Teaching in Prison.
Authors: Monica Frolander-Ulf

If prisons were places people who have committed serious crimes were sent to pay a debt to society, and to be rehabilitated to return to society as healthy members of it, then at least the following things would be true. First, people who had not committed serious crimes would not be in prison at all. Drug users and persons with mental illnesses would receive treatment and would live in their communities, either at home or in safe and hospitable facilities run as public entities. Those who had committed minor criminal offences, such as shoplifting, would be given non-prison sentences involving counseling and community service. As much as possible, communities would be involved in both setting the penalties and organizing and participating in the treatment. Ironically, this was typically the case in American Indian communities, now so ravaged by the U.S. criminal injustice system.

Second, those who must be imprisoned would be placed in facilities that were comfortable, safe, and clean. They would be provided with healthful food and given ample time to engage in physical activities. Except in the most extreme cases, they would be eligible to return to society as a matter of course, and their sentences would be such that their return could reasonably be envisioned by them, giving them hope and encouraging them to remake themselves into persons fit to engage in normal social life.

Third, and of greatest importance, persons in prison would be provided with and expected to make use of training and education. For people who are not literate, there would be literacy courses. For everyone, there would be a wide range of classes and programs aimed at helping those imprisoned both to prepare themselves for meaningful work and to begin to get a clear understanding of the social and physical world.

Finally, prisons would establish an institutional structure to ease the transition from prison to society, making sure that former residents had adequate services available to them upon release as well as decent employment.

As the articles in this issue make abundantly clear, the U.S. criminal injustice system does none of these things. Quite the contrary, it is structured in such a way as to maximize the number of activities characterized as criminal and the number of persons in prison, as well as to ensure that as many persons as possible remain in prison or return there after they are released. In this article, we examine, partly through our own experiences, the third of the above standards for rehabilitative criminal justice, namely, the education of people in prison.

Since most incarcerated persons in the United States are poor, their poverty often compounded by racial and ethnic discrimination, it is not surprising that they have had woefully inadequate schooling. According to a 1997 report from The Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, illiteracy among the nearly 100,000 juvenile prisoners in the United States is very high: "Ninety percent of teachers providing reading instruction in juvenile correctional facilities reported that they had students who [could not] read materials composed of words from their own oral vocabularies." As high as 40 percent of juvenile offenders have learning disabilities. Few juveniles in prison complete their education when they are released. And, in adult prisons, the situation is similar: Nineteen percent of adult inmates are completely illiterate, and 40% are functionally illiterate, which means, for example,
that they would be unable to write a letter explaining a billing error. Comparatively, the national illiteracy rate for adult Americans stands at 4%, with 21% functionally illiterate.

The rate of learning disabilities in adult correctional facilities runs high, at 11%, compared to 3% in the general population. Low literacy levels and high rates of learning disabilities within this population have contributed to high dropout rates. Nationwide, over 70% of all people entering state correctional facilities have not completed high school, with 46% having had some high school education and 16% having had no high school education at all. [1]

We know from the works and practice of Paulo Freire and his disciples, as well as from the practice of revolutionary governments in China, Cuba, and Nicaragua, that illiterate people can become literate in a relatively short amount of time. [2] By mobilizing teachers for nationwide campaigns and training them in Freire's techniques (which, among other things, uses words intimately tied to the experiences of the people being taught), Nicaragua's Sandinista government made enormous strides toward universal literacy in a ~ couple of years. Freire, himself, helped Brazilian peasants to learn how to read and write in less than a year. There is no reason, therefore, why people in prison could not be taught to do the same before their sentences ended. Literate prisoners could be trained to be teachers, so it might be the case that relatively few outside teachers would be needed, and these could be mainly utilized to train the inside teachers.

Recidivism rates are very high in the United States, ranging from 41 percent to 60 percent, depending on whether we are talking about the re-arrest rate (more than 60 percent) or the re-imprisonment rate (about 40 percent). [3] This means that for many people, prisons are a revolving door--when people leave, they know that the chances are very high that the door they are walking out of will soon enough be the door they are walking back into. However, the one thing that is most likely to prevent a return to prison is education. Nearly all studies show that the more schooling an imprisoned person receives the less likely he or she is to get in trouble upon release. Literacy programs reduce recidivism, job-training programs reduce recidivism, and college programs reduce recidivism. For example, "Inmates with at least two years of college have a 10% re-arrest rate, compared to a national re-arrest rate of approximately 60%." [4] There are some methodological problems with most of these studies, mainly connected to the difficulty of imposing adequate controls so that we can isolate the independent effect of schooling on recidivism. But enough studies have been done and enough testimony taken from the persons in prison themselves to tell us that education does indeed work. As one prison student eloquently put it, I believe college education within a penal environment is not only a valuable tool for the prisoner in gaining self-esteem and confidence, as well as future employment, but it is advantageous to society at large. A college-educated prisoner has a greater capacity to function within a social context. Once integrated, the ex-convict, educated at taxpayers' expense, becomes a taxpayer instead of being a burden on society (police investigation, prosecution, incarceration, parole supervision, and in many cases, recidivism). He/she now can function as a productive member of the community. Education is one of the best investments a society can make within a penal setting. [5]

Not only does education work in terms of helping incarcerated persons get on with life after prison (which in turn greatly reduces the cost of the entire criminal injustice system), but it also makes life more bearable in prison. At the federal prison at McKean, Pennsylvania, something of a model prison under former warden, Dennis Luther, education has a high priority:

Forty-seven percent [of the residents] are enrolled in classes, which is one of the highest rates in the federal system. Many inmates earn licenses that help them to get jobs when they are released. They also have opportunities to teach one another--a mentors' group, for instance, and the "I Care" group, which holds discussion about issues of prison life. Many inmates teach Adult Continuing Education as well. These programs are not mere frills, Luther claims, because they help to keep the prison running smoothly. "The older guys see some young guy who's got forty years to do," one staff member told me. "They think, he's angry, and he's scared of me, and I've got to do time with this guy. So they see it as a challenge to get some of the younger guys involved in the ed program; they see this as the only hope. They do it a lot of different ways--mentoring, whether formally or informally--to somehow expand the resources of this younger population coming in. Wherever the staff leaves that challenge, the older inmates pick it up. [6]
Given the proven benefits of education, one would think that it would be a high priority for prison administration and for politicians. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Education has a very low and decreasing status within prisons. Everyday in the news, we read about juveniles being tried as adults and imprisoned in adult facilities. Once there, however, they seldom receive the education that they might get in juvenile facilities. And in the juvenile prisons, themselves, education is woefully inadequate, though imprisoned youth might be able to prepare for a high school equivalency degree (GED). In adult prisons the situation is similar if not worse. Data on education in prisons are not readily available. We searched the Bureau of Justice Statistic’s massive website and found nothing. [7] Searching using the words or phrases "prison education," education and prisons," "rehabilitation," training," "training and prisons," and a host of other similar terms yielded no information. The Center on Crime, Communities & Culture was kind enough to provide us with tables for "Adult Correctional Budgets 1999-2000." These, unfortunately, do not have a separate category for educational expenditures. In some states, these are probably included in the category "Treatment Programs," and while this is a broad area covering more than education, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of states spend less (and often far less) than 10 percent of their budgets on treatments of all types. These percentages are very low, indeed, when we realize that the fraction of all people in prison who have treatment needs is certainly much higher.

In reports covering specific states or types of treatment, including education, the limited amount provided is always highlighted. "Of the approximately 130,000 substance abusers in California's prisons, only 3,000 are receiving treatment behind bars." [8] At New York's Rikers Island, special high school programs were begun for eighteen to twenty-one year olds, after the Legal Aid society filed a class action suit. One of the schools, Horizon Academy, has had some success in getting students through their GEDs, but there are many problems. Only five of twenty-seven teachers are trained in special education, despite the special needs of most of the students, and there is only one guidance counselor. Classes are frequently interrupted by various prison procedures, and students are always being transferred to other prisons before they can complete their studies. [9] In Indiana, only two of ten state prisons offer high school courses, and in those that do books are few and usually woefully outdated. [10] Louisiana a prisoner, Wilbert Rideau, says, "Rehabilitation can work. Everyone changes in time Most convicts want to be better than they are, but education is not a priority. This prison houses 4,600 men and offers academic training to 240, vocational training to a like number." He adds, "Perhaps it doesn't matter. About 90% of the men here may never leave this prison alive." [11]

If hard data on education are scarce, we nonetheless know that the trend in providing education for those in prison is negative. Already in the early 1990s, a California commission on prisons was decrying teacher cutbacks in the face of already inadequate programs. And when there was a choice between having an illiterate prisoner work in a prison industry or attend school, the work assignment invariably won out. [12] Back when our prisons were far less full, Congress, in 1967, enacted Title IV of the Higher Education Act, which allowed incarcerated persons to apply for Pell Grants, direct government subsidies for college education. By 1982, over 380 college programs were in place in forty-five of the fifty states. The studies linking education to recidivism show that the higher the level of schooling attained, the lower the rate of recidivism. Yet in the put-them-all-in-prison-frenzy of the past twenty years, politicians have demagogically attacked federal aid to people in prison, despite the fact that no person outside of prison was ever denied a grant because someone inside received one and despite the insignificant amount of money actually granted to prisoners. The Pell Grant program and college in prison programs were effectively ended with the passage of the Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Once federal aid was eliminated, state aid was also cut, and not just for college education. As of 1997, "at least 25 states have cut back on vocational and technical training programs since the Pell Grants were cut. In 1990, there were 350 higher education programs for inmates. In 1997 there are 8." [13]

To the extent that prisons are offering any education at all, it is increasingly likely to be computer-based "distant learning" or housed in programs directly controlled by state departments of corrections. Perhaps we can add some immediacy to the above discussion with a description of our personal experiences teaching in prison. In addition, we can try to make clear why all movements to depopulate our prisons and to make them humane are so important in the struggle to build a democratic socialist...
society. We have been teaching at the State Correctional Institution--Pittsburgh, a maximum-security prison in Pennsylvania. Monica has been teaching since 1991 and Michael for the past two years. In the late 1960s or early 1970s, several prisoners wrote letters to faculty members at some area universities asking about opportunities to enroll in college courses. Several progressive faculty from the Black Studies, Communication, and Psychology Departments at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) responded by organizing a program allowing incarcerated persons to enroll in select courses offered by university faculty inside the institution.

The program initially received a small grant from the Pennsylvania Governor's Justice Commission. Later the program was supported by the Department of Education (until the mid-1980s), then jointly by the Department of Education and Department of Corrections, and eventually solely by the Department of Corrections. The state's financial contribution to the program was very limited; its maximum yearly contribution was $26,000, most of which was used to buy textbooks for the students. By the 1980s, the state had cut its contribution to between $19,000 and $22,000 per year. The rest of the cost was born by the University of Pittsburgh and the participating faculty members, most of whom volunteered their services to the program. (During the tenure of Governor Thornburgh, the state cut its contribution to $5,000 per year and the rest was made up by grants from the Heinz and Alcoa Foundations.)

In the mid-1970s, the program administrator (Professor Fiore Pugliano of the English Department) canvassed the university for more faculty volunteers, and the program was expanded to offer Bachelor's degrees in several subjects, including English, Psychology, and Communication. Later, with the help of a Pittsburgh Foundation grant to pay for computer equipment, a faculty member in the Information Science Department instituted a Bachelor's program in Information Science.

Invaluable to the program were the para-teachers, residents with college degrees, who were trained by Pitt faculty to teach introductory courses in basic reading, composition, math, and information science. These college graduates formed an informal educational council, which would meet occasionally to discuss issues related to the college program. They were very eager to help and were generous to a fault, with their time, books, and advice. They also acted as mentors to many of the students enrolled in the program and were instrumental in inspiring others to become involved.

The tuition costs were initially financed through Pell Grants. When Congress decided to deny these grants to prisoners in 1994, Pitt began charging each student a per-credit fee, and those serving life sentences were charged the full cost of in-state tuition. In 1994, the word came from Harrisburg that the program was to be terminated within a few years. No new students were to be enrolled and the program was to target those students who would be able to graduate before its termination. The administration issued a new set of requirements for prisoner education, which was to include basic education, certificate, business, and career development programs only. In 1998, the Pitt college program was shut down.

As the college program neared its termination date, a couple of us (Monica and another teacher), unbeknownst to each other, were thinking about what to do next. The political climate in the state government gave them little hope that anything could be done at that time to save the program. A student who knew both of us urged us to get together, which we did. Out of our conversations came the idea to institute a--hopefully temporary--noncredit certificate program. We decided, in essence, to continue the college program and to offer a variety of academic courses taught by university faculty and graduate students. In this program, called the Academic Enrichment Certificate Program, students earn a number of credit hours (calculated as one credit per contact hour) and receive an evaluation by the instructor for each class in which they enroll. An accumulation of 330 credits entitles the student to a Level Certificate. The big difference is that the students do not earn college credits. Initially only students with college degrees or some previous college experience were eligible for the program. It is now open to anyone with a high school diploma or GED. So far, the program has operated without a budget; the teachers are all volunteers, and they prepare all the teaching materials themselves. The institution has preliminarily promised a small amount of money for textbooks for the coming year; hopefully, foundation grant support will be forthcoming in the near future.
The response from the prison system has been quite positive so far. The program received the Volunteer Program of the Year Award for the state of Pennsylvania after only one year of operation. As we suggested earlier, prison administrators are quite often eager to institute a variety of programs for the prisoners, primarily because they realize that when people are engaged in positive activities that give them a sense of dignity and accomplishment, they are much less likely to act out of control. This is, of course, a two-edged sword. The program has given the state authorities an easy way out; it offers college-level education without the college credits the students deserve, and thus without the political fallout that a prison college program might have from the perspective of unenlightened politicians. And, at practically no cost to the state.

Despite these obvious limitations, having this program in place may make it easier to convert it to a college credit program at a future time. In addition, for some of the students, the individual course evaluations, and for others the Levell (or 2 or 3) Certificate, may give them admission and even partial college credits if they want to pursue a college education later. The program may inspire some to consider going to college in the first place. The evaluations and/or certificate can also be useful in efforts to find a job. No doubt, the motivations of the teachers also included a selfish aspect; they do not want to give up their teaching "jobs" at the prison. Our personal experiences teaching within the criminal injustice system, combined with our general understanding of it, suggest some political conclusions. Of greatest importance is the fact that the struggle to reform and then to abolish the criminal injustice system is a part of the larger class and anti-racism struggles. Most people are in prison today because they are members of the poor, and largely minority, stratum of the working class. Their imprisonment and the scapegoating rhetoric that has accompanied it, helps to split the working class. One part of the class is criminalized and made to appear less than human, and this fuels reactionary beliefs, most prominently racism, among workers not enmeshed in this horrible system. What is more, the working class loses some of its potentially most militant and class conscious members, and this hurts the entire class. Unions are less likely to be organized; community organizations are less likely to be formed; cross-racial coalitions are less likely to be made; and progressive politicians are less likely to be elected. The insane and racist war on crime poisons the working class and serves only the interest of the ruling class. As long as this war is not attacked by a unified working class, it will continue and its poison will become more lethal. When Eugene Debs said, "While there is a lower class I am in it; while there is a criminal element I am of it; while there's a soul in prison I am not free," [14] he was eloquently making exactly these points.

The question then is how to build a coalition between the imprisoned and the "free" parts of the working class. We believe that radicals who teach in prisons can be important catalysts in movement building. Teaching in prison is a transformative experience for the teacher. Just going into the prison gives one a good idea of how a prison strips away a person's individuality as it takes away his and her freedom. Each time we go to teach, we are subjected to intensive scrutiny of our briefcases, metal detection, drug scans, and occasionally the mean-spiritedness of the guards. Then we go through a set of metal doors that slam shut behind us just like in the movies, and once through another set of doors, we walk into the yard (sometimes but not always accompanied by a guard) with its ever-present gates and gloomy atmosphere. The prison is along a beautiful stretch of the Ohio river, but a view of the river is blocked by walls. Everywhere there are armed guards. The general sense is one of unrestricted power, the possibility at any time of violence, and fear. Seeing the prisoners in their drab and dusty prison garments and getting glimpses of the stark and unembellished buildings, without anywhere a hint of green or anything pleasing, we are quickly disabused of the notion that people in prison are coddled or have ready access to normal amenities much less luxuries. The stories that the students tell or hint at in class tell us that life in prison is an unrelenting torment. One man said bitterly, "I would rather be spit on and in the gutter outside than spend one more night here."

Teachers can give witness to what they see and hear and thereby help the students and workers with whom they come in contact to get a truthful view of the criminal injustice system. Similarly, teachers can tell the world a basic fact: people in prison are human beings, in the right circumstances eager to learn and capable of considerable insight. Our experiences teaching in prison have brought this home. Almost every class has been challenging and thoroughly rewarding. Challenging, because of the intense engagement with which so many of the students approach the subject matter. Our discussions (one of the students describes them as a "runaway train") are usually highly stimulating intellectually;
the reading material is subject to detailed and critical scrutiny by the students; interesting questions are raised; and we leave the class energized and convinced that this is what education is really about. Many of our own assumptions have been tested, and we have come to appreciate the vast amount of knowledge and talent that is lost to the rest of us when so many human beings are locked up for long periods of time. Teaching in the prison is light-years away from our "ordinary" jobs as professors at an undergraduate college, where the majority of the students appear to take their education for granted. There, questions are often met with a deadly silence (or even occasional yawns), and the students' limited life experience and thoroughly distorted and uncritical view of their society makes it difficult for them to become engaged in the learning process or subject matter. In contrast, the imprisoned students quickly take ownership of the curriculum and become involved in course development and other aspects of the program. Many act as mentors for other students; some have been co-teachers; and some help organize discussions to ensure that everyone gets his turn to speak.

As instructors we are also constantly rewarded by the students' appreciation of our presence. We are ordinary people from the outside who treat the students as full human beings with important contributions to make to the class. The classroom provides one of the few spaces inside the prison where free-flowing discussions can occur in a relatively safe environment unencumbered by the presence of people in authority. And here education is not taken for granted. The generous welcome we get (usually after a brief testing period) reminds us of just how precious it is to engage in a learning process that helps free our minds, not further imprison us mentally.

Our classroom interactions can be used to good effect outside of the prison. We can use them to tell the public that the vast majority of people in prison are just like them, with the same dreams and aspirations, the same good and bad qualities. We can use this to make the point that any of us could end up in prison, especially if we are poor and most especially if we are Black, or Hispanic, or American Indian. We can use our extraordinarily positive classroom encounters to buttress the data showing the cost-effectiveness of education for people in prison. And, we can pose an obvious question: why wasn't decent education provided to these men and women before they entered prison? It is certainly cheaper and more socially desirable to educate people than to imprison them. What we clearly must struggle for is a society in which education, at all levels, is provided to everyone as a matter of right. The struggle to make education available to people in prison can be coupled naturally with a fight to make education available to all. We can show that current trends are doing exactly the opposite. It is obvious that a good education is necessary if one is to "make it" in a stratified society like this one. It is equally obvious, given the data provided earlier, that not having access to a good education increases the probability that a person will end up in jail or prison. And yet, what we find are school systems that are crumbling in many parts of the country.

Students in many parts of the country sit in classrooms with leaking roofs; others are housed in trailers; many do not have access to laboratory facilities or even textbooks; and there is a shortage of qualified teachers. [15] At the same time, there has been a massive increase in funding for prisons, with hundreds of new prisons constructed in the last twenty-five years. Remarkable, several states have been cutting education spending almost in sync with their increased spending on the criminal injustice system, and, in some states, more money is now spent on prisons than on schools. [16] Pell Grants were eliminated for men and women in prisons, but grants of all types have been eliminated for all working persons. This is a crucial point to get across to the public at large. Too many people respond to the idea of offering college education in prison with the argument that, "Why should they have access to it, when I can't afford to put my child through college."

If the teachers are transformed, so too can the students undergo a radical change. Of utmost importance to people in prisons, both in terms of their sanity and their ability to make it in the "world," is contact with persons who are not part of the criminal injustice system. Teachers are such persons, and they and the struggle to keep them there, are all the more important given several ominous trends. Most new prisons are located in rural areas, often very far from the urban areas where the majority of the prisoners are from. Usually public transportation is not available or at least not easily accessible or affordable for family members and friends, making visits less frequent. A new maximum security state facility was recently built in a rural area of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, over an hour away from Pittsburgh and over four hours' drive (add a couple of hours by bus) from Philadelphia. Another facility is planned to open in a couple of years in Fayette County, some two hours' drive from
Pittsburgh, while the facility where we have been teaching is scheduled to be closed. This would effectively eliminate our program, since few, if any, of our teachers would be willing to travel four hours round-trip to teach a class for two hours. Further, the skyrocketing cost of telephone calls, caused by monopoly contracts and commissions collected by the state, makes it much more difficult for inmates to stay in touch with their families.

Education within the prisons also reflects this isolating trend. Increasingly, any education that is provided is administered directly by the Corrections Departments. All the paid teachers within the Pennsylvania prison system are now Department employees. The state now has 263 teachers in its prison system, a 14 percent increase in the past five years. While it is true that the state has hired more teachers for the prisons, the fact that the teachers are themselves employees of the Corrections Department makes it easier for the Department to closely control what is being taught and gives the prisoners fewer contacts with outsiders. A local college is proposing to institute a special program to train individuals to teach in prisons and is seeking one million dollars for the project. Anyone so trained will be required to work for at least four years for the Corrections Department. Clearly this is another way people on the outside are trying to capitalize on the massive expansion of the prison complex. Education inside prisons is now becoming "prison education." As one of the prisoners put it, "What are they going to teach them? Are they going to teach them to swear a lot?" The aforementioned focus on distance (internet-based) learning further isolates the students.

If teachers help to connect the students to a sympathetic outsider and to see themselves once again as full human beings, the courses themselves can open the students' eyes. We have witnessed many "Ahaa!" experiences that signify a whole new way of understanding the world and one's own place in it and the tremendous excitement and positive energy that follows. From a radical point of view, such experiences should be at the heart of any education and certainly within the prisons as well. We have noticed that the more classes the students take, the more they can envision themselves as productive members of society. In fact, a remarkable number of them have come to us with proposals for progressive social projects that they want to undertake when they are released. They have also asked us for other contacts who might help them make the prisons more livable and humane places. And our lecture notes, copied articles, and books are widely circulated, so that we reach many more people than those formally enrolled in the courses. Sometimes articles used in our classes have found their way to students' family members or friends back home.

Prison is a naturally radicalizing environment. Good teachers can help to encourage a coherent radicalism, one that grasps the nature of our society and suggests collective ways to change it. Teachers can also promote their students to organizations fighting for radical social change. We have had many students who would make excellent community or union organizers and leaders. They will just need a chance to become such persons, and their teachers can help, by giving them contacts and recommendations and by acting as missionaries spreading the truths that we have discussed in this article. About a half million imprisoned men and women will be released in the next decade. These people could make a real difference in every arena of social struggle, including, especially, the one aimed at ending the criminal injustice system itself.

The criminal injustice system is an insidious thing. It reflects a deep-seated and systemic antagonism between the rulers and the ruled. This antagonism guides the system and dictates what the rulers will do unless actively combated. Unless we contest it, the criminal injustice system will continue to incarcerate larger numbers of men and women, disproportionately minority, under the most horrendous conditions imaginable. The education of the imprisoned will be neglected, or to the extent that it is addressed, will be made to fit into the overall trajectory of maximum capital accumulation and maximum oppression. All manner of corrupt individuals and institutions, including colleges, will try to get a piece of the pie. We hope that those who read this article will be encouraged to agitate for prison reform and access to meaningful education for those in prison. We hope too that they will themselves try to get into the prisons as teachers or even to begin programs such as the one Monica has helped to initiate in Pittsburgh. We can assure you that this will be an extraordinary opportunity to transform both yourselves and the world around you.
Monica Frolander-Ulf teaches anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown Pennsylvania. Michael D. Yates taught economics at the same school. He is author of Why Unions Matter (Monthly Review Press, 1998) and is Associate Editor of MR.

Notes


(3.) The Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, op. Cit., 4.

(4.) Ibid" p. 5.


(7.) This website is at [less than] http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/[greater than]


(10.) Larry Hayes, "High Schooler in Adult Prison?" Educational Leadership 54, (May 1997), 84-85.

(11.) Wilbert Rideau, "Why Prisons Don't Work, Time 143, (March 21, 1994 ), 80,


(13.) The Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, op. cit" p. 4,

(14.) Eugene V. Debs, Walls and Bars (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1927).


COPYRIGHT 2001 Monthly Review Foundation, Inc. in association with The Gale Group and LookSmart. COPYRIGHT 2001 Gale Group
Teaching, Research and Engagement. Prison Education. Timeline. Recent research on prison education programs presents discouraging statistics on the current recidivism rate. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) reported in 2011 that nearly 7 in 10 people who are formerly incarcerated will commit a new crime, and half will end up back in prison within three years. Prison education is a proven strategy for reducing criminal recidivism and improving economic opportunities for individuals serving prison sentences as well as former inmates transitioning into civilian life. However, access to opportunities for education in prison remain limited. Education in prison is more than just a way to pass the hours while serving a criminal sentence. Prison education is a way to significantly reduce the likelihood that a temporary jail sentence will turn into a lifetime inside the prison system. Many prisoners voluntarily take part in educational programmes. In fact, everyone who is committed to custody is entitled to, and encouraged to participate in the extensive educational opportunities available. Educational programmes in prison are aimed at helping prisoners cope with their sentences and prepare them for release. In particular, these programmes offer them opportunities to discover and develop new skills. Prison education is any educational activity that occurs inside prison. Courses can include basic literacy programs, secondary school equivalency programs, vocational education and tertiary education. Other activities such as rehabilitation programs, physical education and arts and crafts programs may also be considered a form of prison education. Programs are typically provided, managed and funded by the prison system, though inmates may be required to pay for distance education programs. The history