Evidence-Based Police Education & Training in the U.S.

Gary Cordner

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3 Parts

1. Snapshot of U.S. system for delivering police education & training (E&T)

2. Observations on strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and trends

3. Discussion of the evidence-based perspective and its implications for police E&T

U.S. Training System

- 18,000 separate & distinct policing agencies
- About 1 million police employees
- Almost 700 police academies that provide basic police training
- About 40% of academies are single-agency, 60% are regional or state
- Average academy length = 21 weeks

U.S. Education System

- Over 800 colleges and universities offer 4-year (baccalaureate) criminal justice degrees

- Over 1,000 colleges offer 2-year degrees in criminal justice or law enforcement

- High school (secondary school) programs exist but are less common

Key E&T Features

- Education & training mostly separate, even though nearly 50% of police academies are located on college campuses (mainly at 2-year colleges)
- Higher education controlled by colleges & universities
- Training standards set by state governments (all 50)
  - Curriculum
  - Minimum length
  - Instructors

Traditional Process

- Students complete secondary education at age 18

- Police hire at age 21+

- So secondary school graduates go on to college, go into the military, or get a job for 3+ years

- After hiring, police send new recruits to the police academy for basic training, followed by field training

End Result

- No national standards in police E&T
- No national curriculum
- No national control
- Typical American mixed system
  - Federalism (national, state & local roles)
  - Public/private mix (some private mainly on the education side)

Therefore

- Some police academies are high-stress, some low-stress
- Some are residential, some are commuter
- Some put significant emphasis on community policing, some do not
- Some use traditional FTO field training, others the more progressive PTO model

But It Is Less Chaotic Than It Seems

- Nearly all police have some college, many have degrees
- State-level training standards have gradually converged over the last 40 years
- National associations of training directors and training instructors facilitate information sharing
- Lawsuits and national government carrots & sticks have led to more training
- Current crises have focused attention on curricula and the role of the academy in shaping police values & culture

Recent Survey
(89 agencies/10,600 respondents)

Education

- Overall, 56% of police had 4-year college/university degrees

- 59% of police supervisors had 4-year degrees

- 75% of police managers (lieutenant & above) had 4-year degrees

Training

- 89% were satisfied or very satisfied that they had the knowledge & skills needed to do their jobs

- 51% rated continuing training (received in the last 3 years) good or excellent

Trends & Issues

Education

- Criminal justice remains a very popular program of study
- But traditional universities are slow to change
- Big increase in on-line programs offered by traditional and virtual universities

Training

- Basic police training increasingly obtained pre-employment
- Increase in scenario-based and problem-based training methods
- Continuing debate over stress vs. non-stress
- Shift in emphasis from warrior to guardian ethos

Current Crises

- Use of force – more emphasis on de-escalation training

- Persons with mental illness – more focus on crisis intervention

- Discrimination – emphasis on implicit/ unconscious bias

President's Task Force (2015)

- 13 E&T recommendations
- Create "training innovation hubs"
- Encourage more academic partnerships
- Establish national leadership development institute
- Maintain technical sophistication but put more emphasis on community policing, de-escalation, etc.

So Is It Evidence-Based?

- Evidence-based refers to scientific evidence

- Doing what works, what's effective

- Not doing what doesn't work

- Increasingly, policing is expected to be evidence-based

Evidence-Based E&T

- At least two dimensions of evidence-based E&T
  - The <u>substance</u> of what is taught should be as scientifically valid as possible (based on crime science & police science)
  - The <u>methods</u> by which education & training are carried out should be as evidence-based as possible (based on learning science)

- This might apply to several components of police E&T:
  - Pre-career education
  - Basic police training
  - Specialized police training
  - Supervision & management training
  - Executive/leadership education & training

Evidence-Based E&T Report Card

	Substance Taught	Teaching Methods
Pre-career education	+	
Basic police training		+
Specialized police training		+
Supervision/management training		
Executive/leadership education & training	+	

Conjecture vs. Evidence

Some Positive Signs

- Research-based Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) training
- Research-based interrogations training
- NIJ responsible to the President's Task Force for evaluating the impact of training on use-of-force, de-escalation, crisis intervention & also developing a research agenda around police academy curricula

3 Propositions

- We have been negligent in not systematically gathering and using evidence to improve police E&T effectiveness

- Making police E&T more evidence-based is well within our reach

- Making E&T more evidence-based should be far easier than making <u>policing</u> more evidence-based

Main Obstacles

- University resistance to change
- Extreme fragmentation of E&T system
- Emotional attachment to boot-camp style police academies
- Political & legal interference in curricula and mandated topics
- Tendency to confuse training time with effectiveness

Overarching Dilemma – Nature of Policing

- Policing as more craft than science

- Value of experience & judgment vs. scientific knowledge & principles

- "the dictates of an intuitive grasp of situational exigencies" – police discretion

Questions?