recidivism rates (Blackburn, 1981; Linden & Perry, 1982; Schumacker et al., 1990).

However, not all observers believe that provision of basic educational services will necessarily influence recidivism rates (Maguire, 1992). Instead, the positive consequences need to be seen as short-term and focused on individual and institutional benefits associated with educational program participation. We contend that teaching basic skills to jail inmates can only enhance the chance of successful community reintegration. There is popular support for this belief. Even in times of financial hardship, the general citizenry strongly supports basic educational programs in correctional facilities (Nixon & Bumbarger, 1984). The level of support is even greater when the public understands the benefits of such programs (Reffett, 1983).

Correctional education has always been a part of the system. Since the Great Depression, American educators and correctional experts have pointed to the shortcomings of such efforts and called for structural and procedural changes in correctional education. However, these calls have largely been ignored (Horvath, 1982). In American jails, many innovative educational programs have been proposed. The remainder of this article will present a preliminary analysis of a program currently operating in Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky.

Real Opportunities Behind Bars for Employment (ROBBE)

In 1992, the U.S. Department of Education established the Functional Literacy for State and Local Prisoners Program. The purpose of the program was to provide financial assistance for the development of programs to increase the literacy levels of state and local inmates. Specifically, it sought to sponsor the development of the skills necessary to compete in a global

economy. Jefferson County (Kentucky) was selected as a program site.

The project (ROBBE) is a collaborative effort between the Jefferson County Department of Corrections and the Jefferson County Public Schools Adult Education Center. This partnership is designed to serve 600 jail inmates over a 2-year period. The Adult Education Center provides four part-time teachers and instructional materials. Under the grant, the program also has a director, manager, and a secretary.

ROBBE is offered at two locations to medium security inmates. Prisoners enter the program by volunteering or through court order. The program sites are two privately operated correctional facilities—Dismas House of Portland and River City Correctional Center. Dismas House is a male-only facility. It allows convicted misdemeanants to leave for work, school, and drug and alcohol treatment, and to seek employment. Most residents are on work release. All residents have been convicted of nonviolent crimes and have no past felony convictions. They may be sentenced to the facility for up to 12 months. Dismas House has a maximum daily capacity of 225 inmates. The River City Correctional Center is owned and operated by the U.S. Corrections Corporation. Like Dismas House, it is a privately contracted work release program for sentenced male misdemeanants with on-site drug and alcohol counseling available. It has a maximum daily capacity of about 200 inmates.

This program also adds to the continuum of correctional options available in the Jefferson County Department of Corrections. These options range from jail incarceration to Misdemeanant Intensive Probation Supervision. Approximately 45,000 people are booked into the jail system yearly. The vast majority of arrests are for misdemeanors.

At each site, the instructional model moves beyond traditional adult basic education offering. The heart of the instructional model is the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). CASAS is a widely used method of assessing adult basic skills and English as a Second Language abilities. It has been validated, approved, and funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It includes more than 80 standardized multiple choice, performance-based assessment instruments to measure life, basic, and employability skills. Instructors use CASAS to develop an individualized curriculum, focusing upon building and enhancing the student's competency levels. The CASAS scoring scale ranges from 150 (adults with special learning needs) to 250 (GED/secondary diploma). All assessment is linked to competencies and instructional materials that focus upon the goals of the student.

Through October 1993, a total of 383 inmates have been tested under CASAS. One hundred thirty-five

inmates (35 percent) have volunteered for the program, 33 inmates (9 percent) were not qualified, and 37 inmates (10 percent) have completed the program. The remaining inmates (178—46 percent) opted not to participate in ROBBE.

In ROBBE, inmates are given a CASAS appraisal to determine their initial competency levels. If the inmate volunteers to enter the program, instruction typically lasts 6 weeks. At the end of that period, CASAS is readministered to assess the level of student performance. The goal of the project was to raise CASAS scale scores by *five points* (this equates to one grade level) in reading or math. This article will focus upon program performance through the first 9 months of ROBBE.

Research Design

The program evaluation uses a quasi-experimental design. Inmates who do not volunteer for ROBBE but who were eligible for it are used as a comparison group (N=123). Use of such a "self-drop" group (persons who were not excluded from the program but for reasons of their own choose not to participate) is common in correctional program evaluations (see Adams, 1975). The experimental group consists of those inmates who volunteered for and completed the ROBBE program. Of course, selection bias is still a threat to the validity of such a design. The inmates who volunteer for ROBBE (N = 30) may be more motivated to learn.

Findings

First, we compare the pretest CASAS reading and math scores for these two groups. This information is presented in table 1. Here, we can see that these scores are nearly identical. The t score values show that the difference between them is not statistically significant. For both reading and math, the experimental and comparison groups are classified under CASAS as "Level C Learners" (scores between 215 and 224): functioning below a high school level but above a basic literacy level; able to handle most survival needs and many social skills; have difficulty following more complex sets of directions (CASAS Technical Manual, 1993). Therefore, the educational competencies of the

TABLE 1. PRE-TEST CASAS SCORES (READING & MATH) - EXPERIMENTAL AND COMPARISON GROUPS FROM THE ROBBE PROGRAM

Test	Experimental Group Score (N=26)	Comparison Group Score (N=123)	t - value
CASAS Reading:	222.40	222.03	1.38
CASAS Math:	215.96	215.56	0.23

two groups before program involvement are comparable.

The results in table 2 compare the pre and post-test scores of the experimental group. Recall that the goal of the program was to increase the scores by five points (equivalent to one grade level). Here, the reading scores of ROBBE graduates increased by almost 13 points and their math scores rose by just over 10 points. Both t score values are statistically significant. Both CASAS scores (above 225) classify ROBBE graduates as "Level D Learners": functioning at or above a high school entry level in basic reading and math who can profit from high school level (or GED) instruction; meet survival needs, routine work and social demands; and perform work involving oral directions (CASAS Technical Manual, 1993).

TABLE 2. PRE- VS. POST-TEST CASAS SCORES (READING & MATH) - EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (N=20) FROM THE ROBBE PROGRAM

Test	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score	t - value
CASAS Reading:	221.85	234.60	4.45*
CASAS Math:	216.20	226.60	3.61*

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 3. PRE- VS. POST-TEST CASAS SCORES (READING & MATH) - EXPERIMENTAL (N=20) AND COMPARISON (N=123) GROUPS FROM THE ROBBE PROGRAM

Test	Comparison Group Pre-test Score	Experimental Group Post-test Score	t - value
CASAS Reading:	220.40	234.60	7.04*
CASAS Math:	251.60	226.60	4.68*

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

In table 3, we can see that the experimental group also registered significant gains over the pretest scores of the experimental group. In sum, ROBBE graduates improved their educational skills in the program.

Conclusion

The early results from the ROBBE program are promising. They indicate that jail inmates can profit from individualized instruction under CASAS. Of course, the major question here is whether this improvement translates into success on the streets. Future research on the project will include a qualitative, process evaluation of program operations plus a long-

term followup of both employment and recidivism rates.

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