

Correctional educators and their programs

Correctional educators may be found working in settings that include prisons, jails, juvenile justice facilities, or various community based settings. The programs they teach include instruction in academic, vocational, library science, life skills, and post-secondary areas of concern. Correctional educators include professionals contributing as researchers, teachers, vocational instructors, community volunteers, counsellors, administrators, librarians, and more. Their employers may be from the federal, state, or local level and can be either private for profit or private non-profit agencies. Program accreditation may come from a local school district, community college, university or a private educational agency. Some correctional systems are so large that they are not just affiliated or contracted but have become legislated as distinct school districts.

Your students may be male or female adult or juvenile offenders. Programs may run during the week or on weekends, during the day, or in the evening. As a teacher you might work alone, with other teachers, with the assistance of an inmate tutor, or a community tutor. Your students might be working in a classroom, taking cell study correspondence, or following distance education instruction courses.

The curriculum content can range from basic literacy through Adult Basic Education (ABE) to high school, and may include business education, computer training, and even post secondary courses. Some student needs are recognised and mandated by legislation eg. Title 1 and People with Disabilities (hearing, sight, or other physical disabilities). While such instruction is legislated, other specialised instruction is often provided solely in recognition of the individual needs of the student. To this end instruction may be provided for learning disabilities, in the area of language (English as a Second Language), to improve cultural awareness, or to assist those students with physiological conditions (such as FAS/FAE).

While academic programs will deal with academic instruction, guidance, and assessment, vocational programs can cover instruction in trades, trades apprenticeship, and skills training. These programs can include a wide range of practical and theoretical experiences in programs as diverse as woodworking, ceramics, arts & crafts, barbering, auto mechanics, small engine repair, auto body, and building maintenance.

Nontraditional programs often can include life skills and pre-release programs. Within this category, programs such as Life Skills, media, a displaced homemakers program, paralegal training, victim awareness education, a multiculturalism class, and Read to your Children may be presented. Current life skills instruction is based largely on cognitive principles and may include modules on parenting, living without violence, anger management, and others. Pre-release programs seek to reduce recidivism by reconnecting inmates with their family and employment opportunities.

While current research has shown the value of education in reducing recidivism rates, some institutions now see themselves as part of a greater therapeutic community which

strives to rehabilitate and reintegrate the offender back into the larger community. To this end, education in the form of both traditional and nontraditional programs are opportunities they offer to inmates.

In short, the scope of correctional education programs is as great as the diverse needs of the population it serves.