

## Motivational Strategies for Correctional Practitioners

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to examine the significance of motivational strategies on offender participation in learning. Education is an effective tool to assist offenders to become productive citizens in society. Therefore, the correctional practitioners must have effective motivational methods to impact the educational development of offenders.

Education is a valuable tool for making changes in the lives of the adult offender population. The adult offender population includes those who are currently incarcerated, parolees, and probationers. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 68% of inmates (offenders) are high school dropouts. These offenders have a higher rate of recidivism than offenders who have a 12<sup>th</sup>-grade education (Harlow, 2003). Approximately two million men and women are currently incarcerated in the nation's penitentiaries, and 75% of them will commit a new crime within three years upon release from prison (Hall & Killackey, 2008). Inmates are being released from prison with little education, job training skills, or the ability to find employment. Incarcerated inmates who attended correction education were less likely to return to prison. Offenders have a greater chance for employment and better social economic life with a 12<sup>th</sup>-grade education than those who failed to obtain a GED (Harlow, 2003).

The success of offenders' education is dependent upon them actively participating in and completing education programs. Participation in an education program is closely related to correctional practitioners' ability to solicit students and motivate them to enroll and stay in the educational programs. Correctional practitioners (CP) are those teachers, social workers, counselors, and probation officers who have a direct impact on offenders' educational progress. The offender population is a special adult education group that requires effective adult learning and motivational strategies in order to thrive (Ashcroft, 1999). This research involves examining how effective motivational training and strategies for CP can have an impact on the participation of offenders in educational programs. This paper will strive to demonstrate the benefits properly trained CP can have on positively affecting the education of offenders.

### Practitioner Challenges

CP face numerous challenges when working with the offender population. Distinctive incidents that occur in prison, such as lock-downs, head counts, hearings, meetings with lawyers, and compound disturbances, disrupt the regularity of the corrections classroom (Geraci, 2002). Inmate learners are often dealing with stressors at a level higher than learners in classrooms outside the confines of prison. Overcrowding and inadequate funding for teaching personnel are two factors that determine the success of correctional education (Hall & Killackey, 2008). Lack of funding can influence the amount of training facilities provide to instructors. Some certified teachers are not well prepared for the challenges of the offender population and cannot teach well in the correctional environment. As a result, learning cannot happen because the correctional educator has failed to recognize how incarcerated learners learn and retain information (Zaro & Gehring, 2007). Corrections educators should be skilled in methods of

instructing diverse populations in order to recognize the different learning styles and the learning needs of inmates.

Upon release, offenders may participate in adult community or alternative education programs. Practitioners trained in traditional methods may not have the skills needed to properly work with offenders. CP need training tailored to the criminal justice system, including training on motivating the learners. Lack of motivation and stimulation of interest can result in low attendance in programs as well as lack of progression of the offenders. Therefore, it will appear as if the incarcerated or released offenders do not want to learn or the educational programs are not effective. Once offenders are released, judges may mandate GED or vocational training to probationers (offenders) that are on probation as a special condition. The mandatory class attendance does not ensure that the offender will be inspired to focus on learning. Without interest, the learner is simply attending in order to satisfy a requirement, not increase their educational level.

### **Participation**

The justice system has often incorporated mandatory school attendance as part of sentencing. Forcing inmates to attend school as part of their sentence is not used by all prisons and jails. Therefore, offenders who are serving sentences may not be motivated to participate in the educational programs. In addition, there may be no incentive for participating in the program. Some facilities do provide incentives such as gain time or fewer days on their sentence, but other facilities do not (Gerarci, 2002). The fact that not all inmates truly choose to attend educational programs is only one of the challenges CP face when attempting to motivate inmate students to participate and progress. When class is not the offender's choice, their participation will be low and, eventually, they will drop from the program if they are not motivated. Poor work habits and lack of motivation appear to characterize the correctional client, and this affects their level of involvement in educational programs. Offenders need motivation and engagement in order to successfully promote productive participation.

### **Motivation**

Many correctional practitioners are neither fully prepared for their role as motivator nor fully prepared for the pessimistic views many offenders may hold towards education. Inmates who have dropped out of high school have poor self-confidence and negative attitudes about education because of negative experience with school prior to incarceration (Hall & Killcky, 2008). The institutional structure of corrections settings make a great deal of what teachers learn for public school teaching impossible (Lewis, 2006). People employed in CP positions must be trained to motivate offenders to participate in education programs. External motivation from correctional practitioners, such as the probation or parole officer, may be needed. CP may not be motivated themselves because of lack of training, high case loads, or underpay. They also may not understand the importance of enthusiasm and inspiration – which are both crucial elements of motivation (Clark, Walters, Gingrich, & Meltzer, 2006). CP should be trained to use effective motivational strategies to encourage offenders to take advantage of educational resources.

CP can use *motivational interviews* to get offenders to engage in self-motivation, to address behavior changes, and to provide approaches for handling difficult offenders (Clark et al., 2006). A motivational interview is a way of talking to people that focuses on changes in behavior. Clark and colleagues (2006) suggest that CP can help offenders successfully complete probation through motivational change. A motivational approach is about two way-communications between the CP and offender in order to reach a common goal. The

motivational approach may not work with all offenders, but it is a valuable tool which should be employed. CP can improve their work performance through the use of motivational strategies.

One motivational strategy correctional practitioners should consider is the ARCS Model (Keller, 2000). The ARCS Model is a method for improving the motivational appeal of instructional materials, involving four motivational concepts: (a) attention, which is the use of strategies to gain initial interest; (b) relevance, which means relating the material to the learner's needs and wants; (c) confidence, which is providing a sense of self worth and ability for success in challenging tasks; and (d) satisfaction, which consists of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The ARCS model has been used in various educational and training contexts, as well in various demographics and countries. Motivation is not only the learner's but also the instructor's or designer's responsibility. The instructor's role is to create and sustain interest in academic subjects, which stimulates the student's motivation (Keller, 2000). This role places the motivational responsibility on the CP and why the ARCS model serves as a well-suited training model to use with CP. Creating an atmosphere of interest is especially pertinent with the offender population, because many of these students have experienced such great failure in life that they are not willing to risk failure in the instructional setting. CP should consider utilizing Keller's motivational concepts to develop effective strategies for diverse offender populations. CP will be able to identify the affective needs of the offender (learner). As a result, performance in educational programs should increase when practitioners learn to increase motivation.

#### *Attention*

First, a CP should gain the initial interest of the learner. Gaining a learner's attention involves the offender having a readiness to focus their attention on the subject matter (Keller, 2000). There are effective strategies such as inquiry, thought-provoking questions and use of variety which can gain the offender's attention. Incentives and rewards seem to motivate offenders to participate in scholarship. Offenders would be interested in participating in learning opportunities if they could see an immediate relevance to their personal life or future employment.

#### *Relevance*

The second important factor is to incorporate relevance in their field of practice, whether in the classroom or office setting. Offenders need to have choices in their learning and be a part of the solution so that they can become independent once they leave the system. It is important to write motivational objectives that match the needs of the learners. The ARCS model recommends that the designer conduct his or her own learner analysis to determine the most effective strategies for gaining and sustaining interest, providing relevance, creating confidence and increasing fulfillment (Keller, 2000). Relating learning to the offender's life is a strong motivational approach. Offenders who have a sense of responsibility for themselves and others are motivated to learn. For instance, incarcerated women were more likely to enroll in GED program and vocational training for the benefit of their children, because they did not want to return back to prison and miss out on the child's life (Rose, 2004). This expresses the strong need for relevance to be used as an integral part of the strategy to encourage education.

#### *Confidence*

The third category of the ARCS model is creating confidence, which provides a sense of self-worth and involves the following strategies of providing (a) learning requirements in the form of clear objectives, (b) success opportunities early and often enough to establish the learner's belief in his or her ability to achieve, and (c) personal control over the learning with choices of content, objectives, and activities (Keller, 2000). For many offenders, the experience

of being incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system has a negative effect on their confidence. Once CP identifies offenders' needs, CP can set small goals with offenders and help them achieve small milestones. As a result, CP can start building or rebuilding offenders' confidence. Well-designed programs that address offenders' needs may change offenders' attitudes and behavior.

### *Satisfaction*

The final condition, closely related to confidence, is satisfaction. Offenders must have some enjoyment from participating in the education program in order to continue throughout the duration of the course or class. The use of fear and threats to take one's freedom may be effective with some offenders but it not the best practice; personal fulfillment is more useful. The learning experience must fulfill a want or a need of the learner. Fulfilling the learner's need relates to the relevance factor, also part of the ARCS Model. The concept of satisfaction includes (a) increasing the natural consequences for use of the content, simulations, projects, and real-life activity; (b) providing positive consequences—both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards; and (c) assuring equity of rewards so that they match achievements (Shellnut, 1996). Offenders need to be satisfied with their accomplishments in order to see real value in the process.

### **Ways to Cope with Challenges**

Motivation is an essential aspect of rehabilitation in order to change offenders' behavior. CP often fails to implement motivational strategies to help offenders changes their behaviors. Probation officers and instructors do not view themselves as counselors; thus, they may take on a confrontational approach which prevents offenders from developing a desire to change their behavior. A confrontational approach can make probationers resist to compliance. As a result, probationers are uncomfortable to talk about desired changes (Clark et al., 2006). Offenders may be more receptive to change their behavior if CP enhance the readiness to change through interactions with probationers. Probation officers and instructors can begin by using motivational strategies to help probationers establish goals.

Some offenders have no desire to learn or change their behavior. CP have to develop learning strategies that focus on teaching adult offenders, and offenders have to be engaged in the learning process. It is imperative for CP to remove anxiety, fear, and threat from the learning environment. CP can establish two-way communication in order to demonstrate respect and acceptance of offenders with diverse background. Offenders may need more guidance in making choices; therefore, CP need to be proficient and effective in the services they provide to the offenders. All of these methods for coping with offenders in education programs can be achieved through training. Much of the focus of CP training should be on the affective aspects of the offender and how to increase learner's motivation. Education can be a successful tool to promote changes when offenders want to better their lives; however, some offenders have no plans, goals, or desires to be productive in society. As a result, the CP face the test of how to encourage education when the offenders are not inspired. An offender resistant to learning may also have the option to opt out of the educational program. Therefore, CP need to have a better approach to stimulate offenders' motivation.

### **Benefits of Education**

Inmates who earn a GED while incarcerated returned to custody within three years at a significantly lower rate than offenders who did not earn a GED while incarcerated (Nuttall, 2003). Effective education programs provide better job opportunities for offenders and lead to less violence by inmates (Veca, 2004). Participation in correctional education increases offenders' self-esteem. As a result, the offenders are motivated to learn other vocational skills.

Job training programs aim to provide basic skills to unemployed or low-wage workers so that they can be productive members of the workforce (Lafer, 2002). Vocational training programs enhance offenders' chances to have a better life and not to return to criminal activities. Education has demonstrated its ability to improve the lives of offenders, but without the proper promotion, encouragement, and motivation from CP, many offenders will not participate in educational opportunities. The benefits of education support the need for motivational training for CP.

### **Recommendations**

CP goals are to change offenders' behavior while incarcerated or upon release. One method for enacting change is through education. For the offender population, there are several barriers to education. One of the barriers should not be undertrained CP. If CP are better prepared for their role of motivator, they may initiate higher instances of participation in education programs, as well as compliance. The first recommendation is for more CP training. This training is not related to the rote administrative functions of their positions, but how to effectively interact with and motivate the offenders they work with each day. Facilities and government organizations must begin to provide training for instructing inmates, as well as successful strategies for retention in the alternative adult education settings in the community. The second valuable recommendation is for further research into effective motivational methods. While the ARCS model is suggested and has been used with all populations, perhaps a more effective motivational tool for offender populations exists or is yet to be created. It is important that scholars investigate this area of adult education in order to fully understand the implications of motivational strategy training on CP.

### **Conclusion**

Effective education can promote change when CP address the needs of offenders. However, the offender must want to change, because rehabilitation is a contract between the offenders and the CP. Mandatory education attendance takes away from the adults' desire to be self-directed in their learning and, therefore, removes some of the prime motivational elements of relevance and satisfaction. Once an inmate chooses to participate in an educational program, motivation and retention should be the focus. The burden of motivating inmate students is often placed on the instructor. There is a need to incorporate both motivational and different teaching strategies to accommodate the diverse population present in the corrections classroom. The most powerful and valuable educational experiences are the result of intrinsic motivation. In order to elicit intrinsic motivation, correctional practitioners need both to make instructive goals more individual and to cater to the learning requests of the inmates. CP must be trained better in instructing inmates, the culture of corrections education, and effective strategies for retention in the captive corrections setting as well as the alternative adult education settings in the community. In order to make the necessary improvements to the field of offender education, more diligent and focused research on the effectiveness of motivational training for practitioners is necessary. Until that time, CP should focus on increasing the amount of individualized instruction and creating enthusiastic learning communities in order to motivate and retain offenders in education programs.

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