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## **Abstract**

This article introduces literacy from a few “big picture” perspectives, and then reviews five paradigms that have shaped the teaching and learning of literacy in residential confinement institutions for juveniles and adults. The paradigms are specific to correctional education, but they will be familiar to all alternative teachers and advocates of literacy instruction.

## **Keywords**

literacy, reading, correctional education, special education

## **Author Statement**

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## Five Approaches to Literacy in Correctional Education

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### Abstract

This article introduces literacy from a few “big picture” perspectives, and then reviews five paradigms that have shaped the teaching and learning of literacy in residential confinement institutions for juveniles and adults. The paradigms are specific to correctional education, but they will be familiar to all alternative teachers and advocates of literacy instruction.

### Introduction

The idea of education to improve the human condition is unique to the United States. The term “literacy” was coined in 1883 by the New England Journal of Education (Illich and Sanders, 1988, p. 87). The penitentiary, also invented in the United States, originally implemented by Quakers who wanted to end the brutal customs of European criminal justice (Teeters, 1955). In sum, North American correctional educators apply a unique rationale for helping incarcerated students become literate. Yet literacy obviously predates North American emphases; it is intimately related to the human condition, and to progress. A few of its major benefits are suggested in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Literacy Acquisition

DIRECT SOCIAL ELEMENTS	RELATED CULTURAL BENEFITS
Oral communication; language.	Identity as human beings.
Written text (first pictograms, then syllabic systems).	Civilization; origin of middle class worldview; sacred texts.

Alphabetic text.	Legal and monotheistic worldviews
Mass produced text (printing with movable type).	Aspiration for secular and religious democracy; emphases on vernacular languages, mass education, libraries; individualism.
Electronic text (FAXs, modems, Internet, and e-mail).	End of traditional Cold War sentiment, at least toward former USSR and Eastern Block; emergent feminist and ecological perspectives.

Culturally, there is always a lag between the acquisition of literacy by interested individuals and by their entire cultural group. Illich and Sanders (1988) reported that it takes 125-150 years—five to six generations—for a culture to become literate.

Mere acquisition of literacy cannot reverse hundreds of years of systematic constraint, such as has been experienced by Native Americans or African Americans, who are over represented in confined populations. Two examples will illustrate this point. First, consider the education experienced by Native Americans: children forcibly removed from their homes; denied access to their language, culture, and religion; taught through rote memory, with military precision. Or consider the slave codes, which forbade slaves from acquiring literacy under penalty of death because access to “the news” might politicize them.

Literacy in prisons has certain challenges and requires diverse approaches due to characteristics of these incarcerated populations, as such underscoring the need for multiple literacies. This aspect of literacy acquisition, and its application in prisons, may be difficult for many teachers since education is often discussed as if it was always a “good” experience. Nevertheless, schooling can be structured to hurt and subjugate people as well as to help them, as portrayed in Figure 2. Having established the overall context for potential benefits and concerns regarding literacy acquisition strategies in prison settings, we can now discuss specific paradigms that shaped correctional education.

Figure 2: Service Delivery Patterns that Impact Literacy

<b>PURPOSE</b>	<u>Obstructionist</u> To ensure that students	<u>Conventional</u>	<u>Transformative</u>
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	rarely succeed in life, so they can be easily dominated or exploited.	To provide a level playing field, so students with initiative can succeed in life.	To provide the best education possible, there- by enhancing student life opportunities.
<b>EXEMPLARY SYSTEMS</b>	Traditional Bureau of Indian Affairs programs, some prison education.	Most local school and university programs.	Some local schools; private or specialized schools.
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL ORIENTATION</b>	“The most we can give these students is basic education—they can’t handle any more than that.”	“It’s up to the student to take advantage of program opportunities.”	Our expectation is that all participants will give their best effort.”
<b>DEFINING ATTRIBUTES</b>	Abiding resource inadequacy and schooling based on conventional prejudice; classes may be large or small.	Intermittent resource adequacy, and schooling based on fads and politics; large classes.	Fixed resource adequacy, and schooling based on the best research; small classes when possible.
<b>TEACHER OUTLOOK</b>	Although some teachers may be devoted to student learning, most have some other agenda—usually expanding their own career opportunities.	Teachers meet minimal job expectations; they may make some promises to students or the program, but do not necessarily deliver on them.	Teachers are enthusiastic about teaching and learning, often acquiring skills that are not required.

Five Paradigms that Have Driven Literacy in Correctional Education

Organized correctional education was first provided in the U.S. in 1787 at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail. Since then it has moved through five distinct paradigms. For this article we will call these five (1) the Monitorial Method, (2) Discipline, (3) Management, (4) Development, and (5) Reciprocity.

In this model Level 1 is the most immature (least consistent with our current aspirations), and Level 5 is the most mature/ developed/consistent. Each level has its own purpose, pattern of teacher professional identification, and teaching strategies.

The Level 1 Monitorial emphasis was pursued in lockstep, without instructional options. Teachers identified as ministers or evangelists; their purpose was to help inmates read, so they could read the Bible and be saved for Christ. In the local schools this emphasis was associated with the Lancasterian system, which was used because of minimal public support for schooling. The system consisted of a teacher who trained several advanced learners, who in turn implemented rote memory exercises for their student peers. Noted for its mechanistic memorization procedures, it was inexpensive and therefore popular. (Monroe, 1912, p. 383).

In prisons the Sabbath school variation was pursued, often with church volunteers or seminary students who tutored many inmates. Student learning and program effectiveness were measured by the number of Bible verses memorized each year. Secular variations on Level 1 were evident in prisons and juvenile facilities until the mid 1960s. But since the monitorial method is no longer operational, some aspects of its instructional strategies may help modern readers grasp its intent.

A widespread method of Sabbath school literacy instruction was described by the Sing Sing Prison chaplain in 1828:

Show the convict the first letter in the Bible, that is, I. Let him find the same, wherever it occurs in the first verse. Having done this, show him the second letter in

the Bible, that is, n. Let him find every n in the first verse. Having done this and being told what I-n spells, he has already learned to read the first word in the Bible. Let him then find the first word in the Bible, wherever it occurs in the first chapter. Having done this he will probably never forget it. This is his lesson. Let his second lesson be the second word in the Bible, the letters of which and their combination should be taught as before. Let him proceed in this manner through successive lessons, til he has learned to read the first verse in Genesis—'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' Having done this, he has got his reward. One of the most sublime ideas ever presented to the mind of man, he has obtained by

diligent attention for a few hours in learning to read... (BPDS, 1972/1855, vol. #1, pp. 211-212).

This literacy teaching method was known as "Jacotot's plan"

(Quick, 1916, pp. 116-117, 426).

In Level 2 (Discipline), which began in the last quarter of the 19th century and is still operational, some accoutrements of Level 1 remain in place. However, there are more school programs, more secular teachers and texts, and a pervasive emphasis on classroom decorum. Although he was writing about a different setting, Tyack's description of the most popular Level 2 teaching strategy is applicable to education in confinement institutions.

The proper way to read in the public school in the year 1899 was to say, 'Page 35, Chapter 4,' and holding the book in the right hand, with the toes pointing at an

angle of forty-five degrees, the head held straight and high, the eyes looking directly ahead, the pupil would lift up his voice and struggle in loud, unnatural tones

(1974, pp. 255-256)

This was the origin of the phrase "to toe the line"—there was actually a line painted on the floor where the students were required to stand when reciting. The priority here is not student learning but classroom discipline and instructor convenience. The maintenance of teacher authority and decorum, the appearance of learning, is the primary strategy and outcome. This priority corresponded precisely with the institutional purpose of control. Discipline-oriented (Level 2) teachers identify professionally as institutional employees who happen to be assigned to the education program; they would be just as happy overseeing the kitchen or being employed as guards. The focus on One God that characterized Level 1 simply resurfaced as a related focus on a monolithic and eternal institutional milieu.

And so we turn to Level 3 (Management), which emerged during the 1930s. Here much remains in place from Levels 1 and 2 instruction, but the preferred strategy for maintaining teacher authority is through classroom management. Still not organized to prioritize student learning, Level 3 instruction is dominated by what we today call "drill and kill" exercises. Like Level 2 and all the subsequent levels, this emphasis remains popular today. In classroom management institutional teachers identify professionally as instructors of the various disciplines of education: they see themselves as teachers of history, English, math, or as welders, carpenters, etc. They identify not as correctional educators, but as sojourners in a strange setting.

The generally accepted definition of learning as "changed behavior" is anchored in Level 3, whose advocates maintain that goal is precisely the same in education and penology. Level 3 practitioners are behaviorists who treat the mind like a "black box," focusing attention on observable (pertinent, measurable) student achievements to develop coping skills. The teacher navigates through many individual, incrementalized lesson plans, "managing" them all simultaneously. Everyone rejoices if students learn, but the real purpose of the system is classroom management.

The emphasis at Level 4 (Development), which really gained a foothold during the late 1960s and early 1970s, shifts from a behavioral to a cognitive psychological base. Strategies aligned with the findings of Piaget, Loevinger, Vygotsky, Feuerstein, and Kohlberg permeate the Level 4 instructional landscape. Instructors frequently see themselves as correctional educators. They are participants in

an eclectic school of thought that borrows heavily from related fields of education (adult and special education, etc.) but has its own unique core (history, literature, preferred strategies), that differs from those other fields.

Developmental teachers study learner cognitive functions so they can tailor lessons to the way the mind works. Activities are at the level of student functioning, or at a slightly more advanced level to promote development. Cognitive-moral and cognitive-democratic strategies and outcomes enter the correctional educator's purview, often mixed with content in the humanities and social sciences. Some Level 4 advocates announce that these studies help learners become engaged democratically in community—a stark contrast from their earlier careers as criminals. However, true attainment of classroom democratic or participatory management is the feature of Level 5, not Level 4.

Level 4 correctional teachers are deeply concerned with student maturation; they apply holistic strategies, discuss the needs of the “whole student,” and often pursue literacy instruction through whole language strategies. They are certainly concerned about much more than the mere Level 3 focus on behavior. Level 4 teachers pursue the entire repertoire of level 2-4 options (Level 1 is mostly defunct), but their preference is to foster demonstrable student maturation—personal growth and development.

At Level 5 (Reciprocity) all this is extended to include an “eye to eye,” reciprocal approach, reminiscent of the best adult education. Level 5 correctional teachers are alert to the possibility that inmate students—despite their current, degraded condition in confinement—bring a host of relevant personal experiences to the classroom that can be applied to help them acquire literacy. Further, they expect students to participate to some extent in decisions regarding their own education—and, for their part, students tend to live up to these high expectations.

The “teacher as student and student as teacher” sentiment is operational here. Level 5 teachers discuss reciprocity with students, the ability to “put yourself in the other person's shoes,” as an expression of the social maturation goal. Level 5 teachers are “universal citizens” in the broadest sense. Their standard operating procedures are complex and multi-leveled. Although they identify with the field of correctional education (as in Level 4), they are also quite comfortable transcending any specific pattern of identification. Level 5 students who see that their earlier victims are real people (who bleed, suffer, and have dreams just like them) often decide to stop victimizing others.

In summary, the trajectory of classroom outcomes rolls up into a “big bag of tricks,” in which Level 5 teachers have access to more alternative strategies and classroom themes than teachers at any other level. Thus, the teacher can match teaching/learning strategies with student attributes to promote learning success.

It is inappropriate to conceptualize these levels from a “one size fits all” perspective. The best teachers mix and match strategies, according to student ability and willingness to learn. For example, a successful, veteran Level 5 teacher can maximally structure student learning activities (as in Level 1, though secularized), emphasize teacher authority to make classroom decisions (as in Level 2), manage the student through incremental activities to enhance individual achievement (as in Level 3),

focus on the community repercussions of whole student development (as in Level 4), or treat the student as a full-fledged partner in the adventure of teaching and learning (as in Level 5). Figure 3 introduces when the five levels emerged historically, and sketches some of the organizational dimensions associated with each.

Figure 3: The Five Levels of Literacy Strategies in History

Level	Benchmarks that Indicate Implementation Period
1	1787 (first Sabbath school—Philadelphia); some elements remained operational in secular form until the mid 1960s.
2	1876 (Superintendent Zebulon Brockway’s innovative program at NY State’s Elmira Reformatory for men) to the present.
3	1930 (first systemwide correctional education bureaus in Federal Bureau of Prisons and NY State) to the present.
4	False start—1909 to 1923 (NJ’s first correctional education school district, more capable of statewide instructional improvement than Level 3 bureaus) to the present.
5	a 1895 (William George’s Jr. Republic democratic management prototype started) to 1929 Sing Sing’s democratic management organization—the Mutual Welfare League—outlawed).b 1974 (Doug Ayre’s—and later Stephen Duguid’s—Canadian Penitentiary Service program fully operational) to 1993 (Canadian Federal Government stopped program funding). c 1990s (implementation of Council of Europe’s Recommendations on prison normalization—equal educational access in “inside” and “outside” communities to the present.

### Final Observations

Different purposes and assumptions shaped successive literacy paradigms in correctional education. These range from an emphasis on control of students as objects to the empowerment of students as subjects—community members with all the rights and obligations of citizens; from a narrowly religious outlook to one that is broadly universal. The functional “center of gravity” of correctional education is now between Levels 2 and 3, and history shows Level 5 has always been intermittent or temporary. If informed educators could stabilize Level 5, that would be a great step forward. In short, there is still a lot of work for literacy advocates in the field of alternative and correctional education.

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