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## Principles of the Hidden Heritage of Correctional Education and Prison Reform

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# Principles of the Hidden Heritage of Correctional Education and Prison Reform

## Abstract

### Abstract

In all fields of education, theory is in advance of practice (MacCormick, 1931, p. xii).

This essay provides a summary of the historical research themes of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education (CSCE) in the field of prison reform and its leading edge, correctional education. Those themes have been applied at CSCE's system of parolee schools, the California State University, San Bernardino Reentry Initiative (CSRI). The essay addresses the professional contributions of four contributors or heroes of the correctional education: Alexander Maconochie at a penal colony in the South Pacific, William George among juveniles in New York State (NYS), Thomas Mott Osborne at two NYS prisons and one in the U.S. Navy, Stephen Duguid in British Columbia. The current author subjectively selected these four contributors. Then he arbitrarily selected six findings from the work of each. The four are informally known at the CSCE as part of the "pantheon" of correctional education contributors to the theory and practice of the field. The essay also introduces CSRI organizational experiences, in the same format as the four heroes or contributors. Each contribution has influenced the theory and practice of correctional education. The author hopes this review will help readers see the value of this literature.

## Keywords

correctional education, prison education

## Author Statement

Dr Thom Gehring is an emeritus professor at California State University San Bernardino where he taught educational foundations and correctional education.

## Principles of the Hidden Heritage of Correctional Education and Prison Reform

The hidden heritage of prison reform, and its subset correctional education, can help cure the toxic “us and them” dualisms that are compounded by the coercive/ traditional/authoritarian corrections paradigm. This powerful evidence of the anomalies could change the whole dynamic of corrections. It has been overcome, however, at least to this point, by the apparently more powerful pull of the paradigm.

Proven corrections strategies are abundantly evident to anyone who approaches the evidence with an open mind, but the “those people” (dualist) mindset of the paradigm inhibits open minds. Our ability to open our minds and see what is actually going on, has been prevented by our own cultural disposition. The author hopes the essay will help readers see the value of the important—though anomalous—literature.

### Context

What is now the CSCE’s historical line of research activity was actually begun in 1974; the CSCE itself began in 1991, and was officially upgraded in 1993 to a center at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). Correctional education has a pantheon of contributors, and a canon of authoritative literature; the principles presented therein are wrapped up in what is called the CSCE school of thought.

It took eleven years to obtain the basic elements of the CSCE canon. Packaged for interested readers, these definitive books are collectively called the CSCE’s “Core Library.” Those packages are currently held by 21 agencies and individuals throughout the U.S.

There is nothing static about the prison reform/correctional education anomaly

tradition within the larger field of criminal justice. The best books are long out of print and, without help, they might as well be inaccessible to anyone involved in direct correctional education service delivery. Further, our understanding of the pantheon and canon continues to unfold, as old books that are new to us are acquired, read, and treated. All this is why the history of prison reform and correctional education is called the “hidden heritage” at the CSCE and by its allies. It was simply not available unless someone directed sustained energy, over a protracted time, to searches that are only rarely rewarding. But that situation has gradually improved, a result of the work done at the CSCE.

Efforts to establish CSCEs were pursued in Minnesota, Iowa, and New York before CSUSB was successful with the project; later Illinois tried, but that effort was short-lived. Only CSUSB’s center has worked out. The CSCE hub at CSUSB is in the College of Education where the two first directors reside (one is now professor emeritus). During academic year 2016-2017, new CSCE fellows were recruited from CSUSB’s colleges of Arts and Letters (the Art Department), Social and Behavioral Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Criminal Justice); and a new (third) director from Arts and Letters.

There is an East Coast CSCE Branch at Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Jails Education Branch at Montana State University, Billings. CSCE has long and active ties with the Correctional Education Association (North America) and the European Prison Education Association. CSCE is assigned a permanent (rotating) editorship, and four seats on the executive board of the

international *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*.

However, these things do not change the fact that CSCE represents the anomalies, rather than the paradigm, of correctional education. In the institutions, the coercive/traditional/authoritarian paradigm prevails; outside the institutions that same paradigm unofficially regulates which literature—and heritage—can be accessed easily.

The paradigm is totally inconsistent with CSCE's historical research findings. To give an idea about the degree to which the anomalies are inaccessible because of that inconsistency, the Tannenbaum book on Sing Sing warden Thomas Mott Osborne is an indicator. Published in 1933, Tannenbaum's is the best political biography of Osborne. The importance of Osborne's work was recognized by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, so he was asked to write the foreword. The Library of Congress acquired the volume in 1933 but no one had borrowed it until 2005.

So, there is a book on a prison warden of great import; it had an introduction by a U.S. president, yet no one borrowed it for 72 years. The 2005 borrower was a teacher of plumbing in several New York jails who was in contact with the CSCE. He owns a winery. Periodically this jails educator has free wine tasting events for wardens, and gives them each a free photostatic copy of a Core Library book. One time he gave them the Tannenbaum (1933) book. They often read them and sometimes get back to him expressing surprise and happiness that such books exist. A warden who got the Tannenbaum book was elated about his gift and reported back that he was very pleased.

Part of the problem is that even presidential scholars totally ignored the Tannenbaum book. This is an indicator about the strength of the paradigm, and

how neglected the anomalies have been—even though the paradigm's history is a record of constant failure for 244 years, while 23 of the 25 anomalies of which the CSCE directors are aware were all glorious successes by any metric, which prompt encouragement about the human potential. Two of the 25 were wardens, and the program structures they initiated differed in key ways from the themes of the anomalous tradition, its theory and practice. One was put under house arrest by the governor (Murton, 1976), and the other was subjected to a long legislative inquiry that resulted in his resignation (Serrill, 1982). The next narrative introduces the first of the four contributors to the theory and practice of prison reform and correctional education that will be addressed in this essay.

### **Alexander Maconochie**

This section is based on Barry (1958). Maconochie was warden at the British penal colony of Norfolk Island, in the South Pacific, which would today be called a maximum security institution. Soon after he arrived there in 1840 he released all the convicts from the prison for one day. They all returned that evening. Of course they were still on the island that day, just not in the prison, unless they chose to be there. This was so successful that he got fired quickly (even his letter of dismissal was full of heartfelt praise for his accomplishments there), but the British could not find a person to replace him, so he was able to implement his program with the convicts for four years until the next warden arrived. After his death Maconochie's system was successfully implemented, in succession, in Ireland, the United States, and England (though the prisoners in those countries were not released); its underlying themes are now part of corrections in the Nordic

nations. Six of his principles, and the context of each, appear below.

1. Maconochie respected the convicts, treating them courteously and with dignity. It was clear to the men that his respect was based on his recognition that they were humans, not subhumans. The convicts' release from prison, and their return without incident, demonstrated that shared responsibility can be attained, but only after respect, care, and trust were already in place. He chose to implement punishments when they were absolutely necessary for the preservation of safety, and he allowed convicts to be present when he made that type of decision; that had never happened before in corrections. Mutual respect led to many convicts deciding to leave the prison complex so they could take responsibility for building their own lodging, tending and sharing gardens and livestock, and so forth (Barry, 1958, pp. vii-xvi).
2. Maconochie learned that quick transformation of everyone is not usually an attainable goal, but a good program can interrupt nonsocial or asocial behavior so convicts can have real opportunities to learn and develop at their own rates (Barry, 1958, p. 102).
3. Maconochie established an organizational culture that was so strong it was not threatened when any particular convict, or group of convicts, failed. Indeed, the possibility of failure became an educational strategy, because it resulted in loss of marks toward parole. This was made possible through many strategies. He invented parole (a reentry program). He was the first warden to allow convicts who had died in custody to have tombstones with their names on them in the prison cemetery. He was the

first warden to allow convicts to talk to him, instead of only being allowed to talk to an officer, with the warden then getting the message through the principal keeper, and then back to the convict. During Maconochie's wardenship, the convicts voluntarily eliminated the ring, which was a place where officers were not allowed to go, on pain of death (the Norfolk Island ring is the source of the term ringleader). All four of these changes helped to make the organizational culture at the penal colony actually pleasant (Barry, 1958, pp. 111-120).

4. He demonstrated repeatedly that institutional security does not have to traumatize convicts, and that officers do not have to be unkind. The Norfolk Island (convict) security force provided evidence of this. With this innovation the officers' time could be directed to helpful tasks, while safety was maintained (Barry, 1958, pp. 121-124).
5. His whole program was based on what he termed the ability to resist temptation, so inmates citizens after release (Barry, 1958, pp. 63, 72, 117, 218-220).
6. Maconochie showed, beyond any reasonable doubt, that a prison can move quickly from maximum security through punishment, to a maximum emphasis on freedom and opportunity, all within a confinement setting (Barry, 1958, pp. 69-79).

### **William George**

George was a wealthy manufacturer who studied street gangs in Manhattan, boxed frequently with the gang leaders, and turned them away from what they had been doing so they could pursue activities that supported, rather than took advantage, of their communities. In 1895 he established a private institution to

which judges sent juvenile criminals. George was a patriot, and he had a dream one night that the U.S. Constitution would be an excellent management plan for the institution. He was thereafter able to take a “back seat” in the Junior Republic, as he called his institution, allowing the children to run the program. This section is based on George (1911).

1. Nothing should be for free, without labor. Still, George’s approach to shared responsibility allowed for individual differences, as in cases in which Republic citizens who could not work because of health reasons were assigned stipends sufficient to take care of their needs. The inmates built the residences (including hotels and restaurants), factories, a court house, capitol building, and president’s office, roads, and even a jail. The Republic had all three of the branches of government established in the U.S. Constitution. It established a token economy to facilitate all this. One of their factories made “ginger and chocolate biscuits,” which helped fund the institution. (George, 1911, pp. 19-36, 208-247).

2. All community members should be treated equally, as demonstrated when the girls obtained the right to vote, as they did after going on strike. This innovation was passed by the elected inmate legislature (all boys) and signed by the elected inmate president, nineteen years before women’s suffrage passed the U.S. Congress. Many persons—including U.S. presidents, judges, elected officials, and celebrities who visited, said the Junior Republic was more democratic than its “senior” cousin, the United States (George, 1911, pp. 138-154).

3. Institutions that are managed according to the shared responsibility approach, like the Junior Republic, can be successful—consistent with

society’s highest aims—and earn excellent reputations, good press, and community support (George, 1911, pp. 178-207).

4. American democracy, as expressed in the U.S. Constitution and discussed by Dewey (2012, 1916) can help people think critically, and express their community aspirations by planning their individual and group activities. Democracy can be an excellent tool for teaching and learning, in part because it fosters cognitive-moral development (George, 1911, pp. vii-xii).

5. Influence results not from being an authoritarian, but from being a good role model.

Administrators and line staff can always exert their authority, but the result of influence is more profound, more lasting, and more consistent with the goal of transformation, as in the case of inmates, parolees, and probationers (George, 1911, pp. 248-295).

6. If inmates are left to make community decisions themselves, the result will be that they will make more appropriate decisions. In part, this is because inmates want to protect the institution from getting a bad reputation, from getting bad press. When they share in the responsibility, they share in the success, too (George, 1911, pp. 296-314).

### **Thomas Mott Osborne**

Osborne was also a wealthy New York manufacturer, an aristocrat. His family had a long history in abolition, feminism, and other social movements. He was the person who convinced Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) to go into politics. Osborne worked with George (above) for about 15 years. Then, like George, he had a dream, and decided

that the Junior Republic's themes might apply in adult prisons. Beginning in 1913, Osborne was a prison reformer at two maximum and one medium security prison, the first one as a volunteer protected by the governor; he served as warden at the other two. Like Maconochie, he was dogged by the prison system's managers, and in his case, charges were filed against him. The prisoners raised funds from outside for his legal defense, and he was acquitted. This section is based on Tannenbaum (1933), unless noted otherwise.

1. We should try to avoid judging others, especially persons who have already been judged by the courts. Nothing is gained by thinking of inmates or parolees as enemies, as if we were in a permanent war against them. (Tannenbaum, 1933, pp. 3-29).
2. We can trust a group of prisoners to do the right thing, provided the question or challenge is framed correctly, even when no reason might exist to trust any one of them as an individual (MacCormick, 1931, pp. 208-215).
3. There is a need to struggle for institutional improvements such as, but not limited to, the implementation of democracy. However, in prisons, activities that are pursued in a bottom up way have usually led directly and quickly to death and destruction. The "top down/bottom up" approach is effective. Osborne abided with the results of prisoner elections, even when fools were elected to leadership positions. However, when his assessment was that elected leaders were dangerous to the safety of the institution, he abolished it and required a new election. He also demonstrated that this management plan can convert any institution into a showcase, whether or not it is

officially sanctioned as one (Tannenbaum, 1933, pp. 30-44).

4. One prisoner remarked to warden Osborne that his leadership had resulted in making the prison's big yard into a "large class in social ethics" (Osborne, 1975, 1916, p. 229). Stated alternatively, it is possible to transform prisons into schools.
5. The extreme complexity of the human condition results in a sense of adventure or mystery about how shared responsibility (democracy) can work in a prison. We simply do not know why shared responsibility can work. As Osborne explained, any theory about it will be proven incorrect once it bumps into a fact. Nevertheless, shared responsibility has worked repeatedly, in all sorts of confinement institutions (Tannenbaum, 1933, pp. 149-178).
6. The benefits of shared responsibility can be realized by all the prisoners at a site.

### **Stephen Duguid**

Duguid worked as a prison college administrator in British Columbia from the early 1970s until 1993. A prolific author and excellent speaker, he earned the respect of prison reformers/prison educators around the world, except in the U.S. His work on whether prisons can work attracted the attention of leaders in many nations who were open to exploring the possibilities of reform and education in prisons. That is one reason that some consider him one of the founding fathers of the European Prison Education Association (EPEA). Another is that he personally brought together the meeting at which EPEA emerged. As with George and Osborne above, much of his work relates specifically to democracy inside confinement institutions.

1. Shared responsibility can be

implemented throughout the whole institution, as with Maconochie, George, and Osborne, or within a part of the institution (Duguid, 1988, p. 174).

2. For confined populations, the cognitive-moral-democratic approach can have lasting results both inside and after release (Duguid, 1988, pp. 178-180). Corrections line staff and administrators also benefit from shared responsibility principles, especially if they apply those principles thoughtfully.

3. Central office administrators may phase out effective shared responsibility programs, when the corrections administration turns over or at other times, for political reasons.

When this happens, the administrators usually blame the program discontinuity on resource inadequacy (Gehring, 2012, pp. 12, 172, 435, 461).

4. Studies in the humanities, social sciences, and arts help inmates understand society, and the potential role they can have within it, as ethical persons (Duguid, 1988, p. 180). (Contrary to the widely accepted formula for success in the local schools [knowledge, skills, and attitudes], the reverse applies in prisons [attitudes, skills, and knowledge]).

5. Duguid's program showed that cognitive-moral-democratic development within an institution can sometimes focus on unimportant details that seem a waste of time to outsiders, such as whether pizza or doughnuts should be provided at a prison commencement ceremony. That is just part of how democracy works, in any setting. It is just messy (Gehring, 1988).

6. Regardless of how it is greeted outside, post-secondary education can

help inmates, correctional employees, and outside communities (Gehring, 1997, pp. 46-55).

### **The California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) Reentry Initiative (CSRI)**

The CSRI is a system of parolee schools funded by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), through CSUSB's University Enterprises Corporation, and managed by the College of Education's Center for the Study of Correctional Education (CSCE). After six years of planning, the first CSRI was opened on February 4, 2011. Two more have been established, in Victorville and Moreno Valley; a fourth is planned to open soon for Indio.

CSRIs are day reporting centers (DRCs), which means that no residence halls are located at the sites; instead, residence for most clients is provided by community organizations and agencies. They are sober living homes. The growing DRC movement is part of a robust reentry movement, which can be summarized as an effort to make parole more consistent with Maconochie's original concept (see above). In the extensive system of CDCR classification of inmates, CSRI clients are all classified as either "serious and dangerous" or "sex offender."

Several dimensions of CSRI are unique when compared with other DRCs. There are no metal detectors. Often, security officers are as likely to be doing things in addition to monitoring clients: tutoring, cooking cookies or pies for clients and staff, or phoning clients to check up on who needs bus passes, and so forth.

These are schools; CSRI site directors function as school principals, and clients are called students. Most DRCs have a forty hour attendance requirement; CSRI



students are required to be there when they are attending meetings or classes. All the mandatory courses that Parole requires be completed before release are offered, such as Anger Management, Domestic Violence, and Substance Abuse. Other courses are organized in response to student requests: public speaking, leadership through service, cognitive-behavioral functioning, and so on.

The CSRI get good press. When computed according to the same definition, CSRI recidivism rate (recommitment) is only a small fraction of the CDCR (State prisons) rate. There are at least six central principles that have been added to the CSCE's research themes and are confirmed by everyday experience at the CSRI.

1. When they first hear about the hidden heritage, most people defend the corrections paradigm by saying, "That might have been possible back then, but it cannot be done now because current conditions prohibit it," by which they mean the current extent of drug addiction, gang involvement in crime, lack of caregivers in the household, and so on. But CSRI demonstrates that it is indeed possible today to develop organizational cultures capable of bringing out the best in people, even after they have been exposed (sometimes for decades) organizational cultures that brought out the worst. (For the record, trends such as addiction, gang involvement, lack of caregivers, and so on, have been constant since the modern prison was invented, and always perceived as getting worse.
2. The best security system is a good organizational culture, one that interrupts the "business as usual" corrections paradigm.
3. CSRI staff use a play on words from the old song—"it don't mean a

thing if it ain't transformational," a variation of the CSCE term "the transformational imperative." Toward that end, the Bantu term *phelendala* has been found to be helpful. It means, "We don't talk about that anymore." At CSRI it denotes an end to the merry-go-round of crime and incarceration. The *Phelendala* concept suggests that students can be released from some of the painful, personal emotions that accrue from being a victimizer, and from being a victim. This is a driving force once people have decided to overcome their pasts, to begin the process of transformation.

4. This same transformational imperative should be at the center of everything we do, students, staff, and administrators alike. Although employees usually need to focus on different tasks than students, we all need to learn and grow—in fact, part of the joy of CSRI is that we are all in this together.

5. *E pluribus Unum*, the motto of the United States, is also the CSRI motto. Inside the prison, the coercive/traditional/authoritarian paradigm promotes the dualisms of gang and race. That is how two correctional officers can manage 200 inmates (Tillman, 2017). Together, *Phelendala*, the transformational imperative, and a good organizational culture all promote peace.

6. For the recently released, each CSRI is, therefore, the safest place in town, an antidote to post release stress disorder (a variant of post-traumatic stress disorder). In prison, inmates are told what to do and they do it, but at the CSRI shared responsibility is encouraged, both individually and in response of the "personality" of each site.

As a result of what CSCE learned from the hidden heritage, CSRI has demonstrated—yet again—that prisoners can return to the outside community as law-abiding citizens. Further, this has been done without pampering anyone or emphasizing emotional issues, and without new monies or shifts in budgeted resources—merely through a change of mind.

### Summary and Conclusion

In all fields of education, theory is in advance of practice (MacCormick, 1931, p. xii). For more than 240 years the prison system in the U.S. has failed (prisons have gotten larger, perhaps even “created” criminals). Nevertheless, there have been some examples of success during that period. Without exception, the literature of those successes has been difficult for persons to access, unless they spent years searching the historical research. Most people are not able or inclined to adjust their schedules to devote that necessary time and energy to the research. In part, that lack of willingness is because of the popularity of the coercive/traditional/authoritarian paradigm. Why should a person try to learn something that is difficult, when (it

is assumed) we already know the problem, and (it is assumed) have already taken steps to contain it?

Kenyon Scudder, an important California warden, summarized perhaps the most salient aspect of a crime/corrections solution in the title of his book, *Prisoners are People* (1968/1952).

This essay offered cursory data about four contributors, who were selected subjectively by the author from a universe of 25 that have been identified to date. They were Alexander Maconochie, William George, Thomas Mott Osborne, and Stephen Duguid. Six of the principles that were learned from the work of each of those four contributors were arbitrarily selected from the treated data. In addition, experiential principles that have accrued from CSUSB’s CSRI practice were added to the mix, as predictors of future research. The overwhelming preponderance of this material suggests that Scudder’s assertion was correct: prisoners are people.

Identifying someone’s humanity, and then treating that person as a person, appears at first glance rather uncomplicated. It is a high profile, low cost or no cost strategy to help “correct” problems of crime and corrections.

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