

International Review of Education

The Prison Education Project

by Renford Reese, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article examines the lessons learned from the author's development of the Prison Education Project (PEP). PEP has expanded educational opportunities for inmates in 11 California correctional facilities. With the assistance of 600 university student and faculty volunteers, PEP has serviced approximately 4,000 inmates in these facilities since 2011. By providing academic, life skills, and career development programming, PEP aims to educate, empower, and transform the lives of incarcerated individuals. This essay is a summary of the development of PEP. The examination of implementation, fundraising, and branding strategies are highlighted in this paper. The robust spirit of volunteerism is also a central component of the discussion in this article and the "Reciprocal Reflex" is at the heart of the PEP volunteer experience. This phenomenon ignites the passion and gratitude of both the volunteers and inmates. The volunteers learn just as much as they teach and the inmates teach just as much as they learn. The fact that each group shows a deep gratitude to the other for the learning experience creates an exciting symbiotic loop and an esprit de corps that inspires and empowers all involved. The "Reciprocal Reflex" leads to life-long learning. This paper captures the intricate dynamics of how PEP has evolved into one of the largest prison education programs in the United States.

America's criminal justice system has deteriorated to the point that it is a national disgrace. Its irregularities and inequities cut against the notion that we are a society founded on fundamental fairness. Our failure to address this problem has caused the nation's prisons to burst their seams with massive overcrowding, even as our neighborhoods have become more dangerous. We are wasting billions of dollars and diminishing millions of lives. —United States Senator Jim Webb, 2009

Incarceration rates in the United States have increased for 30 years. The U.S. now imprisons a higher proportion of its population than any country in the world. While some argue that policymakers are the blame for the exponential rise in incarceration in the U.S., author Peter Enns blames the American public for its push for more punitiveness. And, this “tough on crime” fervor led to the prolific expansion of the Prison Industrial Complex (2014).

The War on Drugs that was enthusiastically embraced by United States Presidents Nixon and Reagan led to the increase of incarceration rates in the U.S. from 50,000 in 1980 to 400,000 in 1997 (Gunn, 2016).

The *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994* also led to a substantial increase in the prison population in the U.S. This law gave states billions of dollars to build new prisons and hire more police. It included the “Three Strikes Law,” which stated that if you get convicted of three serious crimes a person would serve 25 years to life in prison. There was also mandatory minimum sentencing requirement implemented. The Pell grant program, which gave inmates financial aid to pay for college was eliminated. As a result of these “Tough on Crime” policies, many

correctional education and rehabilitative programs for inmates were cut (Messemer, 2003).

However, over the past five years in the United States, there has been a seismic shift in the way policymakers discuss criminal justice. The subject has become an apolitical issue. Both liberals and conservatives agree that reform is necessary. Fiscal realities that were exacerbated during the economic crisis of 2008-2012 compelled pro-punishment conservatives to find ways to cut costs to state and federal budgets. Scholars Todd Clear and Natasha Frost argue that the Republican's abandonment of the "Punishment First" model marked "the beginning of the end of the punishment imperative" (2014).

Policymakers have come to realize that education is more cost-effective and sensible than incarceration. There have been a number of studies that have been conducted to buttress this assumption.

A 5-year follow-up study (2005-2009) of 6,561 offenders who were released from the Indiana Department of Corrections examined post-release employment and recidivism rates among this target population. The results of this study revealed that an offender's education and employment were the most important determinants on whether they recidivated. Those who had not completed high school were susceptible to recidivate. Younger offenders were also likely to become recidivist offenders. The study found that the recidivism rate for those who had a college education was 31 percent while the recidivism rate for those had below high school education was 55.9% (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, Knutson, 2012).

Anders and Noblit (2011) conducted a multi-year evaluation of the Incarcerated

Individuals Program (IIP) in North Carolina examined what variables contributed to the effectiveness of their program. There were six major contributing factors:

- 1) Case managers actively included IIP into case plans for students.
- 2) Education directors recognized the effects the program had on the students.
- 3) Instructors kept on-campus course content in prison courses and accepted the demand to be 'real' in their interactions with students.
- 4) Students articulated better educational experiences than ones they had before and used the coursework to critically understand their situation and, thus motivate themselves to learn.
- 5) Program participation mediated the effects of prison by reducing opportunities to incur infractions and by helping to manage the stigma of prison post-release.
- 6) The program using the annual evaluation to improve operations as well as to understand program outcomes.

According to research conducted by Gerber and Fritsch (2005), vocational and adult education lead to fewer disciplinary incidents during incarceration, reductions in recidivism, it increases employment opportunities, and increases participation in education upon release.

Moreover, author Sharon Gunn (2016) states that there are an array of rehabilitative options for policy makers in dealing with criminal-justice involved individuals. These options include substance abuse treatment, drug court supervision, probation and community correctional programs.

The Prison Education Project

In the summer of 2011, I had a series of meetings with the Warden of the Chino Institution for Men (CIM) in Chino, California. He explained to me how CIM was transitioning from a reception center to a mainline yard. A reception center is a correctional facility that houses inmates for two years or less before they are placed at a mainline (long-term) correctional facility or released. The warden's concern was that CIM had transitioned into a mainline facility but did not have sufficient academic

programming for the inmates. The warden asked me if I could help provide academic programming to CIM. I convened a mini-conference with my dean at Cal Poly Pomona in which eight prison administrators from CIM and the Assistant Superintendent for the Office of Correctional Education attended. The Prison Education Project (PEP) was born out of this meeting.

We devised a plan in which we would bring university student volunteers into the prison to give “Academic Orientation” sessions to the inmates. The inaugural group consisted of 36 students from Cal Poly Pomona who were divided into groups of six. Each group was responsible for coming into the facility for 90-minute sessions during a four-week period. In the Academic Orientation sessions, student volunteers discussed their majors, the classes they took, overcoming challenges, and their career aspirations. The concept was to expose the inmate-students to an array of academic options as preparation for their future release.

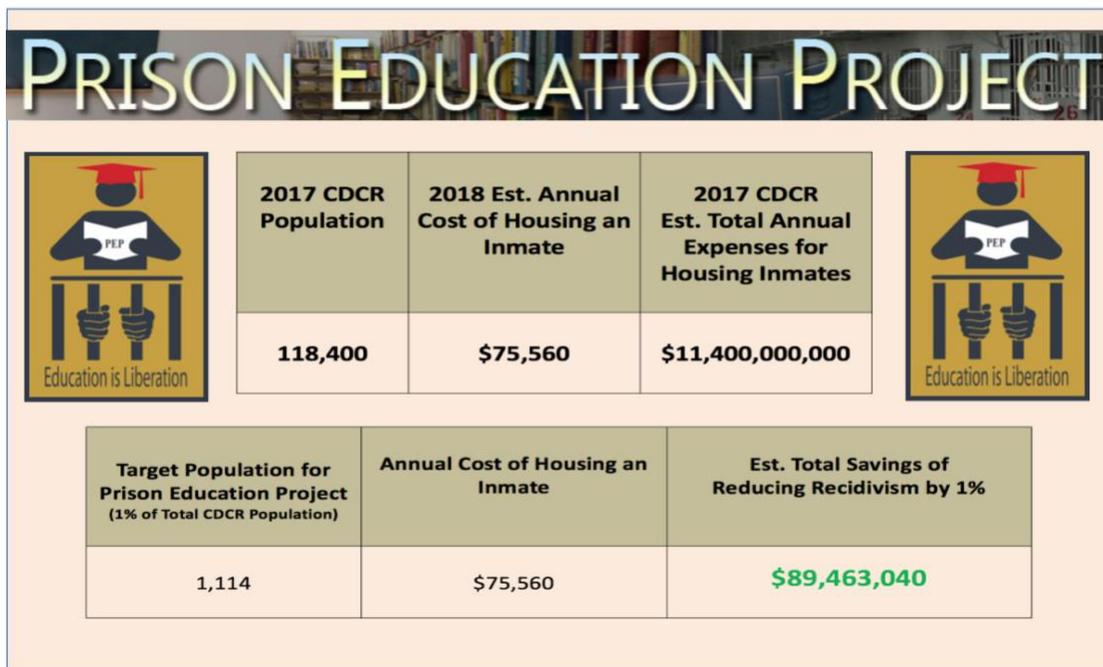
While we were laying the foundation for PEP, I had a series of meetings with the presidents of local community colleges. My idea was to bring instructors from these colleges inside the prison to offer associate’s degree programs. For two decades, the majority of the inmates in the state of California received their AA degrees through correspondence courses that are primarily offered by four community colleges. These local community college presidents stated that it was unrealistic that their college would provide degree programs to inmates when their own traditional students were impacted—meaning their traditional students could not get the classes that they wanted because of budget cuts and overcrowded classrooms.

Since we could not get the local community colleges to provide academic

programs with live instructors, we decided to add more modules to PEP. Over the next two quarters, we provided an Interdisciplinary Certificate program, Career Development, and GED Tutoring.

The overarching idea was to use the resources in the backyard of the state’s 35 prisons to make change. There is a community college and/or a university within a 25-30 mile radius of the majority of the prisons in California.

The broad goal of PEP is to create a Prison-to-School pipeline and provide inmate-students with the cognitive tools necessary to function as productive citizens, which will also translate to recidivism reduction. One objective of PEP is to collaborate with local colleges to assist the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) in reducing recidivism. For each percentage point that we lower recidivism we can save the state of California \$36.6 million US.



Approximately 700,000 inmates are released from federal and prisons in the United States each year and over half of those released return to prison within three years of being released. A study funded by the U.S. Department of Justice studied data from thousands of in-prison programs nationwide and found that inmates that participated in educational or vocational training are 43 percent less likely to recidivate once they are released from prison (Palta, 2013).

Implementation

Durlak and DuPre argue that one must assess the impact of implementation on program outcomes. The authors go on to state that implementation is an important element of program evaluations and that more research is needed to evaluate the impact of implementation factors in different community settings (2008).

In popular discourse, we often hear how we should think outside the box. Whether it is in business, the public sector, or in academia, individuals are encouraged by their managers, supervisors, and mentors to think outside the box. I have come to realize that this is flawed advice because we live and work within systems e.g., boxes.

In order to make substantive changes to organizations and systems, it is necessary to work within the box. Working outside the box keeps one outside the box. Moreover, there are organizational repercussions for working outside the system. The goal should be to push the boundaries of the box outward from the inside. If this is done, you would be in the same place as if you had started outside the box. I have learned this lesson the hard way as a result of working with university administrators and prison administrators. The university and the prison are both systems (boxes) with their own unique standard operating procedures. It is naïve to ignore the calcified structures of these systems.

Working outside the box almost guarantees implementation failure.

The most formidable challenge in running a prison education program is finding a way to get the corrections administrators on your team. Even if the warden is supportive, if other correctional administrators do not believe in what you are doing, it will make it difficult for you to implement the program. If the correctional officers are adversarial toward your program, it will make it difficult to be effective. They do not have to be supportive as long as they are not oppositional. If the teachers in the facility think that your presence threatens their job then the program will be difficult to implement.

When we first began PEP, the warden and the top administrators at CIM were excited to have us come in. But, one problem was that they did not transmit this excitement to their staff. They did not have a meeting with the correctional officers to let them know that PEP was a priority. Hence, the officers at the front entrance gate were adversarial toward the group coming in. These officers would often have our volunteers waiting outside of the gate for 30-45 minutes. By the time the volunteers arrived in the classroom with the inmates, they would only have 45 minutes or so to teach because their teaching time had been minimized by the wait. This made the process cumbersome for the volunteers, which caused attrition.

Another problem we had initially was with correctional officers being negative toward the concept of rehabilitation. For example, a correctional officer would say, "Why are you guys here? These are criminals in here and they will never change." Some 80% of PEP volunteers are female and the correctional officers would tell them that the only reason inmates were coming to their session was to undress them with their eyes. On the "Sensitive Needs Yard," correctional officers would remind the volunteers that they were

doing outreach to rapists and pedophiles. All of these comments were an attempt to discourage the volunteers from coming into the facility. As the program has shown consistency and effectiveness, correctional officers have become more positive toward volunteers and the inmates involved in the program.

Today, our implementation philosophy is that we will only bring PEP to facilities that want the program. It is too difficult to implement a program in these correctional facilities if there is no internal desire for it.

The prisons are prime examples of how the top-down approach to program implementation is ineffective. The warden can emphatically state that they want PEP, but if there is no buy-in from the principal, the education staff, the community resource manager, and at least a handful of correctional officers, it will not happen. PEP thrives in facilities that have the support of these entities.

Another significant challenge of working in the prisons is the unpredictability of situations from day to day. There could be lockdowns and changes made to processes for a number of reasons. For example, we transformed a vacant dorm at the California Institution for Men into a dynamic learning environment for the inmates. Our philosophy was that in order for people to learn, you have to create learning spaces that are aesthetically amenable to learning. In this spirit, PEP bought acoustical dividers for this learning space, which divided the space into six learning areas. We bought bookshelves for the 600 books that we donated to the facility. We bought silk palm tree plants and bought two leather couches and coffee tables for a study lounge area. The inmates and staff thoroughly enjoyed coming to this learning space but unfortunately nine months after creating this space it was turned back into a dorm. The items were eventually

donated to the California Institution for Women.

At the outset of the program, there were also university challenges. My university was fearful of the liability issues that came with students volunteering inside a prison. Our Risk Management department and the university administrators were risk-averse and did not wholeheartedly support our endeavor. In fact, my program coordinator for PEP was a felon. The university wanted me to dismiss him because he was a sex-offender. It did not matter that his crime had taken place 16 years before the day that I hired him. Nevertheless, I met with him and told him that the university would be taking him off of their payroll but he could still volunteer with PEP. I told him that he would have to fully disclose his offense to the volunteers and that his role would be limited to taking the volunteers inside the prison. The university still did not want him associated with the program—even with his candor regarding his offense to volunteers who had the option of not participating in the program. None of these issues moved the administration. It was at this point that I transitioned the program from my university to be run under the auspices of a local nonprofit organization.

Program Activities

There are two 7-week PEP semesters during the year: Fall and Spring. The Fall Semester begins in October and the Spring Semester begins in February. There is a mandatory orientation session for new volunteers at the beginning of each PEP semester. A Community Resource Manager from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation conducts the mandatory training. Volunteers complete applications for clearance during this training session.

- **Academic Orientation Module:** Student volunteers give Academic Orientation presentations to expose inmate-students to college (e.g., majors, classes, college life, careers, etc.). Volunteers also give mini-lectures based on content in their majors. There are 5-6 student volunteers in each session.
- **GED Tutoring:** Student volunteers tutor Language Arts and Math in the Adult Basic Education skills program for inmates. The primary goal is to improve the academic skills necessary for inmates to pass the General Education Development (GED) test. A secondary goal of GED success is to foster aspirations for higher education.
- **Career Development Module:** Graduate student volunteers and community volunteers conduct Career Development workshops on resume-building, job-searching, and interview skills for inmates who have two years or less to serve as preparation for their reintegration into the community.
- **Interdisciplinary Courses Module:** University professors graduate students teach interdisciplinary courses in: “U.S. Economic Policies,” “Introduction to Psychology,” “Introduction to Communication,” “Introduction to Film Studies,” and “Introduction to Philosophy” among others.
- **Enrichment Module:** This module includes the PEP Art program. Inmates have the opportunity to exhibit their art bi-annually during the Pomona Artwalk. This module also includes courses on Creative Writing, Spoken Word, Public Speaking & Comedy, Yoga and Meditation, and Introduction to Modern Dance.
- **PEP-Google Career Development Workshops:** Volunteers from Google’s Human Resources Department give Career Development workshops to the inmates at the Santa Clara County Jail.
- **Faculty Forum:** This forum brings in faculty from various universities to give introductory lectures in their disciplines. Three professors speak during 90-minute sessions in the Spring Semester.

PEP volunteers participate from 10 universities. They volunteer at correctional facilities that are within a 30-mile radius of their universities.

Volunteerism

The functionalist theory attempts to deconstruct why people volunteer. According to this theory people volunteer because the act fulfills various psychological functions. And, although the rationale for volunteerism appears the same on the surface, there are various motivating factors that cause people to volunteer. Clary and Snyder

found in their research that about two-thirds of volunteers have two or more important motives in volunteering. There are five motives that have been identified as prominent themes in the volunteerism literature: value-expression, career, understanding, social, and ego enhancement. These motives have been categorized as self-oriented and other-oriented (1999).

PEP volunteers invest their time and sharing their personal experiences and knowledge. Volunteers expose inmates to substantive content that allows the inmates to transform their lives. Each volunteer commits to one 90-minute session per week for seven weeks. Volunteers visit correctional facilities and give Academic Orientation presentations, Career Development workshops, or tutor inmates to help them prepare to pass the General Education Development test.

The PEP volunteer motto is that “We have a commitment to commitment.” We believe that in order to sustain a movement, a movement needs advocates, which is why 50 percent of the emphasis of PEP is geared toward the inmate experience and 50 percent of the emphasis is geared toward the volunteer experience. Ultimately, the volunteers will one day become the policymakers, teachers, district attorneys, business owners, correctional officers, and police. If we can make this experience transformative for them perhaps they will become more empathetic and open-minded. We want our volunteers to be passionate advocates of the inmates and our movement.

With all of the talk of Millennials being apathetic, our student volunteers are serious and committed to teaching and transforming the lives of the inmate-students. Our volunteers do not get credit for volunteering in the prisons. They volunteer because they have a strong desire to be involved in a cause that is substantive and meaningful.

Unlike other prison education programs that have one instructor that teaches inmates, PEP is forum-based. The majority of our modules are taught in groups. This approach allows us to expand the impact of the experience to more volunteers.

We believe that volunteerism thrives when there are meaningful nonmonetary incentives of the work. Volunteerism also thrives when there is reciprocity—e.g., when the volunteers get back just as much as they give. Reciprocity is one of the most important elements of the volunteer experience. The “Reciprocal Reflex” is palpable in each meaningful volunteer experience. The clients are visibly moved by the experience. They express gratitude for the outreach efforts. The volunteers express gratitude for the gratitude. The “Reciprocal Reflex” enables the volunteer experience to be rewarding, fulfilling, and meaningful.

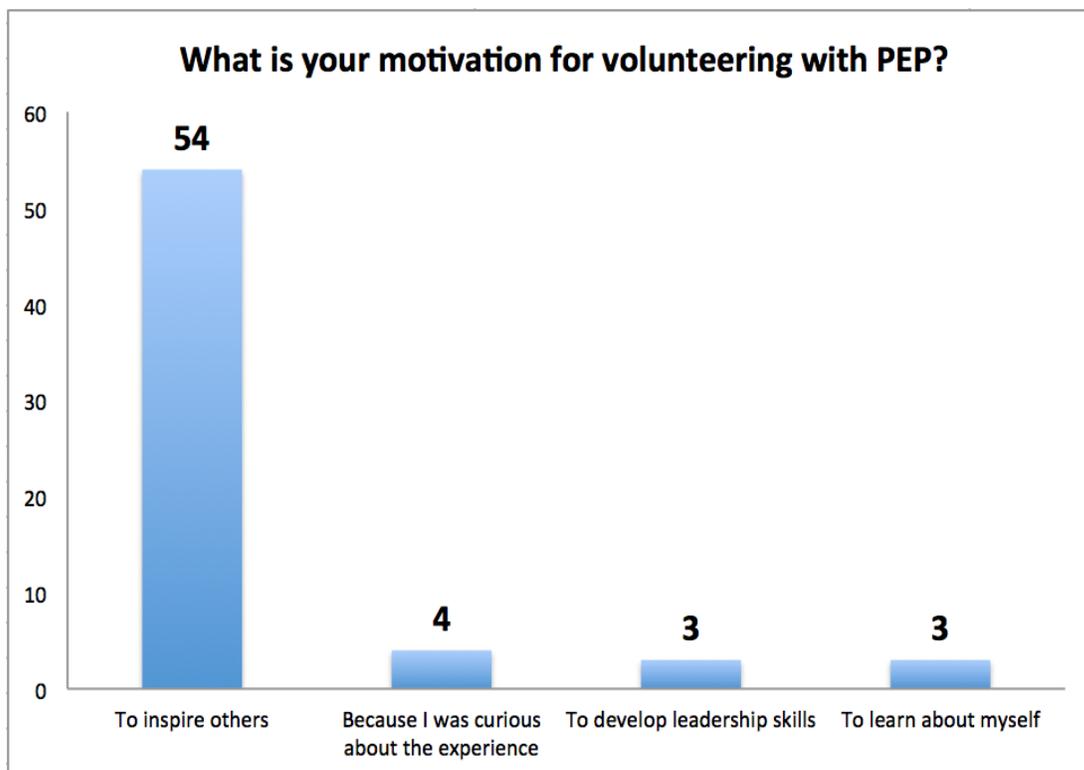
The “Reciprocal Reflex” is dynamic with PEP because the volunteers get instant feedback on how much they are valued. This is manifested in the intense attention given to the volunteers by the inmates during the volunteers’ presentations. This can also be seen in the animated gratitude that the inmates show toward the volunteers after each academic session.

In the end, it is not the presentation of content that makes the experience rewarding and life-changing. It is the reciprocal behavior that creates an extraordinary exciting in which the volunteers and the inmates motivate each other. The “Reciprocal Reflex” leads to life-long learning for all involved.

A one-question multiple-choice survey was given to the PEP volunteers during the Spring Semester 2016. The purpose of this survey was to gauge the primary motivating force of these volunteers. There was one “other-regarding” question and three

“self-regarding” questions in this survey.

The 64 survey participants volunteered at six correctional facilities in California. The results of this survey tell us that the majority of PEP volunteers were motivated to volunteer for an “other-regarding” reason—they wanted to inspire others. While 54 participants selected the other-regarding choice, 10 volunteers selected self-regarding reasons for volunteering with PEP.



Many PEP volunteers come from working class backgrounds and many of them have someone in their immediate or extended families that has been entangled in the criminal justice system. Consequently, they have a deeper empathy for the inmates and want to reach out to inspire and empower them.

We surmise that because of the intensity and completeness of the experience that

75 percent of PEP volunteers only volunteer for one PEP semester. This type of short term volunteer commitment could be problematic for some organizations but it works for PEP because each semester we have over 100 new student volunteers eager to sign up for the program. For almost all of our volunteers, the experience is transformative and life changing. And, although 75 percent of PEP volunteers only volunteer for one semester, PEP is successful because of the wholehearted commitment of these short-term volunteers.

Fundraising

The primary challenge to most social-service organizations is funding. This has not been a problem with PEP mainly because the program uses the funds that it does have wisely. It does not take funds to go to a university to give an energetic presentation about the program, sign up volunteers, and then have them volunteer for seven weeks. We have used this formula in 11 facilities without much cost involved.

We began PEP in 2011 with no grant funding. I would argue that the program was just as impactful without funding than it has been with funding. The 36 volunteers who participated in the inaugural session were just as passionate, dedicated, and committed as the ones in later years. Too much focus on social search outreach is put on fundraising. The key to doing more with less is the recruitment of passionate volunteers who embrace the organization's vision.

The key to starting a successful fundraising campaign is to have done some work first. Then, you want to capture the outcomes of this effort. Many funders are not interested in seeing a proposal that does not include the program's track record or metrics because an idea/concept is just an idea/concept without implementation and execution.

The first two grants that PEP received were unsolicited. For each of these grants, the grant field officer was aware of our efforts. In each case, this representative made site visits to PEP classrooms. As a result of these visits, they requested proposals from us. Our proposals contained a background overview, a list of program activities, and pre- and post- program assessments with 200 inmates who participated in the inaugural program.

The first grant that we received was a three-year grant for \$150,000 US. The second grant that we received was a three-year grant for \$125,000 US. The fact that both of these grants were unsolicited reinforces the point that nascent organizations should be committed to doing impactful work first. Social Entrepreneurship is a self-sacrificing endeavor and those creating social-service outreach programs should be committed to making an impact first before seeking substantial funding.

During the first three years of PEP, we raised \$504,000 US. The big-picture lesson in this fundraising story is to do the work first then capture the outcomes of this work. Inevitably, people who are in the business of charitable giving will eventually recognize your impactful work and be more amenable to giving to your organization.

Branding

Although many nonprofits continue to take a narrow approach to brand management, using it as a tool for fundraising, a growing number are moving beyond that approach to explore the wider, strategic roles that brands can play: driving broad, long-term social goals, while strengthening internal identity, cohesion, and capacity (Kylander and Stone, 2012).

Branding is effective marketing. The concept of branding is usually reserved for those in the business sector. But, I fundamentally believe that branding is just as important for the nonprofit sector. Stakeholders and the public need to know that your

program exists, that it is relevant, and that you are engaging in impactful work. Branding allows the staff and volunteers to experience a sense of esprit de corps.

I left my initial meeting with the CIM administrators to create PEP confident that they were serious about bringing academic programming to their facility. That evening, I searched to find whether the URL www.PrisonEducationProject.org was taken. It was not. I secured this URL, which immediately became the name of the program. Now, if you type “Prison Education” in Google, The Prison Education Project is the first link that appears—out of 55 million others.

In the beginning of the program, volunteers were given \$40 gift cards to a restaurant chain. The idea was for the volunteers to go to the restaurant to debrief after their sessions. We wanted them to discuss what went right, what went wrong, and how they could improve. The idea was also to help the volunteers develop chemistry. It worked. However, I decided to use the money that we were spending on gift cards to spend on “Prison Education Project” sweatshirts.

We only gave sweatshirts to volunteers; you could not purchase one. In order to get a sweatshirt, volunteers had to have completed a semester of service and five out of seven sessions. The concept was to compel the volunteers to earn their sweatshirt and if they earned it they would wear it with pride. And, each time they wore it people would ask, “What in the world is the Prison Education Project?” After the initial semester, a volunteer gets additional PEP-wear e.g., a polo, a PEP-Talk shirt, a V-neck sweater, a PEP jacket. The more committed the volunteer is, the more we want to show our commitment to them.

Our branding efforts did not include outreach to the media. We never sought

media coverage for our efforts. Too many organizations become consumed with getting media attention before they do the work. Our philosophy was always to do the work. During the first four years, no significant media outlet had covered this program. This had not been a problem for us because we have managed to raise the necessary funding and service over 4,000 inmates in eleven correctional facilities during this period.

Moreover, there was meticulous thought put into the PEP logo. The bars, the book, the graduation hat, and the motto “Education is Liberation,” all matter. The logo captures the essence of program. Consequently, this logo appears on all PEP content and clothing.

PEP volunteers are also rewarded for their dedication and commitment to the program by having the opportunity to volunteer for PEP-Uganda. After volunteering for two semesters with PEP, they are eligible to volunteer in the Luzira Upper Prison and Luzira Women’s Prison in Kampala, Uganda. PEP covers the food and housing expenses of its volunteers during their two-week stay in Uganda. The Prison Education Project forged a relationship Luzira in 2013. In a three-year period 75 PEP volunteers have traveled to Uganda to provide academic, life skills, and entrepreneurship classes to 3,000 inmates.

Program Outcomes

The methodology used for PEP modules is a self-assessment. We wanted to know what the inmates thought about the impact the modules had on them and whether they thought the module would help them when they paroled.

The following shows data collected from one of our PEP cycles. There are approximately 500 inmate-students taking classes during each PEP cycle. Below is the

inmate-student post-program narrative assessment. Use the following link to view PEP evaluation results over the years:

<http://www.prisoneducationproject.org/PEPEvaluationReports.html>

Inmate-Student Post-Program Narrative Assessment
<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction to Philosophy Course</p> <p>--This course has truly changed my thinking habits to have more of an open mind, to listen, and weigh out all options. Also, it has helped me realize that philosophy is in everything.</p> <p>--Even though I am 60 years old, I feel like a young student open and ready to attack a career. Thank you so much!</p> <p>--I really appreciate the program and the discussions. It is rare here to do anything of quality, especially a subject that is not part of this life. The student teachers were awesome, well prepared, and knowledgeable. We also welcome being treated like humans, which in this process doesn't happen often. Thank you so much.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Art Course</p> <p>--Amazing, I learned how to paint and it gave me a different outlook on life.</p> <p>--Doing this kind of art helped me a lot to be more creative and gave me a lot of motivation to go on.</p> <p>--It is very helpful and gives me something positive to do with my time that's constructive.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Business 101</p> <p>--This course was very informative and gave me many tools to take with me upon my parole to assist me in starting my own business and being a productive member of society.</p> <p>--I really think this is a great class. It educates you in the basics of starting your own business.</p> <p>--This class has really inspired me to look into starting my own business when I get out. Great class!</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Career Development</p> <p>--I really enjoyed learning new ways of learning how to better myself and finding out about myself and getting tools for my future.</p> <p>--I really am thankful for the time and dedication the volunteers showed and did for this class. It was really helpful and resourceful for me.</p>

--This orientation has inspired me to further my education. Before this class, I found myself not really knowing what I wanted to do with my life as far education goes. In a sense, this course has given me the courage and motivation to take charge of my life and become something I can be proud of such as an educated person with the tools I need for success.

Academic Orientation

--The Academic Orientation sessions helped me to see that there is a chance for me to become more than just an ex-felon. It gave me the encouragement to continue my higher educational goals and not to give up. Thank you!

--At first I really had no idea about a college degree but after this class, I know all about college degrees and how to go about obtaining one. Also they gave us a lot of information about different majors. I feel this class is very helpful to us here at the prison for the one's who want to pursue their education after their release.

--The people who spoke with us were very informative and knowledgeable about their subjects. I do have an interest in furthering my education, so thank you all for your time and concerns of my future.

PEP has an inside-outside approach to rehabilitating inmates and parolees. Once inmates are released they have the opportunity to participate in PEP's 10-week Reintegration Academy, which is hosted on a college campus each spring. Participants are immersed in academic, life skills, and career development modules. On the first day of the program each participant receives a meal card, a voucher for transportation, and a voucher to purchase business casual clothes. In the 5th week each participant receives a free laptop computer. In the 6th week, participants are registered into a community college and are assisted with completing financial aid forms. Our vocational education focus includes the following felony-friendly fields: Aviation Maintenance, Graph Arts, Computer Technology, Horticulture, Electronics, Welding, and Culinary Arts. During the 9th week, the program hosts a job fair for the participants--inviting 25 local employers to meet, greet, and interview participants. At the graduation banquet, each participant receives a certificate of completion. PEP's inside-out approach helps to create a "Prison-to-School Pipeline."

Conclusion

PEP uses words to inspire and empower inmates. Words are the most powerful way in which we can transform the internal human condition. The internal human condition is the way we feel about ourselves—e.g., our self-esteem and confidence. It takes money and resources to transform the external human condition. But, in the absence of money and resources, we still have the agency to educate, empower, enlighten, and inspire through the simple use of words. If we doubt the transformative power of words, we should ask ourselves how we feel when someone says to us: “Great Job!” “Hang in there,” “Be Careful,” “Stay Safe,” “Things will be okay,” “You’re awesome,” “I’m proud of you,” “I love you.”

For people who have been damaged by words, words can also be used to heal and comfort. And, the beautiful thing about words is that they are free. We all have access to them. There is a 12-year-old in the inner city who is being raised in poverty. He has low self-esteem. He is angry and insecure. He is the product of yelling, cussing, fussing, and people constantly telling him that he will never amount to anything. Although the people yelling at this 12-year-old may not have money or adequate resources in their community, all of them have the capacity to empower this youth through the words that they use with him. And, these words can transform him into being more confident, more inspired, and more hopeful about his future.

With the Prison Education Project, we use weekly “PEP-Talks” via e-mails to let volunteers know that they are valued. We remind them that they are transforming lives in each of their sessions. The goal of the PEP-Talks is to motivate and inspire volunteers to

motivate and inspire the inmates.

In the prisons, when volunteers do not have access to an overhead projector, PowerPoint presentations, or the internet, they have their words. And, it is these words that have the extraordinary potential to enlighten the inmates. Beyond the academic content presented by the volunteers, it is the power of other exchanges that inspire inmates. When the volunteers say to the inmates: “How are you doing?” “We’re glad to be back,” “Good Question,” “Great Question,” “This was another great session. We look forward to coming back next week,” “This class is amazing,” and when the volunteers hear from the inmates: “Thank You,” “Thank you so much,” “We really appreciate what you are doing for us,” “We are learning so much from you,” “You volunteers are amazing,” these statements validate the inmates and the volunteers in a priceless way. This is an example of how words help to create an exciting and dynamic learning environment that is based on reciprocity.

In thinking about ways to motivate and empower staff, volunteers, and clients with limited resources, it is important for leaders to think about the importance of words. If they are used in a careful and thoughtful way, these words can do what money cannot do, which is transform the spirit and soul of the people around us.

The common denominator with the in-custody populations in the U.S. and around the world is their lack of education. The lack of education within this population has led to serious societal consequences. The person who drops out of school in the sixth grade has few options in American society—so he will potentially wind up in prison. The person who cannot read is perpetually embarrassed and frustrated in American society—this frustration eventually will potentially lead him to prison. U.S. jails, prisons, and

juvenile halls are filled with an uneducated and angry population. Part of this anger stems from their lack of education and their lack of options in life.

In many cases, someone gave up on them at a very early age. Their parents did not emphasize the importance of education and their elementary school teachers either did not care or saw them as casualties of their communities from the start—doomed to fail.

The inmate who dropped out of school in the sixth grade and can barely read needs education. The parolee who has just been released from prison but has no skills needs education. The youth who has been abused as a child, sent to multiple foster homes, and eventually winds up in a gang needs an alternative; he needs education.

Inside the prison, we meet the inmates at their own academic level. If they need to learn how to read, we help them. If they need help with math, we tutor them. If they desire to pass the high school equivalence test, we will help them pass this exam. If they are Spanish-speaking, we work with them on learning English. In our Career Development sessions, we exposed inmates to vocational education opportunities.

And, when the parolees are released from prison and probationers are released from the county jail, we use the community college as our transformative system. It is the community college that can transform the lives of this disenfranchised population and help to make their dreams come true. It is at the community college that one can become a nurse, an X-ray technician, an air traffic controller, an electrician, a welder, etc.

One cannot discuss the rehabilitation of inmates and the reintegration of parolees and probationers without talking about education. The Prison Education Project's motto is "Education is Liberation"--inside and outside the prison walls. There is no light in the

darkness of these lives without it. Education is the centerpiece of all human transformation—there is no hope and there are no dreams without it.

References

- Anders, Daniel Allison, Noblit, George W. (2011). "Understanding Effective Higher Education Programs in Prisons: Considerations from the Incarcerated Individuals Program in North Carolina," *The Journal of Correctional Education*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (June), pp. 77-93.
- Clary, E. Gill, Snyder, Mark (1999). "The Motivations to Volunteer. Theoretical and Practical Considerations," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol. 8, pp. 156-159.
- Clear, Todd R., Frost, Natasha A. (2014). "The Beginning of the End of the Punishment Imperative," in the book *The Punishment Imperative*, NYU Press.
- Enns, Peter K. (2014). "The Public's Increasing Punitiveness and its Influence on Mass Incarceration in the United States," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 58, No. 4, (October), pp.857-872.
- Durlak, Joseph A., DuPre, Emily P. (2008). "Implementation Matters: A Review of Research on the Influence of Implementation on Program Outcomes and the Factors Affecting Implementation," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Volume 41, Issue 3-4 (June), pp. 327-350.
- Gerber, Jung, Fritsch, Eric J. (1995). "Adult Academic and Vocational Correctional Education Programs: A Review of Research," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, Vol. 22, Issue 1-2.
- Gunn, Sharon (2016). "Letter: War on Drugs," *University Wire* (May 8).
- Kylander, Nathalie, Stone, Christopher (2012). "The Role of Brand in the Nonprofit Sector," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring).
- Lockwood, Susan, Nally, John M., Ho, Taiping, Knutson, Katie (2012). "The Effect of Correctional Education on Post Release Employment and Recidivism: A 5-Year Follow-Up Study in the State of Indiana," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 58, No. 3, pp. 380-396.
- Messemer, Jonathan E. (2003), "College Programs for Inmates: The Post Pell Grant Era," *Journal of Correctional Education*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (March), pp. 32-29.

Palta, Rina (2013). "Study: Educational Program in Prison Work," *89.3 KPCC* (August 23).

Webb, Jim (2009). "Why We Must Fix Our Prisons," *Parade* (March 29).