

Correctional Education:

Does It Get to the Heart of the Problem?

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### **Abstract**

Does correctional education really impact the rate of recidivism for released prisoners? The debate over the benefits of correctional education is often framed as recidivism rates being the primary measure for success. Recidivism rates are then couched in terms of employability as the important measure of the cost benefits of correctional education. However, the issue of offender rehabilitation is more than just economic. It strikes to the very heart of how strong or weak a country really can be. If a nation cannot solve its own social ills the ultimate consequence will be a decaying society that will eventually be a ruined society. The ability to “rehabilitate” the weak members of society into productive citizens is one measure of the character of a nation. The question is does correctional education do enough to support the rehabilitative process for the broader prison population? Should correctional education focus on more than just literacy and employability?

*Keywords:* correctional education, character education, recidivism, correctional curriculum

## Correctional Education: Does It Get to the Heart of the Matter?

### *Introduction*

As a prelude to the topic of correctional education, I feel inclined to provide background information that has a bearing on what might appear to be bias for some of my assertions. As a former juvenile probation officer and corrections center caseworker I speak from the experience of having worked several years in the field. As a former juvenile who was incarcerated several times, including almost two years in “reform school”, I speak with the experience of lessons learned the hard way. As a pastor of over thirty years having worked in corrections and ministering both in and out of prisons, I speak from a steadfast conviction that some can be “reformed” and others can be “transformed”, but the reality is that for many others no amount of counseling, preaching, or teaching will change the mind. As one Bible college professor so aptly stated, “A man persuaded against his will — is of the same opinion still.”

### *The case for correctional education*

As an educator, having been a teacher and school principal, I am a strong proponent of correctional education. Correctional education deserves credit as a major contributor to the efforts of rehabilitation in the world’s largest prison society. Although the United States ranks first in the number of prisons (Walmsley, 2005, p. 1), a statistic that might be viewed with concern, it should be considered that the United States leads the world in efforts of prisoner reform and rehabilitation. Correctional education continues to be evaluated and researched for its effectiveness in the process of rehabilitation — the work of restoring a person to a productive life. The most common indicator for rehabilitation studies is *recidivism*: a return to prison. The question is whether researchers really understand what reduces recidivism. Many believe that as long as a person is able to work they will not commit crimes. This may be true for some, but is it

true for most? It may be time to change the focus of recidivism research from *education and employment* to *education and character*.

Education is not only about economics; it is about character. Education can determine more than what we make (i.e. income levels) – it can determine what we become. It affects character, behavior, decision making, social skills, and morals. There would be little debate with the obvious – *it does not matter how rich a person may be if riches were gained by deceitful or dishonest means*. While it is important that those incarcerated gain meaningful job skills that will improve their chances of remaining out of prison, there should be a strong emphasis on character education; character being the key to staying free.

Barbara Wade explains the reason for correction education. Writing for the *Adult Basic Education & Literacy Journal*, Wade (2006) states,

The premise of correctional education is threefold. First, as inmates gain knowledge and skills, they should be qualified for employment upon their release into the community; second, education in prison should serve as a mechanism that enables inmates to learn to think more responsibly; and last, this combination should make it less likely that they will return to prison. (p. 27).

A part of the debate about the effectiveness of correctional education concerns the measure of recidivism. The question might be asked “what part of correctional education is most likely to impact recidivism rates; that which increases employability or that which changes the heart?” One side of the debate contends correctional education has been shown to reduce recidivism rates. Erica Meiners (2009) observes in the *DePaul Journal for Social Justice*,

Research consistently documents that education reduces re-incarceration: the more education those in prison receive, the lower the recidivism rates. Post-secondary education, in particular, has the highest rate of reducing recidivism” (p. 88).

However, Carl Owens opines that a correlation between education and recidivism needs further research. Owens (2009) writes,

Indeed, it appears that access to educational opportunity may deter engagement with criminal activity. Although scholars have correlated increased educational attainment with lower levels of recidivism, they lack the ability to determine exact relationship between the two. (p. 317).

If correctional education does impact recidivism rates, an assumption might be made that recidivism rates can be improved if we understand what part of correctional education is really working. While education that will improve employability is one reason for CE (correctional education), does that mean that raising the level of academic achievement will improve recidivism rates? For example, not-with-standing GED or HS education, will the chances of not returning to prison improve if prisoners are offered more post-secondary education? That is the implication of several studies.

Is it possible on the other hand that recidivism rates are improved by CE because there is an increase of emotional and intellectual abilities that change the character of the learner? Is it because of values content, improved self-esteem, better social skills, cognitive ability that improves decision making – or some other factor? Has the character changing possibilities of correctional education been given as much study as the emphasis on creating employability? Again, what part of correctional education likely works in favor of reducing recidivism?

The reason for the debate is the uncertainty about what works. It is possible that both are

true for different people to different degrees. Post-secondary education is costly and adding more in correctional education needs to have the strong support of a cost benefit analysis or proof that there is a worthwhile return on investment. Considering that postsecondary education may be funded by Pell Grants or some other government program, it is taxpayer money that is not offset by the recipient's productivity should recidivism occur. The economic cost is one side of the CE debate.

Adding more character and values education on the other hand can be provided with little cost. Is it possible to know if correctional education delivers enough character education: or could increasing character and values education further improve recidivism rates? While most studies of correctional education strive to determine the correlation with recidivism rates and levels of education, few studies have asked the question, "Why does a person choose not to return to prison?" Seldom remembered is that most crimes are still crimes of choice. Does correctional education really get to the "heart of the problem"?

#### *Correctional education and recidivism studies*

A literature review of the issue examines several studies located by searching Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Academic Source Complete, JSTOR, and other journal sources. For the question, "*Is there a correlation between correctional education and recidivism*", most evidence suggest that while correctional education likely helps, quantitative studies provide mixed results in determining CE's impact on recidivism rates.

A study by the *Urban Institute* (2009), for example, looked at postsecondary education in the states of Indiana, Massachusetts, and New Mexico (Burke-Storer, Coggeshall, Correa, Tidd, & Winterfield, 2009). The research asked two questions, (1) How do offenders and stakeholders view the value of PSE (postsecondary education) programming, and (2) does participation in

PSE reduce recidivism once important differences among offenders participating and not participating in PSE are taken into account? (pp. 1-2). The method included analysis of inmate focus groups and stakeholder interviews. The focus population included 2700 Indiana inmates enrolled in PSE, 180 in Massachusetts, and 647 in New Mexico (p. 3).

The Urban Institute (year) study defined recidivism in Indiana as return to prison for any reason or technical violation and in Massachusetts and New Mexico as new arrest for a new offense or technical violation (p. 10). For purposes of this literature review, the details and statistical analysis of the study are not included here, but the conclusions are suggestive that while PSE provided significant qualitative results the goal of reduced recidivism was only slightly significant. The researchers concluded,

The results of the qualitative component of the study indicate that inmates view their ability to engage in PSE as positive in ways that should, in principle, contribute to their success after release (e.g., increased confidence; development of marketable skills). However, the results of the quantitative study provide mixed results in terms of PSE's impact on post-release recidivism. In two states, PSE was associated with a decrease in recidivism, while in a third it was associated with an increase. However, only one of these effects — a decrease in recidivism — was statistically significant. (Burke-Storer et al, 2009, p. 13).

Another study by Freeman Hrabrowski and Jeremy Robbi (2002) posits that the results of studies between correctional education, particularly post-secondary education, and recidivism rates were “overwhelmingly positive” (p. 96). Citing studies by Taylor (1993), Seigel (1997), Jenkins, Pendry and Steurer (1995), and the Center on Crime, Community, and Culture (1997), the research provides data establishing lower recidivism rates in all studies for inmates that

received correctional education prior to release from prison. As an example, Hrabrowski and Robbi (2002) note that a Texas Department of Criminals Justice Study (1990-1991) show that recidivism rates for non-degree holders is 60%, only 13.7% when an Associate's Degree is obtained, 5.6% with a Bachelors, and 0% when a Master's degree is obtained (p. 98).

*The OCE/CEA Three State Recidivism Study*

Stephen Steurer and Linda Smith (2003) claim many "first" in a large-scale correctional educational study where the research design countered weaknesses that had been revealed in studies during the 1990's. The study for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Correctional Education (OCE) by the Correctional Education Association (CEA), was one of the most extensive studies to date concerning the value of correctional education.

Steurer and Smith (2003) state the *Three State Recidivism Study* was the first to access labor and unemployment data for a large sample study (p. 5); and it collected and assembled data from more sources than any previous study. This included family records, institutional records, educational records, and state wage and labor data for over 3000 inmates.

The importance of the *Three State* study is highlighted by its direct attempt to address flaws from prior studies in data collection for pre and post outcomes, but also for the extent of its reviews of prior studies. The research included reviews of major comprehensive studies conducted by the Evaluation Research Group, University of Maryland (1997, 2000), the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (1999), and the Urban Institute (2002) (Steurer & Smith, 2003, pp. 8-10). The research design looked at over 3000 inmates for the states of Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio.

The findings by the researchers suggested much the same conclusion as other studies reviewed. While Steurer and Smith (2003) conclude "The research report here shows strong



support for educating incarcerated offenders” (p. 20), the findings continue to show that recidivism studies generally have mixed results. The researchers write,

It should be emphasized what the research shows about the impact of correctional education on recidivism and employment is compelling. We have shown conclusively in Ohio that correctional education does have a significant impact on recidivism utilizing an exceptionally rigorous design, which used three types of analyses (bivariate, multivariate, and bivariate probit models).

We showed in Minnesota that participation in correctional education significantly reduces recidivism in two of three analyses (bivariate and multivariate). In Maryland we did not have conclusive evidence of statistically significant differences between the participants and non-participants on the impact of correctional education. But, as we pointed out, significant difference does not always account for differences in potential cost savings (Steurer & Smith, 2003, p. 21).

The mantra of “mixed results” appears in many recidivism / correctional education studies and should not be interpreted to diminish the relationship between recidivism and correctional education. What needs to be considered is that most recidivism research is focused on the impact of academic achievement on employability, and that employability is often considered the primary reason for correctional education.

There are fewer studies concerned with reduced recidivism as a construct of *rehabilitation* as it speaks to a change of heart, change of character, or change of mind. The value of character education in the rehabilitation process usually takes second place to the concern that inmates must become employable. While the goal of employability is necessary, it begs the question as to whether correctional education curriculum is robust enough to really

impact the real mission of correctional education— rehabilitation, meaning more than simple employability. The definition of rehabilitation includes, restoration, reclamation, repair, return to a useful or productive life, vindication of a person’s character and the re-establishment of that person’s reputation (“Rehabilitation”, Wordnetweb, Princeton.edu).

*Why CE-recidivism studies should change their focus*

Continued research to prove a correlation between correctional education and recidivism will bring little new information to light unless changes are made to improve data gathering.

Lichtenberger and Ogle note that correctional education evaluation continues to be as follows:

(1) Pre-release outcomes such as enrollment patterns, educational attainment in adult basic education, GED, post-secondary, life skills, and vocational courses taken via the prison system; and (2) Post-release outcomes of recidivism, further education/training, employment patterns, and earnings (Lichtenberger & Ogle, 2006, p. 230).

The need for evaluation, according to Lichtenberger and Ogle (2006), is “an important part in the planning and maintaining of correctional educational programs and should be taken seriously” (p. 235). The purposes of evaluation include the need to establish and justify a budget, to evaluate levels of professionalism and legitimacy of correctional education programs, to improve programs, and to expose weaknesses and deficits in programs. Evaluations, another name for research, depends on collecting data that requires methods of maintaining connections with ex-offenders, establishing relationships with parole officers, community, and numerous agencies.

Whether it is framed as research or evaluation, Lichtenberger and Ogle (2006) note that the focus of pre-release and post-release remains much the same. They write this conclusion:

In short, correctional education administrators must take a proactive approach to form the perception that federal and state granting agencies, other stakeholders, as well as the general public have of correctional education programs. The main vehicle for forming that perception is proper evaluation which includes, but is not limited to, post-release outcomes such as recidivism, post-release earning and employment, and post-release educational attainment. (p. 238).

In other words, employability and reduced recidivism is the proof that correctional education is working.

The question is whether correctional education and levels of achievement is the most likely reason for reduced recidivism rates. David C. Howell (2011) writes, “A statement that you will find in virtually every discussion of correlation is that correlation does not imply causation” (p. 208). A study by St. Leger, Cochrane, and Moore (1978) reported that there was a positive correlation between infant mortality rates, adjusted for gross national product, and the number of physicians per 10,000 in population (Howell, 2011, p. 192). In that study, there was an increase in infant mortality rates as the number of physicians per 10,000 in population increased. Concluding that more doctors would mean more infant deaths defies logic, but the correlation exist none-the-less.

While much of the research has focused on employment and recidivism, has much been done to determine if character education impacts recidivism?—a very interesting question. How to design such research would be a challenge, but one construct could be the increase of character and values content for prisoners that have equal amounts of education, and study recidivism rates for such a released population. Post-release interviews that question why parolees make different choices once released are easy to construct. Who bothers asking the

question? How often are ex-offenders who have stayed out of prison polled to find out what really made the difference?

A literature review of recidivism and character education and also of correctional education and character education failed to yield much in the way of research. While much has been written that validates the notion that character education has been a part of correctional education, little has been done to examine its impact on recidivism rates. How can we know whether correctional education really gets to the “heart” of efforts to rehabilitate our prison population?

### *Defining character education*

The lack of research on character education and its relationship to recidivism may be due to the complexity of re-integration into society, but also the difficulty in today’s society of defining character. For some, character education is all about morals, for others it is about citizenship, and while good character for those with a progressive ideology would include “tolerance”, those with a conservative ideology are reluctant to include tolerance of sin as a virtue that should be taught to our children.

Many years ago, I was asked to give a lecture to a psychology class at Cornell University about working with “deviant characters”, a result of my work in prisons. At that time I was the pastor of a church in Ithaca, NY where almost half of the congregation had become members as the result of “prison ministry”. I was serving in an unofficial role as a chaplain to the county prison. I entitled my lecture, *Conformity and Deviance*, and I began by making this observation: “There is one thing about non-conformists; they are all alike!”

Much of my lecture considered the fact that the concepts of morals, right, wrong, and acceptable social behavior have been changed. The Bible, once the standard of conduct for most

Americans has been removed from schools, vilified in Hollywood, and moral laws such as adultery and fornication are simply not enforced in most states. As a result, society has selected a few virtues such as honesty, respect, integrity, responsibility, and courage as examples of good character (Hoedel, n.d., Homepage). This suggest that “character” is in the eye of the beholder, which only adds to the confusion about what counts as character education. The simplistic view is to accept common social standards and to go from there. A definition that we can all agree on is character that enables us to live in harmony with our society.

Character education must have a definition of character in order to inform practice. Writing for the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Bier and Berkowitz (2002) define character and state,

What we really mean in this field when we invoke character is socio-moral competency. Character is the complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent. In other words, character is multifaceted. It is psychological. It relates to moral functioning. In the first author's *Moral Anatomy*, seven psychological aspects of character are identified: moral action, moral values, moral personality, moral emotions, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics (p. 73).

In studying character education, Christy Visher and Jeremy Travis (2002) of the Urban Institute note that “Individuals returning home from prison have been shaped by their offending and substance-abuse histories, their work skills and job histories, their mental and physical health, their prison experiences, and their attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits” (p.91). Attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits are sometimes not static but differ with relationship to family or to different parts of community, including peers, authority figures, and friends. It would be easy to mistake these changing characteristics as “character”. However character

comes from core values that are solid in terms of being socially normal and consistent across relationships. Such character is often missing or transient in those who are considered “deviant”.

The U.S. Department of Education provided a definition for character education by stating,

Character education teaches the habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations. (Partnership, 2008, Introduction).

While this definition does not define character it is interesting to note that there must be something consistent about character that makes a person the same across multiple relationships because it defines what a person “is” rather than what a person “does”.

*Character education is an “agent of change”*

A minister who had been in prison made this observation: “If two people are hungry, one will work and one will steal. Both have the same problem, but they each have a different solution.” The minister then stated, “Circumstances do not dictate responses. One can choose how to respond to circumstances”.

This is called the pessimistic view known as the “rational-choice” theory with proponents such as Robert Martinson (1975) who according to Uban and Robinson assessed "several" rehabilitative studies and concluded that "with few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism" (Torres, 2003, para. 7). Torres notes that an opposing “positivist” view such as the Social-Psychological Deterministic perspective “suggests that cognitive processes play a major role in the acquisition of new behavior patterns acquired through exposure to certain types of treatment such as educational programming” (para. 4).

In public schools character education and values have become part of most state curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education provided a definition for character education by stating,

Character education teaches the habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations. (Partnership, 2008, Introduction).

The Department of Education reported that a program of grants aimed at character education in schools has resulted in the following achievement. “States reported discovering that development of good student character and positive school climate are at the core of learning and help to create an environment in which academic achievement is maximized” (Partnership, 2008, p. 7). This suggests the prospect that character education in prisons would improve academic achievement as well.

It would be anticipated that an objection could be made pointing out that there is a difference between the general populations of school children and the juveniles and adults that are in prison. However, in almost every human endeavor there is a presumption that human beings develop behaviors as a result of some form of educational nurture. The consensus that most behaviors are learned behaviors would seem to be the conclusion of teachers, doctors, ministers, psychologist, and the vast majority of parents. When preachers preach, isn't this character education? When parents teach their children right from wrong, isn't it character education? What is the point of character education in schools unless there is a consensus that such education is an agent of change? The only right conclusion is that most people believe that education is an agent of change otherwise why would preachers preach, teachers teach, parents train, and counselors counsel? What would be the point? If it is true for schools, homes,

churches, and businesses — it is also true for prisons. If anything is going to change a person it must start with the process of learning.

Education is a process similar to reaping and sowing. The axiom is that you reap according to your sowing and in proportion to your sowing. A great truth was written in the Bible stating, “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6, KJV). If one sows beans, he or she will reap beans. If corn is sown, you will not reap rice. The instructions are in the seed. One reaps what one sows. One reaps in proportion to one’s sowing because the more you sow, the greater the harvest.

I learned a long time ago to not give up on individuals, but to keep planting. If I want a crop of love, I have to sow love, preach love, teach love, write love, speak love — I simply cram love down someone’s throat. It works. If I want to reap a crop of “honesty” it will be included in my economics class, social studies, math classes, science classes, literature, and woodshop — as well as my religious classes, counseling sessions, and group treatment. Some cynic may object, “it is brainwashing”! I would answer, “Yes it is.”

Just how much character education is included in CE curriculum depends on the program and the facility, but this would lead to another variable that could be measured in any study of recidivism study where character education would be the independent variable. Do correctional units with higher level of character education show any difference in recidivism rates?

#### *The state of character education in today’s prisons*

Character education is certainly alive and well in correctional institutions. Some are uniquely faith based programs. Others focus on specific problems such as substance abuse.



Examples of faith based programs include four facilities in Florida that are exclusively “faith based prisons”. Cynthia Barnett (2009) says of the Wakula Institution,

Wakulla, which became a “faith- and character-based” institution in 2006, is one of four such facilities in Florida, reflecting how a new approach toward rehabilitation and life after release is spreading broadly through the Florida Department of Corrections. In addition to the faith-based prisons, there are also two new designated “re-entry” facilities at which inmates get education and substance abuse treatment along with life and job training before they’re released (p. 1).

The Secretary of Florida Department of Corrections, Walter McNeil stated that “We believe there’s a smarter way of looking at crime and punishment and incarceration” (p. 1). This included the faith-based prisons. Two of the facilities, Lawtey and Hillsborough Correctional Institutes, became the focus of a 2007 six month study by the Urban Institute of recidivism rates from these two “faith-based” programs. The study “found six month recidivism rates for Lawtey and Hillsborough inmates significantly lower than those inmates outside the faith based program” (Barnett, 2009, p. 2). Obviously the study is too short and narrow to provide a credible conclusion, but this is one example of character education at work. Concerning the Wakulba Correctional Facility, Allison DeFoor, former sheriff of Monroe county, states that “Since Wakulba has become faith-based in 2006, fewer than 10% of inmates released from the facility have returned to prison” (Barnett, Year, p. 4).

Jacksonville Florida is the site of faith based *Operation New Hope* which was selected by the White House as a model federally funded re-entry program with its “Ready4Work” program. Faith based programs such as Lawtey, Hillsborough, and New Hope each have work

components, job skills training, and educational components. But their focus is faith and character. Barnett (2009) writes concerning Operation New Hope.

Three years later, the program, which focuses on helping ex-offenders find long-term employment, stable housing, substance-abuse treatment and strong community/family relationships, had a 5% recidivism rate, compared to the countywide rate of 54% (p. 3).

Additional data of significance for Operation New Hope is the retention rate of ex-offenders that have gained employment after re-entry. "Business reports a 65% retention rate" (p. 5).

Indiana has 16 correctional facilities that include faith based or character based initiatives under its Indiana Purposeful Living Units Serve (PLUS) program (PLUS, Indiana DOC). The Indiana Department of Corrections implemented three pilot facilities in 2005, but the growth to 16 facilities in the past five years is not without significance. Indiana reports that recidivism rates have declined in the past three consecutive years (Indiana, DOC, Information and Statistics, Top 10 Facts). Commissioner Edwin Buss (n.d.) explains,

PLUS is a faith and character-based re-entry initiative. Purposeful Living Units Serve offers participants alternatives for rehabilitation. Whether participants choose to learn from character-based materials or faith-based materials, the living units are geared towards teaching core fundamental values that challenge and focus on positive reinforcement through learned behavior. The emphasis of this voluntary initiative focuses on strengthening spiritual, moral, and character development as well as life-skills. This is the basis towards re-entry into the community (PLUS, Year, para. 3).

The correlation between PLUS and recidivism is not established through research, but the growth following the implementation of pilot programs is an indication that the PLUS programs are contributing to the mix of educational programs that are working to reduce recidivism rates.

*Research on faith and character based initiatives*

Faith based programs and character education programs are not without challenges. The *Best Practices Tool Kit* prepared by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction examined faith-based programming and concludes,

Research indicates that high levels of involvement in religious activities lead to reductions in various harmful health outcomes, reductions in juvenile delinquency (Johnson, Tompkins & Webb 2002; Johnson & Seigel, 2002), and reductions in prison misconduct while incarcerated (Kerley, Matthews, & Schulz, 2005; Clear & Sumter 2002). However, there is little published research evaluating the effectiveness of faith-based organizations, programs or initiatives (Best Practices, 2007, p. 1).

In the same report, a review of The Inner Change Freedom Initiative (IFI) a faith-based program in Texas, Kansas, Minnesota, and Arkansas reported reduced recidivism in a study of the Texas program. Studies by Trusty and Eisenberg (2003) and Johnson and Larson (2002) showed significant reductions in recidivism for those that completed the IFI programs which included programs while incarcerated and aftercare programs (Best Practices, 2007, p. 3). The results were mixed however, as program participants that did not complete the total IFI program showed higher recidivism rates than non-participants.

*Best Practices* described over a dozen additional readings and studies made on faith-based programs which made claims of reduced recidivism but concluded that research was limited and more research was needed.

Unfortunately faith based programs have come under fire as lawsuits against sectarian programs have resulted in court challenges. The IFI program in Iowa was ruled to be unconstitutional as the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa ruled that it violated

the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment (Best Practices, 2007, p. 4). In 2006, Ohio faced similar challenges resulting in a “Settlement and Agreed Order” allowing faith based programs within certain guidelines. These include no endorsement of religion and attendance is voluntary.

### *Implications for future research*

The research between recidivism and employment reveals that the mixed results are partly because ex-offenders are going to be victims of a culture that simply does not want to hire an “ex-con” regardless of their level of education. In the real world, the first thing that most employers look at when reviewing an application is education levels — except when the person is an ex-offender. There appears to be sufficient research to establish a correlation between education and employability, meaning increased job skills based on literacy and academic achievement. But the challenge of finding work even with academic achievement will continue to be a problem for released inmates.

Focusing on post-secondary education and recidivism may reveal greater gains in reducing recidivism and a robust design may provide greater evidence for increasing post-secondary opportunities in prisons. But the studies would need to look for new programs to research with hopes of finding those that work the best.

A literature review reveals very little formal research into character education and its correlation to recidivism rates. Faith based and character education initiatives, more than any other part of CE, is more likely to produce a “heart change” — the necessary ingredient to overcoming life’s adversity. The problem is that there is too little research that answers the question of what really created the change in a man or woman released from prison who was successful in not returning. It is time to look at whether increasing faith based and character

education really produces the change behind the claims. The programs that do exist should receive greater study and perhaps a more robust design to look at the individual components as they impact character change. Could research reveal differences in strong or weak programs and their impact on recidivism? Can more character or values laden curriculum improve results? Can additional faith based initiatives make a difference?

Research into correctional education, character education, and recidivism rates will continue to have challenges and whether improving recidivism rates by 1% or 2% or 50% will always be considered movements in the right direction. The reason for the research should be the important discoveries that inform practice of better ways to reach the heart of even one person who walks out of a prison forever.

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