

# Critical Education

Volume 9 Number 10

July 1, 2018

ISSN 1920-4175

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## *What is Higher Education in Prison?* *Introduction to Radical Departures: Ruminations on the Purposes of Higher Education in Prison*

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Citation: Castro, E. L., & Gould, M. R. (2018). What is higher education in prison? *Critical Education*, 9(10), 1-16. Retrieved from <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/186439>

*Critical Education* Special Series  
**Radical Departures: Ruminations on the Purposes of Higher Education in Prison**

### **Abstract**

*For far too long, “correctional education” has served as an umbrella framework for all educational opportunities offered inside prisons and jails throughout the United States. In community with students, scholars, and practitioners, we wish to engage and highlight scholarship on higher education in prison in much the same way we theorize higher education in society more broadly, by focusing on the purposes for why we should engage this work. The authors in this volume pose a direct challenge to the notion that higher education on non-carceral campuses and higher education in prisons should be guided by significantly different philosophies of higher education and in this Introduction, we outline the philosophies of education that should guide higher education in prison.*



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## **Introduction**

For far too long, “correctional education” has served as an umbrella framework for all educational opportunities offered inside prisons and jails throughout the United States (e.g., see recently published work: Carver & Harrison, 2016; Drake & Fumia, 2017; Duwe, 2018; Nally, Lockwood, Ho, & Knutson, 2014; RAND, 2013). Consequently, scholarship on the topic is infrequently engaged within the education community broadly, and higher education in particular, and more often is relegated to the academic fields of criminology and/or sociology. We chose to pursue working with *Critical Education* for exactly this reason – because we want to engage with a community of critically-oriented education scholars who consider the engagement of teaching and learning as fundamentally political, regardless of the specific context in which educational interactions occur. This volume, therefore, is an effort at intentionally asking questions about the nature of higher education in what might be described as a site of contradiction: prisons.

“Correctional education” commonly refers to a wide variety of programming offered inside prisons, often called “correctional centers”, and ranges from high school or GED programming, to Adult Basic Education, Vocational, Career and Technical, to Avocational programs, among other related offerings. Such programming can be provided by accredited or non-accredited institutions, or the prison itself, and can be credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing, and need not lead to a terminal degree or certification. “Correctional education” also encompasses prison-specific classes that are offered to or required of incarcerated people, such as Life Skills or Moral Recognition Therapy and depending on the state and/or facility, it can also refer to sentence-mandated programming. Often described as rehabilitative or treatment in nature, sentence-mandated programming is required as part of an individual’s prison sentence, such as substance abuse treatment programming or anger management classes. The consistency and intensity of such programming ranges, from one-time lectures, to annual or monthly meetings, to biweekly and/or weekly engagements. The Correctional Education Association (CEA), self-described as the “recognized leader in corrections education both in the U.S. and internationally” routinely refers to *all* educational efforts within prisons as “correctional education”. When all programming efforts inside prisons are understood as “correctional” in nature, the meaning, purposes, and possibilities of education broadly, and higher education in particular, are narrowed.

It is worth highlighting the CEA (2018) philosophy because of their reach at the intersection of education and incarceration and the scope of their voice in the national conversation regarding the value, practice, and outcomes of education in prison. The CEA provides the following rationale for why education is needed in prisons:

Education is the key to effective rehabilitation. Detained and adjudicated juvenile and adult students need to learn to reassess their values, goals, and priorities in life in way that differs from their time prior to incarceration. Acquiring personal, social, and technical skills are necessary for a successful and permanent reentry into society as productive citizens, parents, and coworkers. (para 9)

Under such logic, “correctional education” is seen as an intervention and serves the broader goal of rehabilitation. According to Maltz ([1984], 2001), in his work on the limitations of measuring recidivism, he argues that rehabilitation is a central component of the Corrections paradigm, and

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is based upon a medical model of intervention. The medical model of intervention is rooted in pathology and the ostensible reasons for crime causation; like its name indicates, the stages of the medical model include diagnosis, treatment, and cure. As such, a framework of rehabilitation contains certain implications about incarcerated people and when higher education in prison is contained within the broader arena of “correctional education,” such logic inherently influences the kinds of experiences made available to imprisoned people. Taken verbatim from his book ([1984], 2001), *Recidivism*, Maltz further elaborates on the medical model of penology:

1. Incarcerated individuals have problems, problems which are a direct cause of their criminal behavior;
2. correctional program personnel can diagnose these problems accurately, and have appropriate treatments available for the individuals;
3. these treatments will be properly applied; and
4. the problems will be “corrected” (or at least mitigated) as a result of these treatments.
5. In addition, the individuals’ criminal behavior will begin to diminish as a result of mitigating the problems (p. 8).

When higher education inside prison is referred to as “correctional education,” it is not only an inaccurate statement, but carries a host of negative inferences about students, instructors, and the reasons for engagement. The very nature of “correctional education” language is dehumanizing, pathologizing, and inconsistent with authentic processes of teaching and learning that stem from the rich experiences and livelihoods of individuals and communities (Freire, 1971; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000). Perhaps it only requires considering the mission statement of a college or university to appreciate the dissonance in the perceived value of higher education on a non-carceral campus and what has been described as “correctional education.”

Thus, the term “correctional education” is one that we reject, and in so doing, we also seek to contribute to the intellectual work of charting the emerging field of higher education in prison. We approach this task, in part, as distinguishing the field of higher education in prison from “correctional education” and as free from the requisite pathology present in some of the most heavily circulated reports, research, articles, and op-eds on the topic of education in prison. Widely cited reports have conflated at worst, and failed to differentiate at best, correctional education and higher education in prison (e.g., Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013; Louis et al, 2017; RAND, 2013). This conflation serves the interests of producing large amounts of data to support “intervention-based treatments” for people deemed to exhibit “criminalized behavior”, to support budgets for “treatment” programming, and to perpetuate societal beliefs about who deserves quality educational opportunities and who does not. Along with practitioners and other stakeholders in the emerging field of higher education in prison, we offer that the term “higher education in prison” be used to describe a very specific teaching and learning experience, one that includes:

- Courses provided to students who have earned a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent secondary credential
- Courses and programs provided by or in close partnership with a postsecondary institution accredited by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation

- Instruction provided by two-year and four-year colleges and universities with public, private, or nonprofit status
- Credit or not for credit coursework
- Degree or non-degree granting pathways
- Courses for college preparation

In fact, we did not come to this definition on our own, but are drawing heavily from years of gathering of practitioners, former students, advocates, higher education administrators, and others at the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison, and the outcome of a multi-year stakeholder engagement process to found the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP).<sup>1</sup> AHEP is a national organization dedicated to supporting the expansion of quality higher education in prison, empowering students in prison and after release, and shaping public discussion about education and incarceration (AHEP Prospectus, 2017). We were both part of the strategic planning process and committee work for AHEP, and continue to be actively involved in the development of the organization.

In community with students, scholars, and practitioners, we wish to engage and highlight scholarship on higher education in prison in much the same way we theorize higher education in society more broadly, by focusing on the purposes for why we should engage this work. Departing from conventional logic regarding the rationale for higher education in prison, we wanted this special edition to consider possibilities and futurities of postsecondary education made available inside prisons. In collaborating for this volume, we wanted to work alongside other scholars to explore how various educational theories and theorists can inform understandings of and desires for higher education in prison both in the current context of mass incarceration and in our visions of the future. We invited manuscripts that would provide imaginative and theoretically grounded visions for postsecondary education inside prisons, with specific desire for *ruminations* that were disentangled from the logics of the carceral state (e.g.: rehabilitation, safety and security, or preventing recidivism). We wanted authors to put on hold narrow discourses of recidivism and cost effectiveness or interventionist logics to explore higher education inside prison through conceptual, empirical, theoretical, pedagogical, narrative, and poetic approaches, and to provide examples from their own lived experiences and programs. The need for such scholarship is urgent.

### **Theorizing Higher Education in Prison**

The spirit of this volume began with a seemingly simple question: What should be the purposes of higher education in prison? It's a rather straightforward question, really, but in a context of mass confinement, where 1 in every 100 people is incarcerated in the U.S. and 1 in 32 is under supervision, federal and state-level spending on "corrections" is at an all-time high, and access to higher education is increasingly becoming out of reach for low- and middle-income families, it can easily become distorted (Gotschalk, 2015; The Pew Center, 2008).

Indeed, in many ways, it already has.

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<sup>1</sup> The first national conference on higher education in prison was held at University Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2010 and has been hosted annually since. For more, see: <https://www.nchep2018.org/>

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Currently, higher education in prison is framed as a catchall answer to an array of social challenges. It is purported, by both sides of the political spectrum, to be a universal remedy for a host of “social ills” related to mass incarceration. Higher education in prison is presented as a way to reduce extraordinary rates of reimprisonment (Vacca, 2004), to reduce the total costs of prison spending (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2006) and, in turn, to save taxpayers’ money (RAND, 2013). It is purported to ensure safety and security inside prisons (Adams, Bennet, Flanagan, Marquart, Cuvelier, Fritsch, Gerber, Longmire, & Burton, 1994), to assist with reintegration post-release (Fabelo, 2002), and to address high rates of unemployment post-release (Nally, Lockwood, Ho, & Knutson, 2012). Higher education in prison is also described as a treatment to cure the specific problem of criminal/ized behavior or as an “intervention” into such behavior (Esperian, 2010), or broadly as “treatment programming” (Davis, 2016). High profile studies (e.g: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013; RAND, 2013) suggesting the social benefits of education in prison and their widespread use as a rationale and justification substantiate many of these claims (e.g., reduced recidivism, reduction in taxpayer costs, safety and security in prison) and as a result, distort the general public’s understanding of the work of higher education in prison or the rationale for the value of higher education in prison.

Moreover, studies that prioritize reduced recidivism as the goal of higher education in prison prevent mass audiences from the perspectives needed to engage in thoughtful conversations about the role of colleges and universities in providing quality educational opportunities to students during and post-incarceration. Such studies can also obscure the broader societal responsibility and opportunity that institutions of higher education have during an era of mass confinement. If the dominant goal of higher education in prison is to reduce widespread rates of reimprisonment - currently hovering around 68 percent nationwide (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014), then it makes little sense to pause and ask, what are the philosophies of higher education that should guide engagement with prisons?

This volume of *Critical Education*, titled “Radical Departures”, begins here. Most of us directing and working with higher education in prison programs are intimately familiar with the aforementioned studies that cite outcomes such as reductions in the likelihood of recidivism, savings to taxpayers or safety, and security in facilities and the community, because we need to. Many of us have used and continue to use these studies to form compelling arguments in support of our programs and the field largely, and to garner “buy-in” from a diverse range of stakeholders. It isn’t that using such studies and citing their findings (some of the most common being: investing \$1 in education saves \$5 in corrections or education in prison reduces the likelihood of returning to prison by 43%) to bolster support for broadening access to higher education during incarceration is necessarily bad; however, when the purposes of higher education in prison are framed as and often bound to reduced recidivism or cost savings, higher education is subject to commodification and vulnerable to predatory market forces (Biesta, 2010). In this context, higher education is viewed as a transaction carried out in the particular context of a prison, and therefore subjected to the host of biases and stereotypes that non-incarcerated people hold about individuals in prison, particularly in regards to aptitude and deservingness.

A framework of narrow pragmatism regarding higher education in prison allows for the general public to debate what types of education should be provided and how much a person in prison “deserves”. If higher education in prison can only be imagined through utilitarian paradigms, such as recidivism or return-on-investment, then the foci and promises of higher

education are broadly compromised, both in the context of the prison and on the non-carceral campus. The potential for the work of providing quality higher education is compromised when the process is engaged as a means to a commodified end; just as we see on non-carceral college campuses where the value of higher education, and more specifically a degree program, is measured in the market value of a job. Importantly, as Biesta (2010) contends, one of the consequences of narrowing the scope of what is valued in education is that we are then limited in our ability to envision how higher education can work to bring us to a different kind of society—one reliant upon less prisons, for example.

For educational theorists, the systemic narrowing of what is possible via higher education in prison is perhaps unsurprising, as it's a version of a familiar tension regarding the politics of teaching and learning in a society that sees itself as free: Why is it that we would imagine one kind of higher education for a particular group of people (non-incarcerated) and another kind of higher education for a different group of people (currently incarcerated)? How is it that we determine who deserves quality higher education and who deserves “better than nothing” education? Such questions echo Du Bois' (1903) now famous provocation, “What does it feel like to be a problem?” in that higher education is distinctively re-imagined for the Other. In this regard, the *providers* of education are there to help the *receivers* of education, a well-defined charitable undertaking (see: Hytten, 2011). In the context of this volume, we attempt to call out these distinctions between the language of higher education for those who deserve access and those who deserve “good enough” opportunities, and pose a direct challenge to such framings.

### The Politics of Higher Education in Prison

The ameliorative potential of higher education in prison is not limited to the context of the prison, the community, or even the individual student. Higher education in prison is positioned as having a positive effect on the non-carceral university campus and for non-incarcerated students. Take, for example, the following course descriptions found on university websites in Spring, 2018.

“What is it REALLY LIKE inside a Correctional Facility?” is the bolded header for a web page (2018) describing a course at a two-year public community and technical college located in the Midwest. In the course, students on the non-carceral campus and individuals in the prison take a class together. The webpage reads like an advertisement, marketing a unique opportunity for non-incarcerated undergraduate students enrolled at the institution to “spend time in a correctional facility” and to “earn 3 credit hours while you do it” (para 1).<sup>2</sup> The Sociology Department recruitment flyer ends by suggesting that the class will be “**unlike any class you have ever had**” (para 2).

In yet another course of this same style, having “inside” and “outside” students in the same classroom, the phenomenon of academic tourism (that is, using higher education in prison as a way to benefit the learning experience of the non-incarcerated undergraduate students), happens at a private university in the Midwest. On the webpage describing this specific program, the first quote reads, “The [redacted] Department of Criminal Justice offers YOU the chance to spend time behind bars in two different state prisons or at a correctional honor camp –and earn 3

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<sup>2</sup> While it is clear that the students from the non-carceral campus will earn credit, it is not evident, and should not be assumed, that the students in prison will receive credit.

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hours credit while you do it” (para 1). The program website (2018), describes the unique opportunity as the following:

[redacted] is unlike any class you have ever had...For years, *dozens of [redacted] students from all majors have been transformed by the ... class.* [emphasis ours, throughout]

The curriculum at [redacted] Honors Camp in the Fall focuses on the issues and challenges of reentry. The curriculum at [redacted] Correctional (level 3 state men’s prison) in the Spring includes the exploration of why people commit crime, the purpose of prison, analysis of the criminal justice system, punishment and rehabilitation, the intersection of race, class, and sex in the criminal justice system, victims and victimization, and the myths and realities of prison life, while the curriculum at [redacted] Correctional Institute (a women’s prison) in the Fall includes pathways into crime, the importance of gender-specific rehabilitation, the role of children, victimization, the myths and realities of prison life, and dependency.

Further, the course “fulfills the diversity Core requirement and is an elective for criminal justice and other majors at [redacted] University”.

Finally, and this is certainly not an exhaustive list, a prison program at a private University in the Northeast also frames courses inside the prison as primarily (or exclusively) beneficial for non-incarcerated students. Taken verbatim from their institution’s website on April 18, 2018:

[Redacted name of program] is *experiential learning* [emphasis ours, throughout]. [Redacted] students physically enter into detention centers and witness the realities of confinement. *The transformative experiences of learning within a coercive institution furthers several Criminal Justice and institutional learning outcomes for [redacted] students. Exposure to prisoners improves the student’s comprehension of diversity – not only within the prisoner population but also between the prison population and the student’s own immediate family, peer, and social networks. Actual imprisonment observation also lends itself to improved scientific literacy as the student seeks to understand sentencing policy, sentencing rationality, and correctional practice within the context of “what works” (as determined from evaluation of scholarly research rather than ideology and opinion).* In addition, cross population discussion mandates that the student improve her [sic] ability to consider, confront, and communicate class, race, and culture specific ideas and assumptions with her [sic] imprisoned counterpart. Ultimately, the combination of these factors *augment critical thinking as the student* explores the world of the prison through the lens of class, race, neighborhood, context of crime, and the entire justice system itself.

In the above examples, incarcerated people are seemingly included as part of the curriculum to augment the educational experiences of non-incarcerated undergraduate student learning; in some instances, in this style of course, the students from the non-carceral campus are the only students receiving credit through the college/university and are clearly positioned as the primary

beneficiaries of such engagements. The prison classroom is framed as providing a positive and unique experience for non-incarcerated students with little to no regard for the desires, needs (including credit-bearing courses), and dignity of incarcerated people. When the vision for higher education in prison is detached from the best interests of incarcerated people, the prison and the prison classroom can easily become a means to an end for the college or university. Indeed, the college or university is at-risk of exploiting incarcerated people and perpetuating the exploitation incarcerated people have suffered as “subjects”, when incarcerated people’s best interests are not centered in such academic engagements.

Close examination of the desired outcomes of higher education in prison compared to the desired outcomes of higher education in non-carceral settings, namely college and university campuses, are often strikingly different. Non-incarcerated students are encouraged to pursue higher education to gain knowledge and skills that help them prepare to actively engage in civil society, including through their careers. While stratification exists along dynamics of race, class, gender, ability, citizenship status, and other salient identity makers, many non-incarcerated individuals are invited to explore themselves and their worlds as college students and to try new things. On college campuses across the country, non-incarcerated students are invited to learn how to identify and address complex social problems and are provided structured opportunities to innovate and to invent. While vocation is a desired result of a college education, the toll unemployment takes on the general population at large is infrequently positioned as the most compelling rationale for this outcome.

In contrast to the philosophies of education that exist on many college and university campuses across the country, students engaging their educational opportunities in prison are met with public expectation that the demonstrable outcomes of their education will be pragmatic and a means to an impactful end: preventing return to prison, reducing taxpayer cost, and ensuring safety and security in prison and in the community. The language of the Second Change Pell Pilot Program, an Experimental Sites Initiative facilitated by the U.S. Department of Education, is one example. The language of the Initiative states that the measure renews federal support for higher education in prison in the form of Pell Grants to pursue postsecondary education with the explicit purpose of “helping them [incarcerated people] get jobs, support their families, and turn their lives around” upon release (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The authors in this volume pose a direct challenge to this notion that higher education on a non-carceral campus and higher education in prison should be guided by significantly different philosophies of higher education. Our expectations are that the purposes and experiences of teaching and learning in both spaces should be unique. When higher education is primarily framed to benefit those who are not incarcerated, a course inside a prison has the potential to be akin to a field trip, and the experiences of incarcerated people are rendered insignificant.

### **Curating the Volume & Working with Authors**

Crucial to defining and cultivating the intellectual community of higher education in prison is an understanding of contemporary practices, perspectives, and experiences. There is certainly no one-size-fits all to this work – in fact, part of what makes the field of higher education in prison so impactful is its differentiation. Yet, as an emerging intellectual and engaged community, it is essential to forward quality research and scholarship that explicitly values the dignity and worth of incarcerated college students and college-in-prison programming

– as well as the professionalization of both. The collection of diverse issues and perspectives contained herein aims to advance this agenda and does so by decentering a dogmatic focus on pragmatic and utilitarian outcomes of higher education on any campus (prison or non-carceral).

In designing this volume, we were committed to including authors from a wide range of backgrounds, especially those who remain underrepresented in this space, as well as authors who provided diverse and at times, divergent perspectives from our own. Importantly, we were committed to including currently and formerly incarcerated authors and using the same vetting and review processes for all submissions, meaning that all viable submissions were sent out for double-anonymous peer review and held to our standards for inclusion. In defining the boundaries of this volume, we were committed to three major inclusion criteria: 1) manuscripts needed to discuss higher education in prison, not simply education, adult basic education, “correctional education”, or related educational endeavor; 2) manuscripts needed to either provide reasons other than recidivism to justify higher education in prison or discuss the use of recidivism as justification in more depth and; 3) manuscripts needed to use critical philosophies to theorize an emerging landscape of higher education in prison. We made initial decisions regarding inclusion based on these criteria. Next, we made suggested first-round edits to authors and then sent out updated drafts for external peer review. Each manuscript was then reviewed by an external reviewer who we chose based on their work within the field of higher education in prison, their scholarship in the field of higher education, and/or their content expertise. We specifically chose a group of reviewers who were also diverse in background, opinion, and experience – with particular attention paid toward people with incarceration histories and the academy.

One of the many challenges of working within the space of higher education in prison is that much of what is published is not done so by currently or formerly incarcerated students or practitioners themselves, but by others. At least part of the reason for this is because of the numerous constraints incarcerated scholars face in their ability to write and publish, the challenges of transitioning from prison to a college campus, and the demands placed upon practitioners to run programs. As editors, we specifically encountered significant challenges in attempting to collaborate with incarcerated authors, most of which prevented incarcerated scholars from safely engaging in the writing and revision process – which has taken over one year. Prison policies that prevent individual correspondence are a significant obstacle to involving incarcerated authors in publication. Additional rules imposed upon programs regulating the contact teachers and practitioners can have with students—many times in response to prison requirements, also make it difficult, if not impossible, for incarcerated scholars to participate in requisite publishing developments. For scholars in prison who were able to participate in this volume, they shared a few common resources, such as the ability to receive print correspondence from us, access to a computer, and access to an individual who was familiar with and supported the publication process, oftentimes communicating with us via email on small matters pertaining to suggested edits and timelines. Some incarcerated scholars did not receive this essential support, whether it was related to accessibility or equipment, or individuals who supported a rigorous and transparent revision process. Consequently, these authors were unable to participate. The fact of the matter is that the majority of incarcerated scholars simply do not have access to the infrastructure to support publication, such as writing courses, writing labs, consistent writing tutors, and faculty who understand the publication process and who are committed to working with students to write, revise, edit, and seek publication outlets. This lack of structural support—widely available on non-carceral college campuses, is desperately needed

if incarcerated students are to be provided real opportunities to create and publish scholarship from prison. Another great area of absence in this volume and even in the submission process is that we did not receive a single submission from a formerly incarcerated scholar currently pursuing a degree on a non-carceral campus. While we know that many students continue their education post incarceration we have no accurate count of the number of students, the fields of study they pursue, or the amount of support or mentoring they are receiving. All of these factors could contribute to the lack of publishing engagement from formerly incarcerated scholars.

Part of the difficult decisions that we made during the editorial process regarded the standards of what constitutes both higher education in prison *and* scholarship on higher education in prison. Because of the so-called genre of “prison writing,” there seems to be a sort of anything-goes type of attitude regarding what constitutes scholarship on higher education in prison. One surprising outcome from the editorial process and the standards we established for decision making was that the latter (vetting for “scholarship on higher education in prison”) ultimately required that we pay careful attention to the issue of authorship and the ethics of how currently incarcerated people were positioned in essays. We found ourselves in the position, in quite a few instances, of having to deliberate over the distinction between being an author or co-author and being an interviewee or “subject” of an essay. We found these issues particularly important because of the historic and continued simultaneous silencing and appropriation of the voices and experiences of people incarcerated. We both feel strongly about being clear about the meaning of authorship and if we ever disagreed, we spent considerable time talking with one another about how best to proceed. Certainly, some authors submitting essays disagreed with our assessments and decisions to reject submissions, and that is understandable. Even amid the most well intended authors, issues of ethical co-writing between incarcerated and non-incarcerated scholars proved cloudy. A few non-incarcerated authors, mostly teacher or instructors, wanted to include incarcerated students as co-authors. This is understandable and we believe their intentions were in good-faith, but some authors wanted to do this when the contributions made by incarcerated students did not justify authorship. We asked all authors of collaborative pieces to include specific methods and writing information as part of the manuscript so that it would be clear to readers how text was constructed, under what circumstances, with what level of engagement from each author; we did not accept essays that lacked or refused to provide these details as part of the revision process. These remain important details for us, especially as non-incarcerated scholars, in understanding the dynamics of ethical collaborative writing. We also offered to continue to make ourselves available as editors long after submissions were selected (and declined).

While we have spent considerable time and energy on this volume, it is not without limitations – and these are important to note. Of eleven manuscripts, only two are solely written by incarcerated authors (Evans and Davis) and one is co-written between an incarcerated and non-incarcerated author (Heider and Lehman). To our knowledge, three (Castro, Gould, and Scott) out of the eleven manuscripts are authored by individuals who direct college-in-prison programs and six (Boyce, DeFina, Heider, Heppard, and McCorkle) are written by individuals who currently or previously teach and/or volunteer with such programs. Of eleven manuscripts, only two (Castro and Davis) explicitly center race and racism and most of the manuscripts do not explicitly address issues of gender, sexuality, class, and related aspects of identity. Only four of the authors (Boyce, Castro, Mackall, and Scott) are educational scholars and researchers and this is disappointing – and likely a byproduct of the ways education in prison continues to be framed

and designed (i.e., “correctional”). These are areas of scholarship that we look forward to supporting in the future and we hope that this is the first volume in many to come.

Finally, there are a number of people we wish to thank for helping this volume come together. Our Graduate Research Assistants, Vanessa Johnson-Ojeda and Shelby Hubbard, both spent time typing hand-written manuscripts into MS Word and formatting for peer review and editing. Bill Taft, with Common Good Atlanta, was instrumental in facilitating the editorial process, and an example of just how much the work of publishing by incarcerated scholars requires the assistance and support of faculty. We are thankful to over 20 individuals who served as reviewers for the volume, and who we are choosing not to mention by name to protect the anonymous peer review process. Lastly, we are thankful to Wayne Ross and *Critical Education* for enthusiastically working with us to publish this volume.

### **The Essays**

We begin the series with David Evans’ manuscript, *The Elevating Connection of Higher Education in Prison: An Incarcerated Student’s Perspective*. Incarcerated for over ten years in Georgia prisons, Evans draws from limited Internet access behind a firewall, personal interviews with other incarcerated students, and personal experiences to convey higher education’s benefits for incarcerated citizens. Evan’s argues that the primary purpose of higher education in prison should not be to reduce recidivism, although that may be a welcomed side effect. Rather, he demonstrates that higher education in prison should elevate incarcerated students and society by creating a paradigm shift from one of punishment toward redemption and renewal, as these foci more accurately reflect our society’s love of freedom. The second essay, by Abena Subira Mackall, extends the theme of societal influence by asking the degree to which higher education in prison advance democratic values. Mackall’s essay, *Promoting Informed Citizenship through Prison-based Education*, contends that the current era of mass incarceration has brought about several threats to the civic well-being of U.S. society, and thus to the legitimacy and stability of democracy. Using practitioner and student accounts of prison-based educational programs, Mackall illustrates that classrooms can function as unique spaces within prisons to promote informed citizenship and further expand the civic capacities of incarcerated people.

The third essay, by James Davis, focuses on his experience as a Black man pursuing higher education during incarceration. In the essay, *Caught Somewhere Between*, Davis explores how access to higher education produces a love/hate relationship, one where he is able to experience transformation while simultaneously recognizing the structural inequities that contributed to his incarceration—including systemic racism. Through the exploration of philosophy and fictionalized writings, Davis discusses many of the transformations in his life that higher education has afforded him, using the oppositional positioning of love and hate as the lens to understand such experiences, while still holding strong to the role of systemic racism within the prison system and society at large. In the fourth essay, Erin L. Castro situates race and racism as lenses through which to understand college-in-prison programming broadly, and the language of reduced recidivism, in particular. In her essay, *Racism, the Language of Reduced Recidivism, and Higher Education in Prison: Toward an Anti-Racist Praxis*, Castro emphasizes the racist nature of the U.S. punishment system to contend that the language of reduced recidivism, as a perceived dominant purpose of higher education in prison, further extends the interests of white supremacy. She argues that the language of reduced recidivism contributes to state violence that is disproportionately enacted against people of Color and that college-in-

prison programs have an opportunity to thoughtfully expand the reasons for higher education; reasons that are firmly rooted in anti-racism and recognize reduced recidivism as an important, but insufficient justification for quality higher education in prison.

The fifth and sixth essays draw upon and incorporate much of the work of the first four authors by focusing on measurement and evaluation. In his essay, *Reducing Recidivism via College-in-Prison: Thoughts on Data Collection, Methodology, and the Question of Purpose*, Rob Scott proposes that college-in-prison programs may wish to track recidivism out of concern for alumni welfare or even programmatic success, but that such metrics deserve our careful attention and reconsideration. Scott demonstrates that while college-in-prison programs are routinely justified via recidivism rates, such claims are rarely made using rigorous methodology and, compellingly, because of difficulties regarding random selection imposed by the prison context, data collection within the prison environment is not sufficient to make predictive claims. Accordingly, Scott proposes a more nuanced method of data collection for college-in-prison programs that are interested in measuring recidivism as one component of broader assessments by combining information from prison and parole databases, the Internet, and program-specific educational data. Data gathered at the program-level is where Ayesha Boyce's essay, *A Re-imagining of Evaluation as Social Justice: A Discussion of the Education Justice Project*, extends the measurement line of thinking. Boyce contends that evaluations of college-in-prison programs should be positioned as social, cultural, and political forces that can – and should – address systemic issues of inequity. Often, ideas about program evaluation pit desires for methodological standards and rigor against advocacy, relationship development, inclusion of underrepresented voices, and stakeholder education and Boyce argues that this need not be the case. Using an evaluation of the Education Justice Project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Boyce recounts her role as part of the evaluation team and presents tools to engage robust evaluation designs with a social justice goal.

Drawing heavily on Herbert Marcuse's essay, *On Liberation* (1969), and inspired by the tradition of radical pedagogy, the seventh essay by Brandyn Heppard makes a case for a liberal arts curriculum inside prisons. Heppard focuses specifically on the inclusion of humanities because of its revolutionary potential, accessibility, aesthetic sensibility, and promotion of imagination. Through the lens of abolitionist prison reform, Heppard positions higher education in prison within a larger revolutionary framework. The eighth essay focuses on public investment in higher education in prison, and specifically on the arguments related to “fairness” of non-incarcerated people paying taxes to support college-in-prison. Tracing discourse from the mid-1990's, Harnish explores the question: *Is it fair to spend U.S. tax revenue on higher education programs in prison?* Using three philosophical lenses to clarify the issue of fairness: a utilitarian perspective, a Deweyan pragmatist perspective, and a relational ethic of care, Harnish ultimately argues that spending tax revenue on higher education programs in prison is fair. Harnish concludes by providing examples of higher education programs in prison that represent ethical caring and educational opportunity in the present political and economic context.

The ninth essay focuses on the purposes of higher education in prison as a way to foster peaceful and just communities. Using Villanova University's undergraduate degree program at State Correctional Institution—Graterford, Jill McCorkel and Robert DeFina illustrate how the benefits of higher education can – and do – extend beyond the classroom. In their essay, *Beyond Recidivism: Identifying the Liberatory Possibilities of Prison Higher Education*, they demonstrate how neoliberal forces shaping higher education in general and higher education in

prison in particular emphasize market participation and college-in-prison programs can counter those forces through community building, expansion of social capital, and political action. The tenth essay, *Education and Transformation: An Argument for College in Prison*, is co-authored by Carmen Heider and Karen Lehman and begins with question: What does it mean to learn inside of a prison?. Lehman provides a narrative retelling of her experiences earning a bachelor's degree through correspondence courses while serving a prison sentence and the impact that those courses have had on her growth and development. The narrative is followed by a critical dialogue between Lehman and Heider, an instructor at the same facility, and explores in more detail the themes that emerge from the narrative through the lens of Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of "conscientization".

The final essay is forthcoming and will be our offering of "ruminations" on the emerging field of higher education one year after publishing this introductory essay. Given the unique publishing opportunity that has been afforded us by *Critical Education* (publishing one essay monthly for one year on a single topic) we are eager to revisit our framing question of this introduction "what is higher education in prison?" and of this volume "what should be the purpose of higher education in prison?" from the perspective gained following a year of continued engagement with our authors and readers. We invite you to actively engage with the essays and us as we continued to "ruminate".

Finally, let us express that we are proud of this volume of *Critical Education* and the opportunity to publish such a wide range of essays on the topic of higher education in prison. It has been a pleasure to work alongside a collection of committed authors – incarcerated and non-incarcerated scholars, students, program administrators, activists and advocates – who are eager to contribute to a growing intellectual field of higher education, even amid obstacles and environmental constraint. We look forward to continuing this work in community.

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[criticaleducation.org](http://criticaleducation.org)

ISSN 1920-4175

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