THE EFFECT OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON PRISONER RECIDIVISM IN MICHIGAN

by

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Abstract

Proponents of Prisoner Education in Michigan claim that educational opportunities while incarcerated help reduce recidivism (return to prison) rates. Most research has been conducted by Correctional Educators and the data may be skewed. Other programs, such as early intervention and Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (MPRI) may also be successful in helping felons stay out of prison. Michigan faces difficult budgetary decisions and prisoner programming, including education, is often cut due to lack of funding. There are many areas to be explored to help cut the rate of recidivism.

Opponents of prisoner education do not tend to agree about the rights of prisoners and to what prisoners are entitled. Does prisoner education cut recidivism rates and, in turn, save money in the long run? What obligation do we have to offenders?
The Effect of Education Programs on Prisoner Recidivism in Michigan

Chapter I: Introduction

In Michigan, approximately 80% of first time offenders coming into the Department of Corrections (DOC) system do not have a documented High School Diploma (HSD) or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Prisoners are turned over to DOC custody if the individual’s minimum sentence is at least 1 year. People sentenced to serve less than 1 year serve time in a county jail. There are alternate sanctions to which offenders may be sentenced including community service or house arrest. In 2010 the state has approximately 45,000 prisoners and about 40 prisons ranging in security from minimum security (Level 1) to maximum security (Level 5). Medium security facilities are classified as Level 2 and 3 and Level 4 is referred to as close security. More offenders are on parole or probation, which are often under MDOC jurisdiction. Due to the financial crisis in Michigan, more prisoners are slated to be released from the MDOC this year than any other year prior and potentially up to 5 more prisons will be closed prior to October 1, 2010. In 2008, Michigan had a 48% overall recidivism rate. Simply stated, recidivism is the return to prison rate of prisoners released based on new offenses or parole violations (Vacca, 2004, p. 298). In 1998, Michigan enacted a law which requires prisoners with no verified HSD to minimally earn a GED before he/she is considered for parole. There are a few exceptions (Shultz, 2008, p. 10A). One exception, for example, is if a prisoner has a skilled trade or journeyman’s license and the prisoner was gainfully and legally employed immediately prior to incarceration. A prisoner may attend school, but earning a GED would not be a requirement prior to release from prison under the law. Another exception is if the prisoner is over the age of 65. In Fiscal Year 2007, a total of
Education Programs and Prisoner Recidivism

68 prisoners were paroled prior to earning a GED. Michigan’s law is unique. Is our duty as members of society to educate prisoners? Why should taxpayers pay for the service of providing education to incarcerated felons? Do felons have a right to a free public education? Is Michigan’s law too strict or is it an unreasonable demand on prisoners? Has the law helped to lower crime or rates of recidivism? Are other programs, including Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry (MPRI), more successful than education programs, or is educational programming a part of MPRI? Is mandatory prisoner programming as effective as voluntary programming? Do ex-felons with long sentences experience the same levels of success as those with shorter sentences? Do teachers or program directors behind prison walls make a difference in the rate of success the prisoners may experience? Is the person delivering the program more important than the program itself?

Many areas for research exist regarding prisoner education. Prison and its affects on society, families and individuals is a huge potential realm for research opportunities. Education is only a single program offered behind the prison walls. Other programs have proven to be successful and not all educational programming is the same from state to state; often even differ from facility to facility across the state. Even within the same facility the curriculum may differ from classroom to classroom. These issues make it difficult to measure success. Perhaps a better indicator of success upon release is simply the amount of time or percent of the minimum sentence the ex-felon served. There is a need for a great deal more research with prisoner recidivism rates and what the DOC can do to help prisoners to be successful upon release. There is a risk of doing too much for prisoners as taxpayer backlash may occur. Prisoner education is a small cog in a big machine. In addition to keeping the offender separate from the public, the goal of the
department is, as the name implies, corrections. The goal consists of attempting to correct
behaviors of offenders and providing instruction and modeling of behaviors considered
appropriate to the public. These skills are incorporated into an educational curriculum
consisting of basic skills such as literacy and life skills to mid-level skills of earning a
high school equivalency degree to higher level thinking skills, such as career and
technical education opportunities and even college level programming.
Definition of Terms

ABE- Adult Basic Education- Skills below the eighth grade level, as tested by standardized testing (usually the TABE).

ALP- Adult Learning Plan-Each prisoner enrolled in an academic program has an ALP created or updated annually or upon completion of academic goals.

Career Pathways-Broad groupings of careers that share similar characteristics.

Career Scope-A vocational interest and aptitude survey and test. MOIS offers career exploration for Michigan students, but no aptitude test to match skills with interests.

CCC- Community Correction Centers, sometimes referred to as halfway houses

Commercial placement- A parolee may be released to commercial placement only if there are no suitable homes to parole (usually in-state family or friends willing to house and assist the offender). Commercial placement is a last resort for the parole board to consider. Commercial placement is usually a hotel or motel and placement is usually only for a week.

Clemency-A governor of a state may grant a prisoner clemency. A clemency is a forgiveness of the crime and clears the criminal history for the offender. A felon granted clemency will show no criminal activity on a criminal history check. The president may also grant clemency to convicted felons to release them from custody and/or to erase the criminal history of a felon. A clemency does not mean the offender is innocent of the crime, simply that the crime is forgiven.

Custody staff- Staff whose primary responsibility is supervising offenders (i.e. corrections officers, sergeants, lieutenants, captains). Custody staff follow a chain of command similar to a military system.

Discharge- The prisoner who is released from prison after serving the entire sentence. Upon release, the offender is no longer under the jurisdiction of the DOC. There is no supervision upon release by the DOC or any other agency.

DOC- Department of Corrections

EPP- Education Program Plan. Each prisoner enrolled in academic, CTE or PR program has an individualized Education Program Plan in place. Each EPP outlines goals and objectives and are written upon entry in a new classroom, quarterly, upon completion of a program, and upon transfer to another facility.

FBP- Federal Bureau of Prisons

GED- General Equivalency Diploma. GED is also considered the next progressive step above ABE in educational programming.

Good Time credits- Good time credits in Michigan were banned in 1978. Good Time was a way to “reward” prisoners for appropriate behaviors, including completing programs and not getting Misconduct Reports written.
Habitual offenders- In Michigan, persons with 4 or more felonies. Habitual offenders usually receive harsher sentences.

HSD- High School Diploma

Juvenile Offenders- Felons under the age of adulthood (in most states, age 18). Some juveniles are tried as adults (depending on the nature of the crime).

Key Train-Software for training for the Work Keys test.

MBP-Marquette Branch Prison, a correctional facility in Michigan that houses approximately 1,200 prisoners in security levels 1 and 5. The prison employs about 300 staff members including corrections officers, shift commanders, teachers, secretaries and business office workers.

MDOC- Michigan Department of Corrections

Misconduct Reports- In Michigan, Misconduct Reports, also called “tickets,” are written by MDOC staff for prisoner misbehavior. A hearings investigator hears the “ticket” and the prisoner is found guilty or not guilty of the rule violation. Misconduct Reports are either “Major” or “Minor,” depending on the nature of the violated rule.

MOIS- Michigan Occupational Information System is a software program maintained by the Ingham County School District Intermediate School District. It contains personality and interest inventories on careers. It also has addresses and information for post-secondary education facilities in Michigan and across the country. There is also a resume maker and cover letter template. Students may print information on schools, resumes, and career information.
MPRI- Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative

Non-Custody Personnel- Employees of the DOC whose primary responsibility is not security (i.e. counselors, teachers, secretaries, human support services staff members, medical and records office personnel). Every staff person working for the DOC has a work expectation to maintain security.

Parole- Supervised release from a secure prison. A parole agent is assigned to supervise the offender upon release from prison.

Parole Agent- A supervisor of a felon on parole. Parole agents make announced and unannounced visits to the offenders’ homes and place of employment. In addition, parolees also visit agents in the office of the agent.

Parole Board- A panel of individuals who deliberate the length of sentence a prisoner should serve and decides when a prisoner should be released from prison on supervision. The governor appoints parole Board members.

PR-Pre-Release Class- a class designed to assist offenders in social, work competencies and soft skills development. The class is offered to offenders who have up to 1 year remaining on their minimum sentence.

PRI- Prisoner Re-entry Initiative; A bill signed by President Bush in 2008 designed to help prisoners transition from prison to the community.

Probation- A sentencing alternative to prison or may be a condition to parole. The offender remains in the community, but under supervision of an agent.

Probation Agent- Similar to a Parole Agent, but the agent oversees people on probation and not on parole.
Recidivism- The return to prison rate of prisoners after release (new violation or rule violation committed while on parole).

Sentencing guidelines- a framework for judges and other sentencing personnel to work

Security Level- in Michigan, prisons rank from level 1 (minimum security) through level 5 (maximum security). Opportunities and privileges are more prevalent in lower security facilities.

SPED- Special Education services in Michigan follow federal guidelines and are provided until a prisoner turns 22.

Soft skills- transferable work skills, including motivation, timeliness and effort.

STG- Security Treat Groups- Organized gangs or other groups which may pose risk to security inside a prison or correctional facility.

TABE- Test of Adult Basic Education-Standardized testing conducted by prisoner education programs teachers to track student progress.

Title 1- Services provided to eligible prisoners in Michigan until age 22. Title 1 prisoners attend school a minimum of 16 hours per week and also receive additional programming, including work and family development skills.

Truth in Sentencing- In 1998 Michigan passed a Truth in Sentencing law which requires felons to serve at least their minimum sentences.

Work Keys Testing- The test measures skills in ranges (bronze, silver, gold and platinum). There is a national push to replace the GED test with the Work Keys certification program. The GED test is not scheduled to be updated until 2010. The training program to prepare for the test is the Key Train software.
YOP- Youthful Offender Program-Educational programming for prisoners who have a high school diploma or GED and are aged 18 to 32. The MDOC does not offer college level programming to prisoners. The YOP program was created in response to the need for higher education opportunities for some offenders.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

History and General Information

Prisoner education differs from state to state across the nation. Michigan is the only state that requires a documented and verified high school diploma or GED certificate prior to release on parole. Prisoner education is not the only program offered to those incarcerated, but often the only program evaluated for its success in helping to reduce recidivism rates. The National Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (PRI) will also be monitored closely and should produce some helpful data.

In 2004, President Bush signed a bill designed to help prisoners upon release from prison called the “Prisoner Re-entry Initiative (PRI).” Along with education, other forms of assistance are being offered to prisoners that include connecting prisoners with outside public and private agencies prior to release in order to arrange for needed services (Wheeler and Patterson, 2008, p. 145). Services may include housing, food assistance, referrals for health services (including mental health) and education and training opportunities. These bills and laws are designed to help prisoners make the transition from prisoner to successful and productive members of society. Most people who enter prison will not serve a life sentence. The cost to house a prisoner in a correctional facility full time for one year in 2010 in Michigan is approximately $40,000. The actual costs per prisoner are higher for higher security levels and individual prisoners with high medical and health care needs. The overall average cost per prisoner is $40,000 annually. Because of the nature of some crimes and the risk to society, some prisoners must remain incarcerated and must remain in high security facilities. Michigan does not impose the death penalty and some prisoners’ crimes are so horrendous, they must be kept from the
public at whatever cost in order to ensure public safety. Many prisoners are repeat offenders and have had the opportunity to be paroled, but were unsuccessful. Some prisoners have no desire to change and will hurt themselves or others upon release. Some prisoners have lengthy sentences because of the nature of their crimes and, due to truth in sentencing laws, must serve their minimum sentences. In some cases, the minimum sentence is life in prison and some prisoners are given consecutive life sentences or sentences with a minimum over 100 years (though the sentence is not life in prison, in actuality the prisoner will serve his or her entire life behind prison bars). However, up to 95% of prisoners will one day return to society. Ex-offenders return to every part of the state and many are our neighbors upon release. Most prisoners are not sentenced to life sentences, and even if they are, they may still be under consideration for parole in Michigan under lifer review laws. In addition, every governor has the opportunity to grant clemency. Clemency erases a person’s criminal history. Many governors grant clemency to a few hand-selected prisoners during their term. Parole is the early release of prisoners from custody, but still under the supervision of the DOC. Probation is an alternative to prison and still represents supervision, but not always under the department’s jurisdiction. If ex-prisoners return to society with no more education and opportunities to change skills than with what they arrived, prison can become a lifestyle rather than a “period” in their lives. Prisoners use a great deal of “lingo” and prisoners who continually return to incarceration call the lifestyle “doing life on the installment plan.” Habitual offenders, those with more than four felony offenses, tend to serve longer sentences under Michigan’s “Habitual Offender” laws, so once a prisoner leaves prison
and then returns, the length of stay in prison will most likely be longer than the first stay and early parole becomes less likely.

Educational programming can serve another function other than academic and that is to help prisoners “do time” with fewer misconduct reports and less violence in the prisons (Vacca, 2004, p. 297). Prisoners tend to stay in educational programming for many reasons. Prisoners are offered the opportunity to learn social, vocational and academic skills, and have the opportunity to apply the new skills instantly within their current environment. This learning includes appropriate anger management and social skills or basic reading skills required on most prison work assignments. Those who do so may move to a lower security level facility and are afforded more freedoms, privileges and opportunities to apply the skills learned, take more classes and some may even earn the opportunity to work in job assignments outside the prison gates (depending on the type of crime and amount of time remaining on the minimum sentence). Prisoners often view education and programming as a privilege and an opportunity to learn and change. The Parole Board often looks favorably on prisoners who choose to participate in programming, even if the program is mandatory to be considered for parole.

In 1997, almost 41% of current prisoners in our country’s state and federal prisons and local jails and 31% of probationers had not completed high school. In comparison, 18% of the general population aged 18 or older had not completed the twelfth grade (Harlow, 2003, p. 1).
In addition, 68% of state prison inmates (compared to federal prison inmates) did not receive a high school diploma prior to incarceration. The numbers are slightly higher in the Michigan state system. The state tends to be “leading” the country in a number of negative trends including prison population, unemployment rates and loss of jobs, which, in turn, typically leads to higher crime rates, more victims, and more people in prison, on probation or parole. The vicious cycle leaves little funding available for alternate programming other than prison or for early intervention programs.

Of course, education and participation in programming while in prison should never be the only factors considered when reviewing rates of recidivism. Education is only one factor to review when we look at the overall picture of offenders returning to prison. One of the biggest common factors of ex-prisoners who do not return to prison is most likely, increased maturation. Other trends that appear to help ex-prisoners to stay motivated include being married or having a strong support system in place consisting of family, friends, volunteers and/or professionals. Prisoners who parole to no family or friends often parole to “commercial placement.” The Parole Board’s last option is to place a parolee in commercial placement. If no suitable home is found for a prisoner
scheduled to parole, he or she is given up to two weeks in a hotel or motel. Commercial placement is usually an inexpensive hotel or motel. In some less common instances, it may be a “halfway house” situation. Some religious or charitable community programs assist ex-felons in securing housing and other assistance. In most cases, there is little or no support for the parolee who paroles to commercial placement. During the time in commercial placement, he or she is expected to find a job or legal means of support, food, clothing, and shelter. Most prisoners who request commercial placement are often refused parole and often do their entire sentence rather than to be released early on parole. When prisoners serve the entire sentence, the ex-offender is left almost completely alone and is no longer under the supervision of the DOC. Prisoners who discharge from maximum sentences usually do not qualify for most state or federal government programs upon release. Prisoners should be released prior to serving their entire sentence behind bars. This would provide a transition back to the community for nearly every prisoner.

Why Teach Prisoners?

“IT is never too late to be what you might have been.”- George Eliot

The department’s primary responsibility to the public is safety. Another central mission of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBP) is to rehabilitate and to provide inmates with opportunities to obtain skills to readjust to communities upon release (Pavis, 2002, p. 146). If paroled in Michigan, most prisoners are required to return to the county the crime was committed. Most parolees are not permitted to leave the state. In order to parole to a different state, the receiving state must accept the parolee. Most often, parolees are released to one of three counties: Wayne, Oakland, and Genesee. These three
counties have recorded the highest numbers of loss in jobs and have high unemployment rates. Finding a job is very difficult for most newly released prisoners. If he or she is unable to find work, return to prison may be inevitable. Many ex-prisoners return to prison because of parole violations such as being unable to care for their own well-being. In addition, many ex-felons simply return to the same lifestyle they had prior to incarceration. Many ex-offenders have no legal means of making money or supporting themselves, so will return to crime. Seeing any or other alternatives is very difficult for many upon release from prison. Due to the costs associated, most prisoners do not receive any sort of formal counseling prior to release other than a 36-hour pre-release program, which is optional. Other optional programming includes Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, and anger management courses. Volunteers run many programs. Most prisoners have some history of substance abuse and most were using when the crime was committed. Many prisoners return to abusing drugs and alcohol upon release from prison.

As prisons become more overcrowded, safety within the facilities also becomes more difficult to maintain. Housing people with histories of violence and anger issues can be a formula for disaster. Rehabilitation often takes a “back burner” to housing, security, and basic needs of food and clothing. This is especially true in times of financial hardships, as Michigan has been witnessing in recent years. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs outlined problems individuals face when basic needs are not met. The tax base in the state has been dropping for many years because of the long history of government funding coming from taxes on manufacturing, particularly in the automotive field. The
tax base is the basic source of Michigan’s government funds to support the budgets for all state government agencies, including Education and the Department of Corrections.

Alternatives and Potential Solutions

Many community members do not find prison-run programs to be as effective as early programming. If Michigan invested in some early intervention programs, perhaps fewer prisoners would be incarcerated. If there were more accessibility to mental health services, substance abuse services and job training, perhaps less people in Michigan would be incarcerated. Many proponents suggest programming opportunities for people prior to incarceration. Some early programming is aimed at providing education to youths about the realities of prison.

“Scared Straight” programs, which are programs for juveniles in which corrections professionals and currently incarcerated adults present information about the harsh realities of prison, do work for many as a deterrent to negative behaviors for many participants, but not all. This program, and programs modeled after “Scared Straight,” is intended to ward off crime by making prison as unappealing as possible for younger offenders. Feinstein in 2005 finds “Virtually all adult criminals were juvenile offenders” (p. 40). However, Feinstein also found in 2005, nearly one half of all serious crimes in our country were committed by youths 10 to 17 years old. Any attempt is better than no attempt at helping younger offenders and potential offenders make better life choices (p. 40). The programs should be revisited and re-tooled to become more successful. The research of “Scared Straight” programs and their success could be an area for further research. The opportunities for research in the areas of early-intervention programs for “At Risk” youth could be endless.
I have discussed early intervention programs with my Pre-Release Instruction class participants. Most of my current students in class participated in “Scared Straight” or similar programs prior to their ultimate prison incarceration. A “Scared Straight” program involves “At Risk” youth visiting adult incarcerated felons. Both felons and youth participants are pre-screened for the appropriateness of the program. Many felons have served prior sentences in jail and most had juvenile records. Most in my class (9 out of 13) did not feel “Scared Straight” programs were effective in their own situations. A few students went so far as to say the programs somehow glamorized prison or made the possibility more appealing.

To be fair, one cannot expect one single encounter to deter crime to be successful alone. Often participants are of primarily inner-city children with little success in educational settings. The participants often come from dysfunctional families (Feinstein, 2005, p. 40). The problems of implementing successful “At Risk” programs are large. Most juveniles want to succeed, yet make poor choices. There are adults who would like to help, but may not know where to begin. These programs are most likely effective with a population who may not end up in prison anyway. Other programming should be available for “At Risk” youth, particularly in such high at-risk areas as Oakland, Wayne and Genesee counties in Michigan, but also across the state. Just because the numbers are high in these counties may be because the population is higher. For instance, if we examine drug related crimes per capita rather than by pure numbers, drug crimes are the same in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan as they are in some areas of Detroit. Because the numbers of crimes seem low in comparison to highly populated areas such as Wayne
County, the programs are not valued as much as they perhaps should be. Areas targeted for funding cuts often come from rural areas as opposed to urban areas.

Other alternatives to prison, including parole, probation, and Community Corrections Centers (CCC), which are called halfway houses or residential community centers in some states, cost less than traditional prison settings. Some CCC programs are faith-based or run by a county or city rather than the state. Even if the program is partially funded with state money, alternate programming should be a viable option for judges and prosecutors to consider when sentencing. Cases should be sentenced by guidelines, but should be reviewed case-by-case. Often mitigating circumstances might make prison a less likely option for some. The estimate is only about 1 in 100 crimes committed actually results in getting caught (DiIulio, 1997, p. 40). Those on parole or probation are often no different from those sitting in a prison cell. While those in prison have nearly $40,000 annually per individual spent to incarcerate them, most parolees and probationers have about $200 budgeted annually per parolee. The cost is less, but our recidivism rates are high and most re-offenders were on parole or probation when they committed new crimes or violated parole. The longer an ex-prisoner is out of prison, the more likely he/she will stay out of prison. While parole and probation systems may need to be re-modeled and re-visited and many more case managers, social workers, and parole and probation agents may need to be hired to help with the size of case loads, putting every convicted felon behind bars is just not reasonable or fiscally responsible. Some categories of violent and repeat offenders should not see parole or probation until the bulk of the sentence is served, but most people are willing to give ex-offenders a second chance. To write someone off for life is something lawmakers and judges need to
very carefully consider before sentencing or designing sentencing guidelines for judges to follow.

Some ideas for changes in parole and probation could include a version of a voucher system where offenders could get help if ex-prisoners seek the help (e.g. tuition vouchers, substance abuse class tuition services, and housing vouchers). If they do not, they should be sentenced accordingly and serve longer sentences (DiIulio, 1997, p. 42). There are many creative sentencing alternatives to consider.

A focus on sentencing guidelines is another area that requires some review. A person in Luce County and a person in Wayne County might commit similar crimes, but may be sentenced much differently (Luce County being a small county in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where the largest town is actually a village, and Wayne County being the county surrounding the city of Detroit). Crimes in rural areas are most likely not tolerated because little anonymity exists in a small town. Again, we as a people need to decide whom we are afraid of and whom we are simply “mad at.” Those we are simply “mad at” can probably make some better life choices through supervision, accountability and participation in programming. Perhaps attainment of some additional “tools” in the form of education may be all a person needs to make better life choices and stay out of prison. Recently in Michigan, some offenders sentenced to life because of drug offences were reviewed. Though time and effort would be extensive, individual cases should be reviewed in other similar types of crimes, as well. Perhaps some universities could use pre-law students to review case files and highlight some for further review by the parole board members or other appointing authorities.
Other possible solutions to “Scared Straight” programs might require conceptualizing other forms of education. The programming could be aimed at youthful offenders to target education rather than incarceration (Harr, 1999, p. 50). Many law-abiding, tax-paying citizens of any state may not fundamentally agree with the concept of providing education to a person who has committed crimes. With rising costs and many people seeking government assistance, negative taxpayer reaction should be expected. People who hear the idea initially may boil down the concept to “free-education for crime committers.” The problems compound when people hear of a participant abusing the privileges. In times of difficult economic hardships and high unemployment rates, abuses run rampant and law-abiding citizens and taxpayers will not see the program for the potential long-term successes.

Many haunting statistics plague our country regarding those incarcerated. Our country has a greater percentage of citizens in prison than any other nation in the world (Welsh, 2002, p. 154), which is ironic considering our country’s motto is “Land of the Free.” Michigan incarcerates at a higher rate than any of the neighboring states incarcerate, including the Great-Lakes/mid-west region of the country: Ohio, Wisconsin, and Illinois. The primary reason for the higher rate of incarceration may be sentencing guidelines or lack of prison alternatives (MDOC website, 2010). In addition, once sentenced, most prisoners in Michigan serve more of their sentence prior to release when compared with neighboring states.

Vacca reviewed a study conducted in New Jersey in 1997. The study concluded that the department spent approximately $25,000 annual per prisoner. Only two percent of the cost was spent on education (p. 301). In 2007, the Michigan Department of
Corrections spent more than $32 million on academic and vocational programs. The overall cost to the taxpayers for the DOC is an estimated $2 billion (Shultz, 2008, p. 1). Though the numbers are huge, Michigan’s budget accounts for less than 2% of the corrections budget for education. Exactly 2% of $2 billion is $40 million- Michigan’s Correctional Education budget is $8 million below the estimated 2% figure.

The typical prison population representatives are adults who are poor or disadvantaged. Upon release, ex-convicts are often unable to find work because they lack vocational and literacy skills. Mastery of literacy skills while incarcerated and working toward a vocation may be a proactive way to address recidivism. Additionally, laws vary on voting privileges upon release from prison. Many ex-convicts will never again have the opportunity to vote. Ex-prisoners tend to be a disenfranchised population of non-voting, poor and disadvantaged. When they are released from prison, they also have a felony on record, as well. Further study could reveal how many ex-felons choose to vote after release or how different states handle the situation of ex-felons voting rights and privileges.

Not all programming in prison needs to be formalized and measured. Even small-scale programs report success. An example is a program for incarcerated parents who record themselves reading children’s books. The program reports success to help reduce recidivism (Stolley, 2007, p. 128). Just a tie to something meaningful outside the prison walls helps prisoners to feel like a part of the community or the family and can help transition upon release. Feeling wanted and needed fills a basic human need. Another program the MDOC runs at one facility is an animal training program. The animals are trained to assist the disabled. The prisoners do not actually do any of the training, but the
dogs become familiar with working with and being around many people. Other facilities have knitting groups. Outside agencies provide yarn and prisoners knit hats, mittens and scarves for those who may be in need. If a small tie to the outside can be established while the prisoner is incarcerated, perhaps he or she will be less likely to re-offend. An ex-prisoner may be more apt to accept a job offer in a lower paying or entry position just to stay out of prison.

There are some documented examples of how programs run by volunteers can be beneficial to prisoners. An example of a “small scale” program is the New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). The program boasts large success rates in helping prisoners stay out of prison upon release. Marable (1996) reports the program is 42 credit hours, delivered via lectures and classroom discussions for 3 hours a day for 5 days each week. Also required are 15 hours of field service within the prison. Only 5% of prisoners who completed the program returned to prison, compared to a repeat offender rate in New York of 42% (p. 80).

Education programs in prison seem to claim to help recidivism, but finding a control group in Michigan for study, of those who do not participate, is difficult due to the law mandating a GED prior to release from prison. Prison populations across the country are exploding and costs of incarceration are rising. Any attempt to lower recidivism and crime seems to be worth the time, money and effort. The resources to design appropriate education programs seem to be worth the cost to tax payers. However, in difficult economic times, cuts are often made in the area of programming. Prisoner programming is not viewed as a basic need. Basic needs for prisoners are food, housing,
and clothing. Though the name “Department of Corrections” implies programming and opportunities for rehabilitation, often the programs are cut due to funding shortages.

Should Prisoners Participate in Education Programs?

Social skills courses, anger-management, substance abuse, sex offender groups, violent offender groups and other programs, up to and including religious programming, intended to help prisoners alter thinking patterns represent some of the programs offered in prisons other than academic and vocational programming. Sometimes participation in programming is required—it is not voluntary to participate. The majority of programming aimed at prisoners, however, is not mandatory and often run by volunteers.

Funding for state prisons come from state and federal taxes. If the MDOC takes up more than their share of the available funds, other programs are cut. Even from within the corrections budget, the first area that is most often cut is programming. Some things must be provided to those who are incarcerated: food, clothing, shelter, health care and separation from the public. All of these areas cost a great deal of money. High security is not convenient and costs valuable resources of time, money and human resources. When directors of departments, governors and state government officials analyze areas which can be cut, prisoner programming is often put under the microscope. At least 50% of all state correctional facilities cut back their prisoner education programs between 1991 and 1996 (Welsh, 2002, p. 154). Michigan was no different, though the cuts were much more drastic in 2001-2003. During that timeframe, the rate of re-incarceration remained relatively the same. Nearly all educational and voluntary programming offered in Level 5 (maximum security) prisons in Michigan were cut. Each Level 5 facility education program in Michigan was reduced to one teacher per facility. The waiting lists for
education in Level 5 facilities are enormous—almost 15,000 state wide. The theory of having only one educator per Level 5 facility is to reward prisoners who lower their security levels. The reward is the opportunity to attend educational programming. If prisoners want to participate in programming, the behavior should improve in order to move to a lower security level to earn the opportunity to participate in an education program. In prison, in addition to behavior reports, the easiest way to lower security is to participate in prisoner programming. This represents a sort of “Catch-22.” In the popular novel, “Catch-22,” the characters find themselves caught in a dilemma. In order to accomplish one goal, another seemingly impossible situation arises. In the Michigan prison system, in order to participate in programming, a prisoner must lower his or her security level. In order to lower his security level, a prisoner must participate in programming. Also, those who need programming the most, in terms of developing social skills that are considered acceptable by most members of the general public are often housed in Level 5 where little programming exists.

In 1999, a study conducted in the U.K. strongly suggests educational programming not only helps prisoners upon release from prison, but also while serving time. Not only do the skills learned compensate for what is perceived as inadequate prior education and social skills help upon release, but also in successful problem solving while incarcerated. Prisoners should be able to acquire soft skills useful in work, but also to develop other skills to give prisoners a sense of achievement and self-respect. Realistically, for some prisoners, especially those serving long sentences, school is a way of merely passing the time (Reuss, 1999, p. 113), just as religion is a way of passing time or filing lawsuits can pass time within this secluded environment.
Michigan is unique in requiring a GED or High School Diploma in order to be released on parole, with few exceptions. Michigan’s law spurred 3,814 prisoners to earn a GED last fiscal year (Shultz, 2008, p. 1). Some other states offer incentives for prisoners to attend school and to pass the GED, but Michigan is the only state in which a GED is mandatory. On any given day in Michigan, between 10,000 and 11,000 students are enrolled in prison classrooms and others are on waiting lists. The theory is that educated prisoners can make better choices in family, work, and social settings. A prisoner who leaves prison with an education can expect to find a better job and have better skills for maintaining the job, once employed.

Many proponents of correctional education push for CTE instruction over academic instruction. The hypothesis is that adult students need hands on activities and real work experiences in order to be successful upon release. There are six career pathways which have been identified: Arts and Communications; Business, Management, Marketing and Technology; Engineering/Manufacturing and Industrial Technology; Health Sciences; Human Services; and Natural Resources and Agriscience. The MDOC has CTE instruction in each of the six career pathways, but usually only one or at the most two programs offered at any given facility. No CTE programming is offered to Level 5 prisoners. Most CTE programming is focused in lower security levels. When possible, CTE pre-testing is conducted to determine strengths and interests. Where possible, students are placed in programs which align with their personal strengths and interests. In addition, CTE programming is limited to those who possess a high school diploma or GED. The MDOC receives some federal funding through Perkins Grants to run CTE programs in the prisons.
Education is not the primary focus of a correctional setting. The mission of the DOC is security first. There are some secondary goals to incarceration. In many correctional settings, a conflict among authorities regarding the goals of prison may arise. The conflict is often between “custody” and “non-custody” staff. Like many theories, such as theories in education, the pendulum swings from left to right. The pendulum in corrections is similar. There are phases in time where the mission of incarceration focuses on different aspects of incarceration. Is the primary meaning of prison to “correct” felons, as the name implies, or is it simply to remove the offender from society? Traditionally, “custody” staff, corrections officers and the employees who fall into the paramilitary hierarchy tend to believe the primary role is to remove prisoners from society. The “non-custody” staff members, employees who do not fit into the paramilitary hierarchy, often see corrections as the opportunity for the incarcerated individuals to make changes in their lives. Vacca finds that a conflict arises when there is a struggle to define the “purpose” of corrections: security, control, punishment or rehabilitation (p. 300). The attitude of correctional staff and prisoners can be contributing factors in measuring the success of failure of prison education programs. Part of the push to ensure the success of MPRI is staff training so that each person feels responsible for the success of the program and of the prisoners. Other factors that must be addressed and are essential to success are prison overcrowding and funding for programs (p. 300).

What Should Be Taught?

Should programming be limited to academic, vocational and social skills? Each can help prisoners upon release from prison and even while in prison. How about artistic skills or moral education? What is an appropriate and effective education (Vacca, 2004,
How do taxpayers get “the most for the money”? Many state penitentiaries offer a wide-array of programming. The programs focus on academic, vocational, social, artistic, and sharing techniques and strategies for dealing with emotions in an appropriate manner. Programs should focus on effective education programs, which are those helping prisoners to deal with social skills and techniques and strategies for dealing with emotions. Most statistics for a “typical” prisoner in the DOC is a non-white, 25-year-old male with little or no employability skills and lack of formal education (Vacca, 2004, p. 297). When he leaves prison just a few years older without a formal education or training, the likelihood of him returning is high.

What about basic literacy? Vacca’s (2004) readings lead him to conclude that most maximum-security prisoners typically are men with low employability skills and states that “more than half of the adults incarcerated in American federal and state prisons can neither read nor write” (p. 297). The statistic is not found in any other literature and seems very high, unless only research of maximum-security prisoners, as opposed to all prisoners was conducted, which is not clear within the study and certainly not stated. However, teaching prisoners to read is probably not the answer to reducing the rate of recidivism if reading is the only skill taken into consideration.

Vacca concludes that education programs in prisons should stress practical applications of literacy (filling out forms, making requests in letters inside and outside of prison). The GED Testing Service (GEDTS) made little changes to the GED since it appeared after World War I. GEDTS revamped the test in 2001. The test evolved to a more “hands on approach” to daily living. Many questions regarding daily activities were included on the test, including rental contracts and forms. Most prison jobs require
literacy skills and often require the prisoner to have a GED. In addition, inmates can use reading as a way to pass time (p. 302). Literacy skills can be applied in the prison and are important to success outside of the prison upon release.

In the year 2000, prisoners were no longer permitted to apply for Pell Grants (Welsh, 2002, p. 154). As a direct result, prisoners were no longer able to attend college courses held at prison to earn a higher degree. Due to lack of funding, universities and community colleges pulled programs run at state prison institutions. Though prisoners received less than 1% of all Pell Grant funds (Leder, 1996, p. 13), the concept of prisoners receiving a free higher education enraged law-abiding, tax-paying citizens and lawmakers. It seemed unfair for prisoners to have the opportunity to earn degrees while incarcerated. Recently the “get tough on crime politicians” called for an end to “country club” prisons, which resulted in Pell Grants being eliminated (Welsh, 2002, p. 154). In essence, denial of Pell Grant application for prisoners shut college programming down in prisons because colleges could or would not offer the college courses free. Few lobbyists push for prison reform in the form of opportunities in education. Unless a person is touched personally by a loved one or family member going to prison, most people really do not give much thought to educational opportunities for those who are incarcerated or see the long-term outcomes as potentially positive for not only the offender, but for society as a whole.

In Michigan, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation classes are taught in addition to Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. If a prisoner earns a GED early in his/her prison term, an opportunity to earn a CTE certificate may become possible. However, some programs end with a prison
issued certificate, which may not be recognized as equally as a GED certificate, within the public or workforce. The MDOC is currently pushing for state or national certification in each CTE program offered. Also, waiting lists are designed to assist those being released from prison in a short time rather than for those serving long sentences. Most programming is focused at lower security levels and at those potentially leaving prison soon. The MDOC CTE committees are working to provide relevant training for those incarcerated in Michigan. Current programs offered include: Auto Mechanics, Auto Body, Business Education Technology, Visual Graphics, Computer Repair, Custodial Maintenance, Building Trades, Horticulture, Food Technology and Hospitality, Electronics, Machine Tool, Welding and Optical Technology. There are many areas for improvement and many opportunities for research, including researching which work fields are predicted to have the most openings and then focus energy in training opportunities within those fields.

Over 7 in 10 of prisoners who currently hold a GED earned the diploma while in a correctional facility. Inmates raised without two parents are less likely to have a high school diploma or GED (Harlow, 2003, p. 7). It is difficult not to draw a conclusion relative to a link between education level and incarceration. More research could be done. Other common factors must play a role in typical offenders, including socio-economic factors, parenting issues and having a family or individual history of mental illness. When state-run mental hospitals closed in Michigan, prison populations skyrocketed. Many prisoners have a history of mental health issues. As with many other areas mentioned, appropriate mental health services and treatment concerns need further research. In addition, there are high numbers of students participating in education
programs in prison with a history of prior participation in special education. Though these students may not qualify for special education services in the DOC, having the history documented will help future researchers in possibly linking the two factors. In addition, having the history may help current teachers in the system help the students to succeed. Some GED test takers qualify for accommodations on the GED test. By having the SPED history on file, it can help school psychologists to make the recommendations to GEDTS. Some accommodations include having the test read-aloud or allowing the test taker to have extra time. All accommodations must be previously approved by GEDTS prior to testing.

Numerous literature reviews and studies have been conducted which conclude a positive correlation between education and successful release to society. In 2004, Vacca found a study that measured the success of inmates enrolled in twenty-one college-level education programs. Inmates who earned a diploma returned to prison at a lower rate (26.4%) than those prisoners who did not earn a degree (44.6%). Another study reviewed by Vacca demonstrated that 25% of inmates who received vocational training in prison returned to prison following release. The comparison group (no vocational training) had a 77% recidivism rate. The study was conducted in Oklahoma. Both studies suggest that working toward and earning a degree is positively related to success upon release (2004, p. 298). Leder states a 30-70% reduction of ex-offenders returning to prison for those who get some form of higher education (1996, p. 12).

Vacca also reviewed a study conducted in Ohio. Ohio’s overall recidivism rate was 40%. The recidivism rate for inmates enrolled in college (not completing college-just enrolled) was 18%. Prisoners who earned a college degree while incarcerated in
prison reduced the rate of recidivism by 72% when compared to inmates not participating in any education program (2004, p. 298). There is always a danger in reading too much into statistics. Perhaps the numbers who participated in college programming was a low number and may not represent people who might not have returned to prison regardless of program participation. Mark Twain said, “There are three types of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics” (Twain, 1905). Statistics can have a way of being manipulated to get the desired results and readers and researchers need to be careful of the implications.

In 1996, Leder points out some observations. The purposes of incarceration are few. Punishment is the most obvious. Another is to provide opportunities for rehabilitation. Not every person in prison is capable of rehabilitation. Prior and potential victims need to be protected from criminals (p. 13). The name “Department of Corrections” implies opportunities to correct negative behaviors will be provided. Some judges sentence offenders so they will receive some sort of treatment during incarceration.

Whichever course a prisoner may be enrolled in at any given time, modeling, group learning, soft-skills (job transferable skills), and technical skills are always being demonstrated. Cooperation, conversation and modeling of appropriate behaviors by other prisoners, teachers, officers and other correctional staff show prisoners alternate ways of dealing with stress, anger, and controlling emotions. Prisoners are given an opportunity to learn and demonstrate self-respect, anger-management and social skills that are considered acceptable to the public.

In 2004, President George Bush signed into law the “Prisoner Re-entry Initiative” (PRI) requiring states to offer more assistance to prisoners being released from prison.
Each state was responsible for enactment. MPRI in Michigan is fully implemented. Every region in Michigan now has at least one MPRI in-reach program. Michigan has three regions--Region I: the metropolitan area surrounding Detroit; Region II: which reaches further west and north than Detroit; Region III: which includes the northern Lower Peninsula and the entire Upper Peninsula. MBP is the MPRI “In-Reach” facility for the entire Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Feinstein cites the reality of measuring the success of re-entry programs and any success of any prison program. Once a prisoner leaves the prison system (incarceration, parole or probation), little contact is maintained (p. 40). Only prisoners who are not successful are tracked by state data entry. Even prisoners who do experience success upon release may be reluctant to give credit for his or her success to the skills taught while in prison.

Perhaps the success of the prisoner has little to do with the program itself, but more of the person who delivered the program. Allday presents information on prisoner perceptions of effective teacher behavior and working with students who have experienced “excessive school failures” (2006, p. 730). Programs may be more successful with people who are trained to work and deliver information in an institutional setting. This aspect would be difficult to measure.

What about moral education? Does religious program participation help recidivism rates? As with many aspects of life in prison, further study would need to be conducted. Whatever is taught in the prisons, the program should be learner-centered and tailored to the prison culture. If prisoners see no value in participating, currently or upon release, programs cannot be effective.
Carini and Jackson report of a Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) created in 2004 by Catherine Rohr, a young Wall Street Investor. The work that prisoners must complete to participate is rigorous, but the successes appear to be high. The program boasts a 93% employment rate among graduates (p. 52). The program is primarily a mentoring program rather than an education program. Education is not the only tool to lower the rate of recidivism and to help prisoners to succeed.

Perhaps the program is successful for another reason. Most states have education and vocational programs in prisons. Perhaps the Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative can help because of the bridge from prison to the community without the gap (Pavis, 2002, p. 146). If prisoners are arriving in the communities unprepared, whether or not he or she earned a GED certificate may not make a difference if the documentation is not available. A study conducted at a Community Corrections Center (CCC) in 1997 in the month of November found most prisoners lacked possession of necessary documentation. Only 68% arrived with a Social Security Card; 43% arrived with a pictured ID; 14% with a resume; 16% with a copy of the GED earned in prison; 73% with a copy of a GED not earned in prison; and 20% a vocational training certificate earned in prison (Pavis, 2002, p. 146).
Prisoners who are nearing release need to be prepared to document achievements and have vital records such as birth certificates and social security cards. A portfolio should be developed by each prisoner to access needs and documentation. Minimally, a portfolio should contain: educational documentation, including academic and vocational completions; a pictured identification card; a social security card (if eligible); resume; and birth certificate. Ideally, applications should be filled out in advance for any government-run programs for which the individual may qualify, including housing and heating assistance, child care assistance and food aid. Being prepared will help the offender “hit the ground running” rather than waiting for documentation before preceding.

Who Should Teach Prisoners?

Not all programming in prisons is conducted by federal or state-employees. Many states rely on volunteers, contracted companies or the prisoners themselves to run courses
or study programs. Most states rely on a combination of volunteers, custody and non-
custody staff. Programming offered by prisoners and volunteers may be more cost
effective than other programming, but the success of such programming, like recidivism,
is difficult to measure. Another danger of programs run by the prisoners is the meeting
often becomes a way for security threat groups, such as gangs, to meet with little
supervision by custody or security staff. At least one staff member should be present in
every prisoner run meeting to ensure that security is not breached. With no staff member
present, it makes it easy for security threat groups to change the intent of the meeting
time and place as a means of operating a gang, as one example.

Though gender and ethnicity came up in several studies, Alladay focus on the
differences in teacher ratings amongst gender and ethnicity (2006, p. 729). Across the
board, most prisoners lack solid formal education and success in school. Teachers need to
create a safe environment for learning within prison settings. Teacher awareness of
academic failure and deficits is important to ensure that failing students do not slip
“between the cracks” (Alladay, 2006, p. 729). As with all teachers, but more so in the
prison setting, teachers, in order to be successful with the students, must realize their
behavior can either encourage or negatively alter the desire to learn. I often witness
negative prisoner behaviors in my own academic and CTE testers and students. It is
easier for a prisoner to be perceived as having a difficult personality than to be perceived
as a stupid or naive. Prisoners often prey on those with weaker personality traits, be it
staff or fellow inmates. Many studies of effective teacher behavior have been conducted.
Several of these studies were only focused on either an observer or teacher’s opinion. The
data is limited because there is no outside group or person to validate the findings.
Although some studies consider student perceptions, Alladay focused on an under-represented group, prisoners, has having valid opinions of effective teacher behavior.

Teacher behaviors selected to study by Alladay came from prior research relative to instructing others how to be effective teachers or which behaviors were most desirable in teachers. Such behaviors include being fair to students, consistency in enforcing rules, caring about students’ well-being, slow to anger/overreaction, wanting student success, being positive, treating students as individuals, being inspirational, being excited, and being respected. One area that was not included was the knowledge base of the teacher. I would think adults (as prisoners are) would have strong opinions on the teacher behaviors represented by those whom they found to be knowledgeable in their respective fields. Even if a teacher had every other quality listed (fair, consistent, caring, temperament), I still tend to believe knowledge base should be included in the study. Frequency data were tallied to determine which Likert-scale rating for each statement received the most responses. A survey of volunteers within the prison system was conducted. Of the 600 surveys distributed, 425 (71%) were returned, a good return rate. For the purpose of the study, 371 (62%) of the surveys were used for the data analysis. Surveys tossed out were those representing primarily blank replies (p. 739).

The study indicated no significant differences between effective teacher behavior for a male or a female. The study also found no significant correlations linking course grade to teacher evaluation. Ultimately, the study showed prisoners to have strong feelings of what effective teacher behavior truly is. One conclusion that could be made would be the importance for teachers to be aware of how we are perceived, especially by students experiencing excessive failures. Teachers can control their behaviors. Simple,
practical changes may be all that are required to promote academic and behavior success in some students. One can conclude the behaviors prisoners witnessed prior to incarceration were most likely behaviors valued while enrolled in prisoner education programs. 

Though significant results came from Allday’s study of teacher behaviors, some large limitations became apparent. All respondents were removed from the public school environment for a number of years. People often recall actual events differently than others in the same situation. Memory is not always correct. I know if I had to rely strictly on my memory, the results of my study would be skewed. Also, the study was specific to one geographical area (South Carolina).

Successful programs in prison need to be run by people who have been trained to be successful in the prison culture. Vacca finds educators are more successful if they are able to recognize different learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Instructors should involve engaging topics to motivate and sustain inmates’ interest (p. 302). Few states offer college degrees in an area as narrow as Correctional Education, but some, such as Minnesota, do. Few instructors in the MDOC have been formally educated in teaching adults. Most correctional educators do not go to college to become a correctional educator (Garaci, 2002). Most hold teaching degrees in secondary or elementary education, though a current and valid teaching degree is required for academic instructors and school principals working for the department. Some vocational instructors may have alternate experience and documentation of certification for the job. A valid teaching certificate, in some cases, is not required. Not everyone who attempts to work in a correctional facility finds success. A person who goes into the field of education is
generally a person who wishes to help others. Working in a correctional facility can work against a teacher’s willingness to assist students. A correctional educator tends to need certain personality traits perhaps not necessary or needed to be successful in traditional educational settings.

Most educators in prisons find the jobs to be rewarding. Although the job of teaching inside a prison is not for every teacher, prisoner education remains an alternate setting for education programs and a potential job to which instructors should be exposed to while in their teacher preparation. Personally, I never met a teacher who had a goal of teaching prisoners. I have, however, met many teachers who are happy to be a teacher in the prison system.

How to Measure Recidivism?

Studies done on recidivism are difficult. How long should the study go on? If a prisoner received educational opportunities, earned a degree or vocational certificate and stayed out of prison for five years, then re-offended, was the program successful in keeping him out of prison, or was the factor of education a failure because he returned? What happens to prisoners who re-offend in new states and/or in the federal prison system? What happens to a prisoner who was out of prison for a month and then passed away? Tracking every instance of re-offending is nearly impossible. If a prisoner serves a long prison term, participates in education, and goes to jail for several months, did he recidivate? These are only a few areas requiring further study. Recidivism needs a strong definition in order for researchers to draw conclusions from research. Vacca concludes the literature points to some difficulty with the use of recidivism as an outcome measure. One problem is that a definition is lacking, is indirect and measures law enforcement
activities, but not education. Finally, the definition of recidivism is too simplistic. Education and learning can be their own outcomes (p. 302-303).

Education is only one factor to review once a person recidivates. Studies show age alone is a measurable factor. Personality profiles may be another large factor on whether or not a person returns (van Dam, et al., 2007, p. 763). Finally, once a person has been in prison once, returning is not difficult. Parole violations are the largest “reason” prisoners in Michigan return, not new crimes.

Recidivism is difficult to track across the board. Perhaps more studies should be done across demographics. For example, female ex-offenders often face different circumstances and barriers to be successful (Case, et al., 2005, p. 146). Most ex-offenders are men and most programming dollars are spent on men. Women have special needs upon release including lower self-esteem, higher social stigma associated with their inmate status. Many women have children prior to their incarceration and their prison sentence left many children either homeless or perhaps in a less than ideal situation. Many women ex-offenders are single parents who must not only face finding employment, but also struggle with childcare and re-establishing relationships with estranged children (p. 147). Many lawsuits in Michigan facilities have been tried. Parity and equity amongst programming offered to men and women should be the same.

Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusion

The literature tends to show education can help prisoners from returning to prison after release. Prisoner educators, however, conducted most studies. I do not think the research is conducted by a completely unbiased group of researchers, no matter how highly educated the group may be. Researchers generally do not publish material they
believe to be biased or untrue. The research, however, may lack credibility due to the nature of the researcher and the work he or she does. To preserve their work and justify their jobs, they find prisoner education to be important. They believe in the conclusions drawn. Finally, recidivism is difficult to pinpoint, as most studies do not study a prisoner’s lifetime or even if a prisoner returns to prison in a different state or the federal system.

Though education is not the sole key in helping to keep offenders out on the streets as productive members of our society, it is a large factor. Better-educated individuals tend to make better decisions. The new MPRI initiative is helping more ex-prisoners stay out of prison. Upon release, they need support and follow up to help them be accountable and remain successful.

There are many areas for future research within corrections and specifically correctional education and recidivism. One area for future research could include forced programming. Michigan requires prisoners to earn a GED prior to be considered for parole. Does forced programming actually help lower recidivism? Personality and behavior qualities of DOC teachers could be an area to focus upon. Studying whether or not vocational programming helps prisoners stay out of prison could be studied, along with the most successful types of vocational programming and what should be offered. In Minnesota, a small group of prisoners are trained to be underwater welders. There is a very low recidivism rate from the small group. In Michigan, of prisoners who have completed a vocational training course, the most frequent vocational program earned was a Custodial Maintenance Certificate. Perhaps this program is not the most successful program in helping prisoners stay in society upon release. Perhaps the program does not
perform what it was intended to do- help prisoners find employment upon release in the related field.

A solid definition of recidivism could be developed and studied. Many groups from the MDOC to the legislatures to determine if the funds were well spent will study MPRI efforts. The money is well spent if ex-prisoners remain out of prison. Education is just one factor helping prisoners become productive society members. Some opportunities for education should come prior to being incarcerated, as well. If Michigan invested more in programs, from mental health to substance abuse treatment and job training, perhaps less people would be incarcerated to begin with. Prisoner Education is a vast field and many aspects could be studied. Overall, from the studies and research, I believe educational opportunities do help prisoners upon release from prison. I believe there are many factors and indicators of success upon release. The ultimate goal is to help the person be successful. Education is the key to success, though many educational opportunities and services should be available before a person is incarcerated. It costs a great deal of money to incarcerate a person. If the money could be better spent in early intervention programs, perhaps Michigan would have less people in prison, lower recidivism rates and lower rates of crime. Education is the key. The most important aspect is when, where and how to deliver the services. Prisoner education is an important piece to the puzzle. I do not believe it is the entire puzzle.
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