

EXPLORATORY PIECE

Discussing the Place of Corequisites in Juvenile Correctional Education and GED Success

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Discussions surrounding incarcerated juveniles, education programs, and recidivism are difficult to find. In fact, gathering data is incredibly difficult in juvenile facilities because of high turnover rates and difficulty of obtaining permission to conduct studies in juvenile facilities (Calderone, Bennett, Homan, Dedrick, & Chatfield, 2009; Shippen, Morton, Flynt, Houchins, & Smitherman, 2012). A study by David, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, and Miles found that participating in a GED or equivalent program reduced recidivism rates by 30% (2013). Assuming there is a relationship between juvenile recidivism rates and education programs, an important question remains. What types of education work best, and why? We believe a corequisite model paired with a philosophy course may be an important piece to this question.

The course will focus on reading and writing skills through article readings, reflection papers, and narrative creation exercises.

A philosophy based corequisite approach has been developed for two primary reasons. The first being that pre-college philosophy classes have been shown to improve scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test 3—which tests verbal, non-verbal, and numerical reasoning (Topping & Trickery, 2007). Philosophy majors also have the highest mean scores in verbal reasoning and analytic writing, as well as having the third highest mean score for quantitative reasoning (Education Testing Service, 2019). Some universities have even begun partnering with K12 schools in order to teach philosophy summer camps or instruct during normal school hours (Center for Philosophy for Children, 2019; Texas A&M University, 2019). GED program completion is a major concern for juvenile detention centers, so it is important that critical thinking and reasoning skills are fostered. Philosophical discussion can certainly develop critical thinking and reasoning skills—with the bonus of increasing test taking skills.

The second primary reason for choosing a philosophy based corequisite approach is that research shows improving things like self-esteem, personal development, and a sense of empowerment, are all ways in which motivation to complete education programs amongst incarcerated adults is fostered (Baranger, Rousseau, Mastroilli, & Matesanz, 2018). Philosophy as a field is inundated with literature related to meaning making and values, self-respect, classroom engagement, and identity (Locke, 1935; Boxill, 1976; hooks, 1994). After facilitating discussions on these topics and having students complete reflection assignments, students will learn the skills and foundations for cultivating and maintaining things like value, self-respect/self-esteem, and empowerment in their own lives (personally and academically). Students would be given the opportunity to speak, hear others, and experience validation through their own ideas.

The structure of the philosophy course will be simple. The course will focus on reading and writing skills through article readings, reflection papers, and narrative creation exercises (where students develop a case study to coincide with the discussion topic of the day). Dialogue is heavily utilized so that students can grapple with these concepts in a low stakes

environment and build confidence, as well as watch their ideas and the ideas of others form.

We believe that a philosophy course that is taught alongside a GED class at a juvenile detention center will do much more than simply grant students an avenue for content centered application of their developing reading and writing skills. The content of the philosophy course will help students become more confident, as well as autonomous learners; this in turn will translate to higher GED completion and lower recidivism rates amongst juveniles.

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