

EDITORS' NOTE

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From its inception, the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP)* has been an educational project: a forum for prisoners and former prisoners to engage in the production of knowledge about the politics and experience of crime and punishment. Most contributions to *JPP*'s first issue were written by prisoners involved in educational programs. Teachers from these programs were instrumental in soliciting those articles (Davidson, 1988). *JPP*'s existence has relied on the close relationship among educators teaching individuals who participate in various forms of educational activities during their incarceration. This may explain why *JPP* frequently publishes articles examining the nature, functions, and significance of educational programs (Dana and McMonagle, 1997; Murphy, 1998; Poindexter, 2001; Taylor, 1997).

This is the second issue of *JPP* devoted to the study of educational practices in prisons. Much has changed since the first issue was published in 1992. Twelve years ago, a multitude of colleges and universities were operating prison higher education programs in Canada and the United States. Penal authorities were devising means to force prisoners who could not pass reading tests to attend adult basic education classes. By 1992, political pressure was mounting to eliminate grants for higher education even as support for mandatory basic education was rising. The concurrence of a dramatic increase in the prison population, attempts to undercut higher education, and policies that linked attendance in basic education programs to parole recommendations and work assignments, led some prisoners and non-prisoner educators to conclude that despite all the rhetoric about rehabilitation, schooling in prison was supported by administrators for its control function, rather than for its ability to educate (see Harris, this issue).

In the 1992 issue, Ray Jones and Brian MacLean examined the function of higher education in prisons. Jones questioned the extent to which "the proliferation of post-secondary prison education represents a transfer within the system of the reformatory function of punishment" (Jones, 1992: 3). MacLean discussed the "theoretical perspectives of criminal behavior on which this programming is based, its accomplishments, and its implications as a form of social control" (MacLean, 1992: 21). Tiyo Attallah Salah-El insisted

on the need to sustain educational programs, and documented their significance for individuals in changing how they lived their lives while they were incarcerated and after release; however, he went on to observe that “[t]he major program in prison is to program the prisoner. The key focus is to contain and maintain prisoners, not to educate us” (Attalah Salah-El, 1992: 46).

Ray Jones opened his 1992 article with the observation that higher education programs were “flourishing in the prisons of Massachusetts.” The issue you hold in your hand was produced under different circumstances. Today, most higher education programs have been decimated by funding cuts. A few survive, but the depth of programming that existed in 1992 is lost. Steven Ainsworth tells us in this issue that an educational program for death row prisoners is tenuous at best in San Quentin, and David Deutsch describes the reliance on volunteers to operate college courses for the general population at that prison. At SCI-Dallas, in Pennsylvania, officials focus on adult basic education and the General Education Diploma (see Graves, Rucier, this issue). For most prisoners, access to higher education is limited to traditional correspondence courses, which prisoners pay for out of their meager funds. Thus, Jon Marc Taylor’s contribution to this issue provides practical information on how individuals can “piece together a college education” at minimal cost. Quality literacy programs and liberal arts education are scarce at best, but the constraints imposed by years of cutbacks have failed to dull the critical edge that emerged in the 1992 *JPP*.

In this issue, Deutsch documents the bureaucratic procedures and other factors that undermine the effective delivery of officially-sanctioned programs. Several essays note the expedient and cynical use of public opinion to justify dismantling the funding structures that supported prison higher education. This despite considerable evidence that access to this education increases an ex-convict’s chances for a successful release and “frees the individual from the solipsistic trap of thinking only in terms of self and immediate gratification” (Huckelbury, this issue). Prison higher education is victim to a “law and order” agenda that legitimates a “no frills” policy for incarcerated millions. Politicians manipulate a public taught by a corporate media to live in fear of street crime, to associate criminal behavior with people of color, and to ignore corporate crime and the terrible price most people of the world pay so a few can get and remain very wealthy.

Yet it is clear from the essays in this issue that there is more to the story than political opportunism. The educated prisoner is a threat to the penal system,

whether that education is gained through participation in formal educational programs or through the decision to use prison time to read books (see Richards, Terry, this issue), because “knowledge is indeed power, and it therefore becomes something that must be denied to those one wishes to keep powerless. Thus the logical strategy for prison administrators is to keep prisoners ignorant to prevent the acquisition of any high-minded ideas, lest we begin to question our subjugation and treatment” (Huckelbury, this issue).

Stephen Richards and Jeffery Ross demonstrate just how far education can contribute to questioning one’s subjugation in their introduction to the New School of Convict Criminology. They write, “These men and women, who have worn both prison uniforms and academic regalia, served years behind prisons walls, and now as academics, are the primary architects of [a] movement . . . that promises to challenge the conventional research findings of the past.” Both Richards and Charles Terry, who are members of this new school, describe in this issue how they furthered their education in prison. Prison writing as “a means of resistance and struggle” (Gaucher, 1999: 26) has been fostered by prisoners’ contacts with teachers entering the prison. *JPP* is an example of this.

A powerful contradiction results from the refusal to permit quality basic and higher education programs to operate officially. Politicians have been somewhat successful in suppressing formal education or transforming attendance in mandatory basic educational programs into just slightly disguised forms of population control. Formal schooling has suffered serious setbacks, but education itself struggles to survive and has taken on more adaptable forms in order to do so. Unlike the 1992 issue on education, this volume contains several accounts of these forms. This phenomenon, prisoner-organized educational activities, is not new (Dana and McMonagle, 1997; Rivera, 1992), but it appears here as far more complex forms of education than it has been described elsewhere (Davidson, 2001).

Patrick Rafferty’s historical analysis of *Out of Bounds* reminds us of the significant role played by the penal press as one of the earliest and perhaps most enduring forms of prisoner organized education; an education, he notes, created by prisoners as much to teach outsiders as to inform those inside. Faced with the lack of programs, the poverty of instruction, and the manipulation of the school’s function, prisoner-educators have formed literacy councils, peer tutoring projects, and college level courses taught by community volunteers (Deutsch, Graves, Rucier, this issue). These programs are not

operated to manage the prison population. They exist so prisoners can educate themselves, which often begins by helping people to overcome the damage of their experiences with racism and many other factors that destroy the inner city schools where most prisoners today spent their childhood years.

Prisoner-educators connect with literacy programs operating outside the prison to learn how to tutor and to develop effective learning materials. They use one-to-one instruction to teach reading, they design courses to improve their chances of succeeding when they "return to society," they introduce people to ideas, and they teach the capacity to critique. In this issue, prisoner-organized education takes on numerous forms: an individual's decision to use his or her time to read whatever books are available in prison libraries, discussions about a reading in the prison yard, close-circuit television programming, and complex processes for teaching individuals to tutor and organize literacy programs.

In previous studies on prisoner-organized education, the prisoner-educator appears to operate in opposition to the prison school. In some notable cases they operated as secret political education groups. That is not the case here. Prisoner-educators see their programs as potential resources for prison schools, or as filling a void created by the destruction of higher education. They are described as an effective means for providing much-needed individual instruction, and a less embarrassing way for a prisoner who cannot read to overcome his or her fears by learning basic skills from someone the student trusts. Repeatedly, the prisoner-educators writing in this issue express their desire to work cooperatively with prison schools, if only the schools would be willing to recognize prisoners as individuals who have something to offer the world. And it would help exponentially if administrators would value tutoring and classify it as work for pay. Prisoner-organized education is a voluntary, democratic form of education. It is essential that educators who read this issue of *JPP* take this alternative form of education seriously and support it.

It is of the utmost importance to note that this issue is in itself a collaboration between an inside and outside educator. Jon Marc Taylor and I began this project almost two years ago, from writing the first draft of the call for papers, to contacting contributors, to reviewing and editing submissions. It is my pleasure to prepare this Introduction. Jon gets the last word by writing the Response. Together, we want to express our deepest appreciation to the authors. We have learned so much from working with them and reading their articles. We thank Marcia Stentz for her careful editing, Susan Nagelsen for contributing

an essay that views education in prison from a university teacher's perspective, and Peter Murphy and Greg Newbold for their book reviews. Finally, I want to thank Jon and John Perotti for letters that keep reminding me of the necessity of courage and the will to resist.

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