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Voices Behind Bars: Correctional Education from the Perspective of the Prisoner Student

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VOICES BEHIND BARS: CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
THE PRISONER STUDENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Leadership

by
Renee S. Hall
B.A., University of New Orleans, 1999
M.Ed., University of New Orleans, 2002

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Abstract

Approximately two million men and women are currently incarcerated in the nation's penitentiaries. Ninety percent of these inmates will eventually be released from prison. There is a need for prisons to provide services that will prepare these men and women for successful reentry into society. These services include education and vocational training. To determine the effectiveness of education/training, the perspective of the prisoner student is key to the field of correctional education. The voice of the prisoner student, however, is absent from the literature on prisoner education. This qualitative study examined the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and plans/goals of prisoner students at Southern State Penitentiary (pseudonym used). One-on-one interviews with prisoner students were used, as well as brief observations of the classroom setting and operation. Surveys were completed by two corrections administrators to gain the perspective of the administrator in relation to the correctional education experience. Three emergent themes indicated a need to further study the prisoner student from this intimate perspective: student perceptions of success, regret of prior decisions, and rethinking the correctional education experience. The findings of this study have implications for the fields of elementary and secondary education, higher education, and correctional education.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Approximately two million men and women are currently incarcerated in the nation's penitentiaries (Butterfield, 2002). Ninety percent of these inmates will eventually be released from prison (Linton, 2004). The vast majority of these inmates enter prison without basic literacy skills or job training. According to the U.S. Department of Education (Linton), approximately 75 percent of men and women released from prison will commit an additional offense within three years. The lack of financial resources for correctional education, coupled with the negative stigma associated with being an ex-convict, contributes greatly to recidivism. This assumption is based upon previous studies assessing correctional education's impact on recidivism (Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003; Slater, 1994-1995). Thus, the importance of education in the criminal justice system has not been given adequate recognition.

This study was an examination of prisoners' perceptions of adult education. Where many studies on correctional education focus on recidivism, this study attempted to gain the perspective of the prisoner on various aspects of correctional education, including previous educational experiences, teacher to student interaction, and ability to function in the job market. Using qualitative inquiry methods, the study sought to discover prisoners' perceptions about attending classes, interacting with prison personnel in these classes, and how prisoners felt they would benefit from taking classes.

Education and the Prison

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of correctional education as a means of reducing recidivism (Nuttall, Hollmen & Staley, 2003; Slater, 1994-1995). These studies show that approximately 60 percent of ex-convicts end up in jail at least

one more time (Linton, 2004; Slater). According to Nuttall et al., 40 percent of young offenders aged 21 and under who earned a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) while incarcerated returned to jail within 3 years, compared to 54 percent of young offenders who did not have a diploma or complete a GED program while in prison. Similar results are reported when considering postsecondary education in correctional settings.

The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (1995) indicates the rate of recidivism for educated prisoners ranges from 15% - 30% when students take college courses. Slater (1994-1995) not only concurs with the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education's* findings, but also finds that federal prisoners in general had a recidivism rate of 40 percent without college courses and 12 percent for those prisoners who were released having taken some college education. Additional studies also conclude that prison education programs significantly reduce recidivism (Slater; Turnbull, Lin, & Bajeva, 1997).

Chappell (2004) concludes that the higher the educational attainment, the higher the reduction of recidivism. Additionally, prisoners who are educated experience “beneficial effects on post-release employment and institutional discipline (p.149).” Further, Chappell states that correctional education programs are cost effective and provide “a substantial return-on-investment for society (p.149).” That study showed that inmates who possessed at least two years of college were re-arrested at a rate of 10% as compared to a rate of 60% for those who do not possess this level of education. Chappell’s review of correctional education articles also showed that there is a positive relationship between education and recidivism. Similarly, Gordon’s (2003) study of correctional education and recidivism shows that of the inmates who earned their GED while incarcerated, only 4% were re-arrested as compared to the national rate of 65%. Finally, a 1992 study (Porporino and Robinson in Gordon) shows that federal offenders

were tracked for a year after release to determine the effects of education upon recidivism. Of the prisoners released, those who completed the ABE program had a re-arrest rate of 30.1% as compared to 35.5% for those who were released before completion and 41.6% for those who withdrew from this educational program. Those inmates who completed vocational programs were re-arrested at a rate of only 8.75%; the recidivism rate for those who completed GED programs was 6.71%.

While the literature cites successes in adult education programs, some attention must be paid to the prior educational experiences of prison inmates as well. Mageehon's (2003) study of women convicts showed that the women who completed the GED program had experienced a strong academic connection in their kindergarten through twelfth grade education that fostered academic growth behind bars. This is important because, according to Mageehon, "correctional educators are in a unique position to be concerned about their students' pasts and futures... the women's experiences prior to incarceration, the histories of abuse and addiction, their relationships with the power brokers both within the institution and outside the institution, mediate who they are as students (197)." Therefore, correctional educators should be aware of the relationship between prior experiences and current experiences, as well as how other external factors influence prison classroom success.

The Quandary of Correctional Education

Despite the numerous research results on correctional education and its effects on recidivism, funding for correctional education is a serious issue. According to Slater (1994-1995), approximately 23,000 inmates received federal aid in the form of Pell Grants for prison education, with each award being approximately \$1,500. The Pell Grants received on behalf of

prison inmates were used to offset prison-operating costs as well as provide educational programs for prisoners. Though the \$35M spent on prisoner Pell Grants may appear substantial, this number only represents 0.2% of all Pell Grants (\$6 billion) awarded to college students (Slater). This relatively small amount of funding aids at least 1,400 inmates yearly nationwide in gaining employment upon release.

The benefit of federal funding for correctional education ended with an addendum to the 1994 Omnibus Crime Bill (Violent Crime Prevention Act). The provisions of this bill eliminated Pell Grant money from prison inmates. As a result of the termination of federal assistance, colleges and universities streamlined and/or eliminated prison education programs (Slater, 1994-1995). Similarly, the majority of in-house prison education classes nationwide were cut and/or eliminated.

Defining the Problem

This study is derived from the decision to withdraw federal funding in the form of Pell Grants from prison inmates. Given the limited financial resources of prisons to offer educational programs, the focus of my study was to gain the perspectives of the prison inmates themselves in order to determine the most effective programs as perceived by these inmates. However, to fully understand the correctional education environment, I had to also gain the perspectives of those people responsible for administering these educational programs. Additionally, I wanted to determine the personal educational experiences of prison inmates both prior to and during incarceration. In times of limited resources, it is imperative to consider what is most important in order to best spend education dollars. Therefore, this study focused on determining which program(s) best benefit the prisoners' educational and employment goals upon release from prison. Most importantly, however, I sought the voice that is not reflected in the literature, but

stands to be directly affected, the prison student. Perhaps the study findings will enlighten decision makers as to the reasons why so many prisoners cannot stay out of prison once released.

The purpose of this study was to gain the unheard perspective of the prisoner regarding prison education programs. Specifically, I focused on those GED, adult literacy, and vocational training programs offered by the penal institution. By investigating penitentiaries, I was able to gain insight into what programs are currently available, what programs were cut as a result of the Crime Bill of 1994, and the dynamics of institutional influence. Since the impact of the Crime Bill has been felt over the past eleven years, I determined what alternatives for correctional education have been implemented as a result of the legislation. This study allowed me to gain multiple perspectives on correctional education. I gained an understanding of what correctional educators experience in the classroom and what they feel prisoners need in order to be successful after release. Through a qualitative inquiry of prisoners, I determined which programs prisoners perceive as effective in increasing their ability to gain and keep employment, which programs they would like to see offered, and what academic and job related/vocational knowledge they possessed prior to incarceration. Finally, I compared the program preferences of prisoners with the programs currently available to them. My goal was to gain insight into the question: How do prisoner students perceive their correctional education experience?

Why Study Prisoners' Perceptions Qualitatively?

Opponents of correctional education may not see the value of educating a prisoner. They may question the rights of convicts to receive special services such as college courses. After all, most prisoners are not allowed to vote in an election or work in certain fields. These prisoners become citizens once again on parole day or at the completion of their sentence, however. Upon release, prisoners need to be able to gain employment adequate enough to care for themselves as

well as other family members. According to Moeller et. al (2004), "...although literacy does not guarantee a better life outside prison walls, illiteracy guarantees a higher recidivism rate" (p. 41). Thus, it was important to establish an argument for increased correctional education through the data. The focus was correctional education – live voices and words from prisoners who have experienced change upon release – voices that may open opponents' eyes to the men behind the prison identification number.

Overview of Methodology

This study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Through interviews with prison administration and prisoner students, I was given a picture of the educational environment and needs of the student in a correctional setting. Through a series of brief observations of classes in session, I witnessed students taking part in the correctional education experience. The goal in collecting data was gaining the perspective of the participant in correctional education, a perspective that is often overlooked.

Research Questions

To fully understand the correctional education experience from the perspective of the prisoner student, I sought to determine the following as a result of this study:

Primary Research Question:

How do prisoner students perceive their correctional education experience?

Secondary Research Questions:

- What motivates students to attend class?
- How do prior educational and employment experiences affect student motivation?

- What is the institutional culture of the prison as they relate to education, and how does that affect the students?
- Are there discernable differences between the perceptions of prison inmates and prison administration as it relates to correctional education?
- What are the causes of these discernable differences, if they exist?
- What are prisoners' perceptions of what a successful person does? What career and educational aspirations do prisoners have?

These research questions provided me with the avenue to discover the perceptions of prisoner students on their ability and preparation for life after release from prison. This issue is highly significant due to the impact that the incarcerated have on their respective families and communities.

Significance

In America, approximately 1.5 million children under age 18 have at least one parent who is incarcerated; approximately one half is African American. Of these children, 80% have a father who is incarcerated. One fourth of these incarcerated fathers have sentences of 20 years or more. The average sentence for incarcerated fathers is 12 years; seven of these years must be served in order for an inmate to be eligible for parole (Austin & Hardyman, 2004). Thus, a significant percentage of the American population is impacted by an absent father. Given that prison inmates seldom “interact positively with their children while incarcerated because they are embarrassed by their circumstances,” the family relationship is often diminished during incarceration (Geraci, 2000, p. 632). Instability in the home caused by an absent parent often has dire consequences for the children involved. Thus, the study of the correctional education

experience is significant since the successful reintegration of fathers into society impacts a large portion of the nation's children (Austin & Hardyman).

Several studies have been conducted to determine the impact of incarceration of fathers on the community (Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Geraci, 2000; Patillo, Weiman, and Western (Eds), 2004). The incarceration of fathers tends to reduce the number of two parent families even after the father is released from prison. A study by Western, Lopoo, and McLanahan (2004) found that the mothers of incarcerated men's children find the men unacceptable as mates when they are released from prison. These men are unattractive to women for many reasons. They have less education and are less frequently employed than their non-incarcerated counterparts. Drug and alcohol abuse are frequently factors that contribute to a lack of healthy relationship skills and a lack of anger management ability (Patillo et al.).

Nurse's (2004) study of newly paroled fathers concluded that incarceration was a major strain on their relationships with their children and their children's mothers. Fathers were away from their children for long periods of time, putting a strain on their relationships. Some states require incarcerated fathers to pay child support even while incarcerated. As a result, Nurse cites fear, anger, and resentment as emotions experienced by the incarcerated fathers. Thus, the incarceration of fathers creates relationship problems for American families (Nurse).

Perhaps most significant to the incarceration of males is its impact upon the children involved. Johnson and Waldfogel (2004) studied the risks of children and their living arrangements when their parents are incarcerated. Several behaviors are observable in children of incarcerated adults. According to Johnson and Waldfogel, these children have lessened emotional, behavioral and psychological development. These deficiencies manifest themselves through aggressive behavior, withdrawal from social interaction, involvement in criminal

activity, depression, and problems with concentration. In addition to the emotional and behavioral trauma of absent parents, children are often left with relatives or placed in foster care during their parents' incarceration. Johnson and Waldfogel attribute attachment theory to the problems associated with the children of incarcerated adults. According to this theory, children develop very strong bonds with their parents. When a parent is suddenly removed from the home, however, the bonds become damaged. When placed in the care of other custodians, the children form bonds with these people. These new bonds stand to be damaged as well, since most living arrangements are temporary. Thus, incarceration of fathers has a negative impact upon children's development and mental well being (Johnson & Waldfogel).

The importance of correctional education has been established and this study was designed to get at the piece of the puzzle that has not been addressed – the voice of the prisoner student. The remainder of this chapter defines key terms and provides an outline for the rest of the study.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, I used the following definitions:

Penitentiary, prison, penal institution, and **correctional institution** will be used interchangeably for the purpose of this study; these terms refer to the facility where prisoners live, work, and take educational courses while incarcerated.

Incarceration: confinement to a penal institution while awaiting trial for an offense or as punishment for an offense.

Offender: one who commits a crime.

Prisoner: one who has been remanded to a penitentiary/prison/correctional institution as punishment for a criminal conviction.

Recidivism: return to a penal institution as a result of commission of an additional criminal offense or violation of conditions of parole.

Correctional educator: a teacher or instructor who teaches in a prison setting.

Correctional education: educational classes and/or training within the penal institution (prison).

Vocational education: programs focused on training adults to perform a specific task (ex: welding, pipe fitting, farming) in preparation for performing that task on a job site.

Adult basic education (ABE): an education program designed to provide basic skills (math, reading, and writing) to the adult learner.

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): an alternative to the high school diploma, the GED certifies that the student has the basic skills required for the completion of grade 12 of high school. The GED course is one that prepares adult students for taking the GED test to determine on which grade level an adult student performs.

Literacy: the ability to read and write to function in society.

Offense: any infraction of the law warranting arrest and incarceration.

Federal aid: money received by the federal government for funding an educational program (or other program, as determined by the federal government).

Conclusion

Correctional education has been in existence for over three centuries with the purpose of rehabilitating the prisoner in some form. Cuts in state and federal spending on correctional education have limited the human and financial resources available for creating and maintaining educational programs. Though studies (Linton, 2004; Nuttall et al., 2003; Slater, 1994-1995) have demonstrated that correctional education contributes to reduced recidivism, funding for correctional education remains stagnant (Slater, 1994-1995). This study was an attempt at

gaining further data demonstrating the effect of correctional education upon prisoners. The perspective of the prisoner, a perspective that has not been well researched, was the focus of this study.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study will focus on various aspects of prison education. Chapter Two will review the literature on correctional education, beginning with a chronology of prisons and prison education in America. The chapter will also discuss literacy in America, community, instructor, and student roles in correctional education, and the conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter Three of this study will provide detailed information about the study methodology. This includes descriptions of the role of the researcher, research questions, data collection and analysis, as well as validity and ethical considerations.

Chapters Four and Five of this study will present the findings of my data analysis, a discussion of these findings, implications of these findings for correctional education, and suggestions for further research. At the end of this study, I have a better understanding of the prison education setting from the perspective of the prison student.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The following chapter is a review of the literature on correctional education in America. A brief history traces correctional education from the first penitentiary to current research studies. A section on literacy in America discusses prisoner literacy rates as compared to the general public. Studies on recidivism and motivation to change are discussed and the gap in the literature is revealed. Further, prisoner re-integration into society is discussed and the conceptual framework that informs the research and interview questions for the study is presented.

History of Correctional Education in America

The Quakers of Pennsylvania developed the penitentiary concept during the early colonization of America (Glaser, 1995). Established in 1790, the Walnut Street Jail was the model penitentiary, designed for the punishment and confinement of early American prisoners (Warburton, 1993). Literate prisoners were provided with a Bible or other religious book for the redemption of lost souls. No visitors were allowed in the sixteenth century prison, except for religious counselors and preachers. According to Warburton, jailors determined sentence lengths and prisoners were separated according to the severity of their offenses. The prisoners committing minor offenses were permitted to live in dormitories where they often worked at a craft (such as tailoring or shoemaking). Those offenders of more serious crimes spent their time in solitary confinement; the assumption was that prisoners would have plenty of time to reflect upon their crime and repent (Warburton). This method of handling more serious criminals was ineffective, so these serious offenders were given work assignments and instruction on religious and moral issues (Warburton). Thus, the original purpose of the penitentiary was to reform offenders by making them penitent (Glaser, Warburton).

Due to prison overcrowding, two additional prisons were constructed: Western and Eastern penitentiaries were erected around 1818. The Eastern penitentiary, also known as Cherry Hill, was managed using the Pennsylvania system. Under the Pennsylvania system, prisoners were entirely isolated; the prisoners were even blindfolded when they were brought into the prison for the first time (Warburton, 1993). Soon, however, another system of prison management would challenge this practice.

By 1821, there were two different schools of thought in regard to prisons: the Pennsylvania system and the Auburn system. The Auburn system, named after the New York state prison in which it was developed, created a response to prison overcrowding by assigning prisoners to work groups where they worked in silence (Glaser, 1995; Warburton, 1993). Founded in part by Stephen Allen, the Auburn system was the most widely accepted and practiced prison management system in the United States. The system was the most popular in America because prisoners were more productive and therefore brought more money into the prison. Europeans, however, preferred the isolation of the Pennsylvania system.

Western European officials used the Pennsylvania system for incarcerating prisoners. Originated by the Quakers, this system called for prisoners to be separated from each other day and night (Silva, 1994). These Pennsylvania system prisoners received moral education from a chaplain who traveled from cell to cell and provided spiritual guidance and lessons from the Bible (Silva). According to Silva, the Pennsylvania system did not work because it was not as economically feasible as the Auburn system with its mass production industries.

A third prison system emerged in 1876 New York. This so-called reformatory, named Elmira, was meant for prisoners to be confined and reformed. There was an emphasis on academic and vocational training at this institution. In 1878, the institution's superintendent,

Zebulon Brockway, hired professors from the Elmira Women's College and the Michigan State Normal School to establish a school at the reformatory (Gehring, 1997). Courses taught included general geography, physical geography, moral education, ethics, economics, and history. In 1883, Professor N.A. Wells joined the other four professors at the reformatory. He taught industrial arts to the prisoners who were not interested in taking the traditional courses (Gehring). The reformatory was the first to employ the concept of parole. Derived from Australian and Irish "ticket to leave" models, parole was developed to strengthen the prison's rehabilitative capacities (APAI, 2006). Indeterminate sentencing enabled a board of institutional officials to grant "marks" earned through good behavior and participation in the institution's available programs. Once enough "marks" were earned, a prisoner was released; the prisoner was still under the supervision of the prison (through the help of volunteers and/or police officials) for an additional six months (APAI). The 19th century also brought about the concept of probation, defined as release from prison with conditions in the place of institutional confinement/imprisonment (Glaser, 1995).

The turn of the 20th century marked a period of recognition of the usefulness of vocational education (Silva, 1994). Once the community at large had accepted and began to participate in higher education, education programs began to be introduced into the prisons. According to Silva, prisoners typically took correspondence courses. Columbia University sponsored one of the earliest outside correspondence courses. In 1914, professors from the University of California established a correspondence college program at San Quentin (Gehring, 1997). By the 1920s, these correspondence courses became available through U.S. land grant colleges; the land grant colleges and state agencies sponsored courses for prisoners in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Silva).

Prisoners learned agriculture, real estate, and salesmanship. Remediation classes sharpened their grammar, mathematics, and foreign language skills. Additionally, an educational program was created for the Virginia Penitentiary in 1920. This program was based on a desire for prison reform and prison education (Gehring).

Many other prison education programs materialized during the 1920s and 1930s. San Quentin Prison enrolled 438 prisoners in extension courses through the University of California (Silva, 1994). Prisoners were used by the University of California as assistants in the classroom (Gehring, 1997). Inmates also trained to be teachers through Clinton Prison's (New York) weekly Normal School. The New York State Board of Regents could certify these inmate teachers as elementary school teachers. By 1927, a majority of the participants passed the Board test for certification (Silva).

In 1928, graduate students from Johns Hopkins University assisted educators at the Maryland Penitentiary by extending the school week to four evenings. Austin MacCormick, assistant warden of the U.S. Naval Prison in New Hampshire, established the American Prison Association's Standing Committee on Education in 1930 (this organization later became known as the Correctional Education Association). By 1932, the State University System of Wisconsin had developed one of the first full time correctional education programs. MacCormick also founded the organization's publication, *The Journal of Correctional Education*, in 1937 (Gehring, 1997). In 1940, at the American Prison Congress, member George Killinger recommended the institution of college courses inside the prison as opposed to correspondence courses (Gehring).

The first degree program for inmates occurred in 1953, with 25 inmates from Menard State Prison (Illinois) who took courses at the Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Illinois also

had two other degree programs that were funded by state aid and university grants – one at Vienna State Prison and the other at Graham Correctional Center (Silva). This influx of prison education programs, however, began to diminish by the late 1950s. Development of prison education programs became inconsistent and sluggish at this time (Silva).

Dr. John McKee was instrumental in conducting research on correctional education in the early 1960s. His research was sponsored by the Rehabilitation Research Foundation at the Draper Correctional Institution in Alabama (Gehring, 1997). A few years later, prisoners gained wide access to higher education in the form of college courses in 1965 with the passing of Title IV of the Higher Education Act (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). A major part of this act was the Basic Educational Opportunity grant, named Pell Grant after its sponsor Senator Claiborne Pell (Silva, 1994). The act allowed prison inmates to receive federal financial aid, using the Pell Grant, to attend college. Prisoners were able to receive the maximum amount of funding due to their low-income status (Silva).

McKee's work resulted in the development of the Environmental Deprivation Scale to predict recidivism in prisoners (Gehring, 1997). The U.S. Office of Education also funded the Adult Basic Education program for prisoners in 1969. This program was first implemented by Dr. T.A. Ryan of the University of Hawaii and later spread throughout the nation (Gehring).

The most ambitious college program in a prison was Project Newgate (Silva, 1994). Funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity, five college programs were created with the intent of creating a feeling of being on a college campus while still behind bars. Inmates were permitted to live apart from the general population and forego work assignments in order to participate in the program. If an inmate was released prior to completion of a degree, he or she would be encouraged through financial support to continue studies at one of the cooperating college

campuses. Project Newgate was considered a success. Researchers found its methods worthy of replication. Three measures of success from Project Newgate were lessened recidivism, achievement of stability, and realization of life goals.

The late 1960s brought about another model in prison treatment programming – the Medical Model (Silva, 1994). Convicts went through a self-discovery program via group therapy, individual therapy, and education. These tools intended to make the reintegration of prisoners into the community an easier task. The Medical Model utilized funds from various federal and private organizations, including the Law Enforcement Assistant Administration, the Ford Foundation, and the Lilly Foundation (Silva). Through the Medical Model, prisons became correctional institutions and prisoners were referred to as clients.

The rapid expansion of prison education became apparent in the late sixties to the early eighties. In 1968, 13 of the 50 United States had correctional education programs. That number grew to 33 states by 1970. By 1973, there were 182 correctional education programs in the nation, a number that catapulted to 237 programs by 1976. By 1982, there were 350 correctional education programs in the nation's prisons (Silva, 1994).

The increase in educational programs made studies on program effectiveness necessary. The following is a continuation of the historical context of correctional education - discussion of recidivism studies that began in the 1970's.

Recidivism Studies

Given the need to justify the use of federal money for prison education classes, the 1970's became a period for studying the effects of higher education in the prison setting (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). The success of the prison education program was determined by the rate at which prisoners returned to the correctional facility. The conclusion of these studies was that education

for inmates decreased recidivism (Hrabowski & Robbi). There was also a notable decrease in the cost of housing for extra inmates.

Though there were documented successes with prison programs across the nation, the increase in prison education programs was short-lived. The attitude toward prison management returned to the incapacitate and incarcerate ideology (Silva, 1994). Prison construction increased to accommodate mandatory sentencing laws, and there was a move to exclude prison inmates from education program entitlement (Silva). Schmidt (2002) describes the cutbacks of the 1990s as a “combination of recessionary budget pressures and a push for more punitive approaches to crime” (p.A27). In 1994, three decades after the initiation of Pell Grant funds for prison education programs, Congress added to the Violent Crime Control Law Enforcement Act (Omnibus Crime Bill – sponsored by President Clinton – popularized by the Three Strikes law) a provision removing federal Pell Grant monies from prisoners. Since these Pell Grant monies were important for reducing prison costs, many prison education programs were reduced or cut altogether (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). Schmidt describes the impact of the Crime Bill on higher education: “Higher education programs for prisoners have become increasingly scarce over the past decade as state and federal lawmakers have taken an approach to criminal justice that stresses punishment over rehabilitation” (p. A26). As a result of the Crime Bill, Schmidt claims, state legislatures also withdrew their tax-dollar contributions for correctional education programs. Lack of funding had dire effects for correctional education.

Gehring (1997) feels that several factors contribute to what he calls “the demise of the Pell Grant” (P.48). Some of these factors, Gehring states, are a result of correctional educators themselves. First, in a study of correctional educators, Gehring found that correctional educators were not knowledgeable enough about the field of correctional education. Only a small percent

of these educators knew about the “definitive books” in the field of correctional education – *Correctional Education* (MacCormick, 1931) and *Time to Think: A Cognitive Program of Delinquency Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation* (Ross & Fabiano, 1985).

Gehring (1997) also states that some correctional educators opposed higher education courses, even though they taught the classes. A small number of these educators were members of the Correctional Education Association at the time of Gehring’s study. Additionally, some colleges and universities accepted Pell Grant funds for correctional education programs without improving the quality of the programming. The prison libraries were often inadequate for prisoners pursuing postsecondary education. Finally, Gehring states that inmates suffered because of a lack of resources such as computer labs and advisement, as well as the doubling of tuition and textbook costs by some higher education institutions. Gehring states, “Student learning often took a ‘back seat’ to program expansions, career development, politics and funding” (p.50). The results of the elimination of the Pell Grant were destructive for students who had previously begun a program of study. According to Gehring, students were not able to complete their degree or certificate programs due to many colleges’ refusal to extend these programs.

The Hrabowski and Robbi (2002) study recommends that legislators revisit the federal financial aid for prisoners (and reinstate said funding). According to the researchers, “It is crucial that members of Congress and the public call for the reinstatement of federal financial assistance in the form of Pell Grants to inmates. In addition, funding for state tuition assistance programs to prisoners should also be increased” (p.98). The study also calls for an increase in funding for post-release support services. Reinstatement of previously allocated funds is thus one means of securing prison education dollars.

To best facilitate learning and, hence, rehabilitation, Silva (1994) suggests that prisons and colleges come together and build prisons on university campuses. This radical idea has been attempted with little long-term success. Silva states that campus prisons would 1) separate student inmates from the rest of the prison population, 2) ease prison overcrowding, and 3) use existing state-owned space – the state’s university grounds – which could be utilized at low cost. Thus, Silva’s proposal for cost-effective prisoner education adds an option for prison administrators and legislators in charge of correctional education funding.

Drakeford (2002) researched the impact of an intensive program to increase the literacy rates of juvenile offenders in Maryland; he states that literacy is one thing that the majority of incarcerated Americans have in common. As a result, Drakeford suggests that literacy training is a necessary component of the prison term. Drakeford states

Crime and fear have caused policy-makers and legislators to support the idea of building more prisons. As a result, sentencing legislation has become harsher and some prison programs have been eliminated. However, research has shown that to reduce crime rates and recidivism of students with disabilities and ethnic minorities in juvenile corrections, correctional educators need to incorporate programs with strong emphasis on literacy development (p.34).

This same assertion can be made in regards to correctional education for adults. Low rates of literacy contribute to criminal behavior when there is no avenue for training and/or employment (NIFL in Drakeford, 2002). Thus, adults must become literate and trained in order to compete in the job market upon release. The following is a discussion of literacy in America’s prisons and communities.

Literacy in America

According to the National Institute for Literacy (2005), a literate person is able to read, write, and speak competently in English. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 states that literacy is “an individual’s ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society” (p. 1061). Literacy has five levels, all centered on the ability to understand documents, prose, and computations, and to solve problems based upon this understanding. According to this definition, Americans rate anywhere from a 1, where a person is able to sign his/her name on a document or find information in a newspaper, to 5, where a person is able to fully understand the world around him/her. A person with a literacy level of 5 can perform more complex everyday tasks and understand dense passages or documents (NIFL, 2004).

To determine a person’s literacy level, the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey can be administered; the test is used to assess the everyday problem-solving ability of the person taking the test. Results of this test are categorized into the five levels mentioned above, thus universalizing the concept of literacy across the nation.

Brizuis and Foster (1987) find that “efforts to reduce economic dependency and reduce crime cannot succeed without upgrading the educational levels of many on welfare, in prison, or otherwise dependent” (p.7). Though they do not claim that literacy will totally eradicate crime, Brizuis and Foster make the assumption that it will be more difficult to function in society without literacy. The authors go on to label illiteracy a “human tragedy,” stating that being literate is the “first link in the chain between education, job skills, labor force adaptability, and economic growth” (p.9). Thus, literacy is key to any rehabilitation program at a correctional institution because it prepares the inmate for successful adaptation to society.

The NIFL (2005) states that while there is not a great number of totally illiterate people in America, there is a large number of adults who possess very low literacy. These people “lack the foundation they need to find and keep decent jobs, support their children’s education, and participate actively in civic life” (p.2). This translates to approximately 22% of the 44 million citizens that make up the adult population. Just on level up, at level 2, approximately 27% of the adult population (48 million people) scored within this low level of literacy. Therefore, nearly half of the adult population in America today lacks the basic skills to perform everyday tasks in life. Though immigrants make up a large portion of level 1, the numbers suggest that the low levels of literacy in America are problematic. The literacy of prisoners – the incarcerated population in America – will now be discussed.

Literacy and the Prisoner

In prison, the lack of literacy is also a problem. According to Gunn (1999), this lack of literacy is a problem that learners acknowledge. Those who are deemed illiterate are aware of the disadvantage they face; this, in part, brings some students to the prison classroom. The U.S. Department of Education states, “prison populations had a higher proportion of unemployment history, learning handicaps, high-school drop-out rates, and over-representation of African Americans” (p. 74). It is safe to assume that low levels of literacy contribute to these conditions. It is also safe to agree with Chappell (2004) who states, “the higher the level of educational attainment while incarcerated, the more likely the releasee was to have obtained employment upon release” (p. 149). Similarly, Newman and Beverstock (1990) state

In some situations, especially those connected with penal correction, society must value its own safety above the rehabilitation of those who have failed to find a socially acceptable niche. However, when citizens realize that it would be more cost effective to

rehabilitate people than to keep them in storage, and better still to take therapeutic and preventative steps prior to imprisonment, both the sense of threat and the high price of crime will come down (p.13).

Newman and Beverstock (1990) go on to emphasize the importance of literacy instruction for prisoners by looking at what happens when Americans have low levels of literacy. Many people are placed in prison because of their lack of literacy, which manifests itself in an inability to secure a job; this in turn leads to an increase in criminal behavior for survival. According to Newman and Beverstock, “inmates would have a better chance of getting jobs, becoming better citizens, escaping the criminalizing effects of poverty, and staying out of jail if they were literate. America’s choice is an economic one: either spend a few thousand dollars teaching a potential perpetrator to read and write, or spend hundreds of thousands of dollars keeping him or her locked up” (p.13). Thus, literacy should become a priority in both prophylactic measures outside of prison and educational programming within the correctional institution. Given the importance of producing a literate prisoner, each prisoner must be motivated to attend adult literacy classes, at minimum, while incarcerated. Further characteristics of the prisoner student will now be discussed.

Characteristics of the Prisoner Student

When incarcerated, every prisoner has his own set of prior family, educational, and employment histories. Each history is unique and may or may not contain all three above-mentioned components. Research shows, however, that there are common characteristics – background characteristics – that are shared by the majority of American prisoners (Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Geraci, 2000; Moeller et al., 2004; Visher & Travis, 2003). First, the nation’s correctional population generally possesses a low rate of literacy, and a high rate of high school

drop outs (Visher & Travis). Additionally, many of these prisoners have learning disabilities (Moeller et al.). The lack of education makes it difficult to understand job applications, legal documents, and other real-world texts (NIFL, 2005). Moeller Et al. describes prisoners' prior educational background as a "pervasive history of negative educational experiences" (p.45). This lack of educational ability may have led to each prisoner's incarceration.

Family relationships are also part of the characteristics of the prison student. The educational, employment, and criminal histories of the family all impact the prisoner student's beliefs about socialization, the importance of school, and incarceration (Austin & Hardyman, 2004). Geraci (2000) describes the prisoners she teaches as hardened by their prior family histories: "I use the term hardened criminals because many of these men have usually not had much of a childhood or normal family life. Most were on the streets at an early age and had to raise themselves" (p.633). Many prisoner students are the children of prisoners themselves, or they have close relatives who are incarcerated (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2004). Thus, negative family relationships are common to prisoner students.

Poor job skills and employment records are shared experiences of most prisoner students (Visher & Travis, 2003). Lack of employment stability is a strong predictor of criminal activity, and most prisoner students have not held a stable job prior to incarceration (Austin & Hardyman, 2004). Many prisoner students commit crimes in order to earn wages for their families. The commission of crime then leads to incarceration.

Still another characteristic of the prisoner student is his history of substance abuse. Though it is not a focus of this study, substance abuse is another predictor of criminal activity (Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Pelissier, 2004; Visher & Travis, 2003). Dependence upon any chemical substance, but especially illegal drugs/narcotics, is likely to distract a man from his job, his

family, and his obedience of the law. In prison, substance abuse and/or dependency will most likely prevent the prisoner student from making a change of any kind. Thus, history of substance abuse could prevent a prisoner student from successful completion of an educational program if there is no substance abuse treatment program.

The prior family, educational and employment, and substance abuse histories of prisoner students have a large impact upon the decisions that he makes while incarcerated. These prior experiences can serve as a deterrent or an impetus for success. The key to overcoming the obstacles presented by prisoner students' background characteristics is educational intervention. Thus, a prisoner student must have desire or motivation of some sort to begin taking classes and/or seeking treatment while incarcerated. The motivation of the prisoner student to change is the next focus of this review.

Motivation to Attend

The prisoner student must at some point make a decision to attend classes. The decision to attend, and the decision to persist, must be motivated by some factor or set of factors. Therefore, to better understand the correctional education experience, this study sought to understand what motivates prisoner students to attend and complete classes.

Pelissier (2004) has established the importance of the prisoner's motivation to participate in a treatment program. Since most programs in prison are voluntary, it is important that prisoners have the drive (motivation) to want to take part in the available programs (Pelissier; Pelissier & Cadigan, 2004). Though Pelissier's work is primarily focused on prisoners in drug treatment programs, the concept of motivation still applies to correctional education. The following is a description of Pelissier's internal and external motivation.

When describing drug treatment programs in a correctional setting, Pelissier (2004) identified the willingness to participate as “motivation to change.” This motivation can be external or internal. External motivation comes from outside the prisoner and includes incentives such as early release/good time, easier work assignments, and extra pay. External motivation can come from the parole board, the warden, and/or the judge trying the case. To be considered an external motivator, the factor must be the cause of the prisoner’s decision to attend. This can be legal pressure in the form of court-ordered participation (as per prison administration) in an education program, or participation in an education program as a means of reducing a prison sentence. Satisfactory participation in college classes at the Hampden County Correctional Center in Massachusetts, for example, can earn each student good time toward the reduction of his prison sentence (Burke & Vivian, 2001). According to Burke and Vivian, “students are thus provided with an incentive to further their education and enhance their prospects for future success” (p.160). Edwards-Willey and Chivers (2005) also found that inmates in New York correctional facilities may receive time credits for participation in college classes.

For many correctional institutions, participation in classes is mandatory (McCabe & Ryan, 1994). Mandatory participants often encounter problems because they cannot understand the importance of attending classes (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004). These prisoners, according to Parkinson & Steurer, may have encountered academic difficulty in the past.

Lindner (1994) states that students may be overwhelmed by the challenge of classroom tasks; the student may feel that failure to complete a task is “a negative evaluation of their competence” (p. 125). As a result, a prisoner student who is externally motivated may encounter difficulty adjusting to the educational setting. Also, the prisoner may be discouraged from participating by their peers’ negative comments (Parkinson & Steurer). Thus, external motivation to attend

classes may complicate participation in classes, but it does not mean that the prisoner will not succeed in that class. Internal motivation to attend, however, is a stronger predictor of success.

Internal motivation comes from within the prisoner student. This type of motivation occurs when inmates willingly accept treatment(s) in an attempt to alter their behavior patterns.

According to Pelissier (2004), older males and males who plan to return home to children tend to be more willing to participate in treatment programs. Pelissier found that internal motivation is key to success in drug treatment programs. The same can be said about correctional education programs. Osberg and Fraley (1993) compared the motivation of traditional college students to the motivation of the prisoner students. The researchers found that prisoner students were, on average, more motivated to attend and persist in college courses than traditional students. This motivation can be the result of many factors. Some prisoners are internally motivated to attend classes as a means of impressing the family. Parkinson and Steurer (2004) describe the use of in-prison graduation ceremonies with family members present as a tool for motivating prisoners to attend and complete programs. Other inmates may be motivated by the quality of the instructors in a particular program (Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005). Some correctional educators feel that a “good student” will be naturally motivated to attend classes (Lindner, 1994). Thus, those students who had positive academic experiences prior to incarceration may be more internally motivated to attend classes than those inmates who fared poorly in school.

For some students, internal motivation may simply come from a need or desire to personally improve while incarcerated (Burke & Vivian, 2001; Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005). Edwards-Willey and Chivers state, “attendance in educational programs may not be entirely motivated by the desire for early release, but as a means of self-improvement that translates to success upon release” (p.68). Stephens (1993) found that incarcerated students most frequently

wanted to take classes to better themselves and least frequently participated in classes in order to reduce prison time. Burke and Vivian found that inmates enrolled in college classes were internally motivated to change their lives in preparation for release:

It should be pointed out that inmates who enroll in college classes may be inherently more motivated than inmates equally qualified who do not participate. Hence, they are perhaps more motivated partake in productive activities in general rather than illegal activities following release (p.162).

Once a student enters a class or program, for whatever reason, that motivation must sustain him to the completion of that program. If the prisoner student cannot remain motivated, he will most likely discontinue participation in the class/program. This withdrawal from classes could lead to recidivism. Thus, motivation to attend and persist in correctional education classes is essential to successful reintegration into society.

Schlesinger's (2005) study of fifteen incarcerated African American males in Wisconsin provides further insight into prisoner student motivation. The researcher identifies ten theories on motivation, primarily from the field of psychology. Theorists include Piaget, Maslow, and Vygotsky. Based upon his readings, Schlesinger defines motivation as "why people do the things they do....behavior in achievement contexts where the opportunity exists for success or failure" (p.230). Schlesinger's findings indicate that the study participants were motivated for many different reasons – both external and internal.

Schlesinger (2005) states, "the most often reported reason to attend school was to congregate with friends and associates" (p.236). Additional reasons prisoner students decided to attend class include:

- Keep active

- Stay away from the wrong crowd
- Regret (dropping out of school)
- Freedom from kitchen work
- Desire to learn
- Increased self-esteem
- Transition out of a criminal lifestyle
- Set examples for children and families
- School pay (stipend for attendance)
- Early release
- Judge's requirement

Schlesinger cites the desire to stay out of trouble/prison as one of the motivating factors shared by a majority of participants. All of the participants reportedly found education valuable, despite their motives to attend:

“All subjects valued education, most felt good about their participation in correctional education, some wanted to learn for learning's sake, and many believed correctional education was one good thing about going to prison” (p.242). Thus, Schlesinger's study demonstrates the many factors that motivate the incarcerated to attend and persist in classes. This motivation is both internal and external. The majority (70%) of the factors listed are internal – somehow focused on the improvement of the man. Though the study is specific to African American incarcerated males, its results were a useful comparison for the participants and findings in the current study. The following section presents the impact that incarceration has upon the community as a whole, and how correctional education is necessary for successful re-integration into society.

The Effects of Incarceration Upon the Community and Re-Integration

Lynch and Sabol (2004) researched the effects of incarceration on social control in communities. Incarceration has negative consequences for the entire community. The authors emphasize the importance of social control and organization in the community. Community members can accomplish this control and organization through an increase in involvement. Incarceration hinders this process because it removes members from the community. In particular, incarceration decreases the number of employed males; it also decreases the number of men enrolled in higher education institutions. Thus the absence of the employed and educated male takes away from family support in the community (Lynch & Sabol).

Crime rates rise when there is a high number of families headed by single women (Lynch & Sabol, 2004). This is partially due to the absence of supervision for young males. Rose and Clear (1998) attribute the weakening of families and communities to this lack of supervision for teenagers and the lack of men for marriage in the community. Nevertheless, social control increases in times of high crime because of neighborhood interaction and communication in the hopes of preventing future crime. Thus, crime increases community involvement (social control) while weakening family relationships, causing further crime due to lack of supervision of the children of incarcerated adults (Lynch & Sabol).

According to Warburton (1993), researchers from the Rand Corporation emphasize the role of the community in facilitating the rehabilitation of former prisoners. According to the research, these former prisoners must have community support in the form of positive responses from society. Suggestions for community involvement include the use of role models and productive personal relationships as part of the reintegration process. Also, the Rand researchers encourage the enlistment of various community resources, including but not limited to manpower and

financial assistance. Additionally, the researchers recommend a continuation of rehabilitative support programs after release from prison (Warburton). Thus, the community and legislators, along with prison administrators and educators, are key to successful prisoner reintegration into society through educational intervention. The following section is a discussion of another stakeholder in the correctional education/re-integration process – higher education.

Correctional Education and Higher Education

So where does education for prisoners fit into the field of higher education? The connection between U.S. penitentiaries and community colleges is well documented (Garmon, 2002; Gehring, 1997; Silva, 1994). Since the early 1900s, universities have offered courses to prisoners through correspondence courses, distance learning, and through professors physically going into the prison to lecture. Between 2003 and 2004, the vast majority of inmates (92%) were enrolled in vocational courses for college credit (Diverse Issues, 2005). An additional 5% of inmates were enrolled in traditional college courses. The significance of colleges and prisons as partners in education is that providing a college education to an inmate drastically improves his/her chances of success on the outside. Garmon (2002) states, "...there are many inmates who have the intelligence to be effective, successful students who can become productive citizens, if only they have the opportunity to complete part or all of their college studies while in prison" (p.32).

The problem with the prison-college partnership is its under use (Garmon, 2002; Schmidt, 2002). To truly impact corrections, researchers suggest the implementation of more higher education classes, on the community college and university levels, that provide service to the prison population. The issue with the prison and higher education relationship is that program availability is limited, and the number of impacted prisoners is very small. States like Texas

offer college courses for approximately 10,000 prisoners with the understanding that the prisoners will repay their tuition. In California, San Quentin offers college classes that are taught by volunteers. In Illinois, state community colleges pay for the courses offered to prisoners (Schmidt). The limitation to these programs is their quantity and the lack of available funding: "...programs generally serve only a small fraction of the prison population, and tend to rely heavily on charitable donations or the inmates themselves for financial support" (Schmidt, 2002, p.A26).

The most cost effective college programs, and the easiest to access, are distance courses (Carlson, 2004). Regardless of the type of college program, researchers such as Schmidt (2002) urge policymakers to consider making more higher education available to the needy prisoner population:

In most states, a large percentage of inmates are woefully lacking basic skills, with access only to disjointed instruction that often varies from prison to prison and leading, at best, to a GED. In community colleges throughout the nation, however, there are numerous successful programs that could serve a population in desperate need of basic skills instruction (p.32).

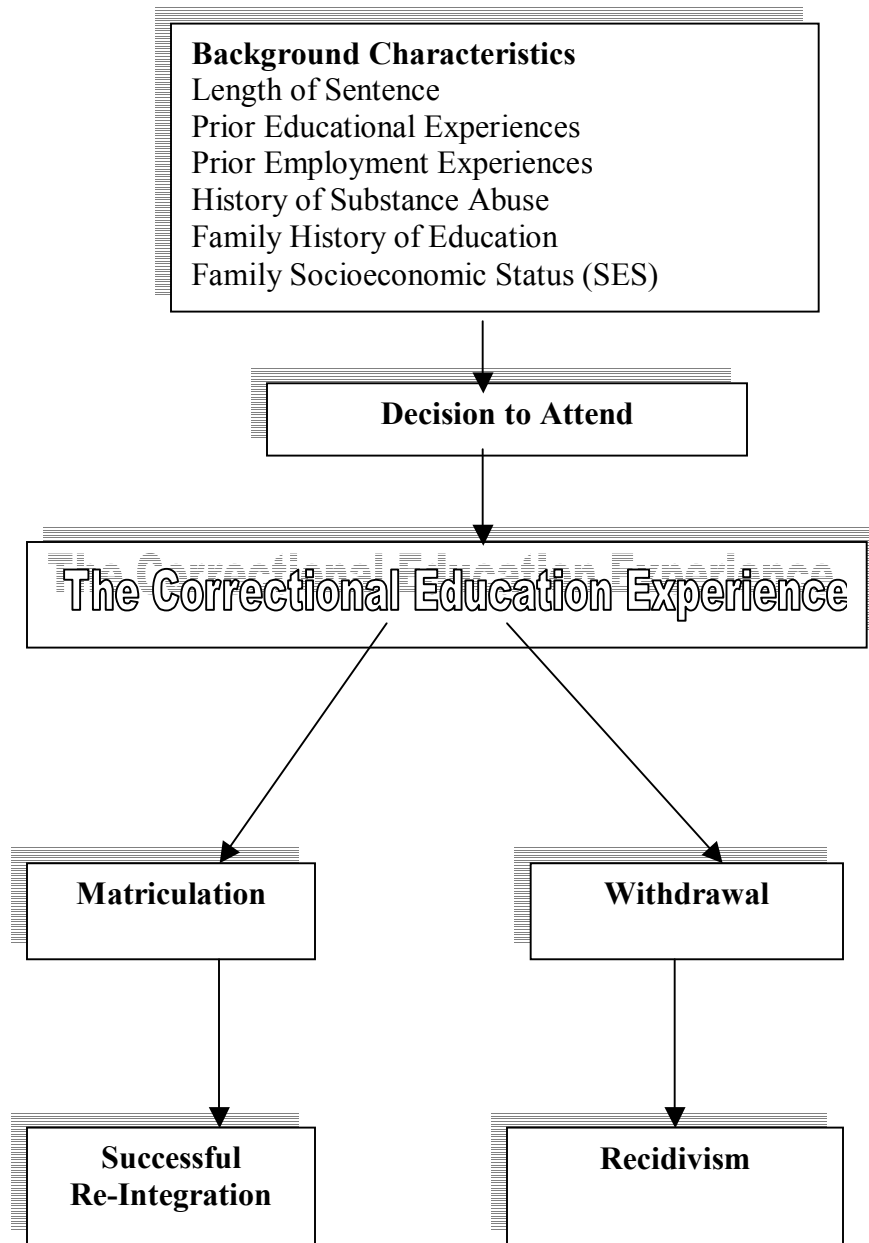
The cost of housing prisoners is another issue posed by corrections researchers. According to *Black Issues in Higher Education* (2002), approximately six times the funding is allocated by states for prison operations than for higher education. It costs \$30 billion a year to house and care for the nation's prisoners. That translates to approximately \$20,000 per person per year (Diverse Issues, 2005). According to Hamilton (2005), this imbalance in spending has occurred over past decades as well: "...from 1977 to 1997 total state and local expenditures on corrections were about 2.5 times greater than all education spending during the same period" (p.30).

Researchers call for an increase in funding for higher education. Through increased funding, more college-level programs could be offered to prisoners. With a college education, the rate of recidivism drops to approximately 7.7% (as compared to 29.9% for those who did not complete a college program) (Carlson, 2004). Therefore, reallocation of government spending to enhance higher education programs is the recommendation of some researchers. This adjustment in funding could effectively unite correctional education with the community colleges and universities of the nation, thus enhancing the likelihood of successful re-integration of the prisoner student. The following conceptual framework identifies characteristics of the prisoner student in his decision to attend and persist in classes. The framework also establishes the basis for the research and interview questions for this study.

Conceptual Framework: The Correctional Education Experience

Given that the goal of this study was to better understand the correctional education experience from the perspective of the prisoner student, the conceptual framework is focused on the choice to attend classes and the subsequent effects of that choice. Figure 1 is a representation of the correctional education experience. First, the literature identifies prisoners' background characteristics that determine motivation and academic ability (Chappell, 2004; Gunn, 1999; Newman and Beverstock, 1990). This background information that every person possesses includes prior educational and employment experiences, family socioeconomic status and level of education, and history of substance abuse. Mageehon's (2003) study of women prisoners demonstrates the importance of previous educational experiences with teachers in order for prisoners to be receptive to new educational experiences. Previous employment experiences may peak interest in a particular course or program of study. The family's history of education and employment is also significant to prisoner choice as the family generally sets the norm for

Figure 1 The Correctional Education Experience



the behaviors of its members. Thus, if a prisoner comes from a home where both parents are present and education is a priority, the prisoner should, in theory, be more receptive to participating in correctional education. Unique to the prisoner student is the length of prison sentence, which could also influence the decision to attend classes.

The actual experience of the prisoner student in the prison classroom was the focus of this study. It is during this time that students interact with correctional educators and other students in an effort to make some sort of change. This change could be internal, an attempt to alter self-esteem and/or cause personal growth, or an attempt to gain skills to obtain better (or different) employment upon release from prison. The reasons for the desire to change were unknown prior to collecting data for this study. What is known is that the prisoner student has chosen to make some change through participation in classes. Through the collection of data, I was able to gain insight into this prisoner student choice.

Based upon the quality of the correctional education experience and the prisoner student's level of motivation and ability, the student will either persist in the class/program to completion or withdraw from the class/program. Withdrawal from the class/program may be due to transfer from one facility to another, or even release from prison. However, for the purposes of this framework, I assumed that the decision to withdraw was based upon some level of dissatisfaction with the class or program. The literature has shown that completion of a program of study during incarceration increases the likelihood that the released ex-convict will be successful at remaining in society. I assumed that withdrawal from classes at any point leads to a higher rate of recidivism based upon a lack of skills and/or job training. However, studies have also shown that prisoners who have had some correctional education have a lower rate of recidivism than those prisoners who choose to abstain from correctional education altogether (Chappell, 2004;

Nuttall et.al, 2003). Thus, this framework demonstrates the likelihood of recidivism and success with the understanding that there are exceptional prisoners who will be successful despite their dropping out of a correctional education course/program.

To gain the perceptions of prisoner students on the correctional education experience is to look beyond statistical data and into what makes a prisoner choose to attend and persist in classes. It was my hope that the voice of the prisoner as participant in classes would shed light on the factors that contribute to successful re-entry into society. The following chapter is a description of the study's phenomenological methodology, research questions, and data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

When considering the correctional education experience, who are the major stakeholders? What does correctional education mean to a prisoner student? How does correctional education translate to post-release success? With little research on prisoner perceptions of the correctional education experience, there are many questions about the life of the prisoner student to be answered. Thus, the primary focus of this study was to determine which pre-incarceration factors contribute to the correctional education experience, and how the educational programming behind bars affects the future career, employment, and educational goals of prisoner students. This chapter provides a discussion of the methodology used to address the research questions. Specifically, this chapter examines the research questions, the qualitative methodology, phenomenology, and the researcher's role in the research process. Additional topics in this chapter include method of data collection and analysis, establishing trustworthiness, and the delimitations and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

There were three major concerns at the beginning of this study. The first was the previous educational and employment experiences of the prisoner student and how these experiences impact educational choices during incarceration. The second concern was how the prisoner student perceived the correctional education course offerings, class environments, and instructors. The final concern was how the combination of pre-incarceration experiences and the correctional education experience translate to successful re-integration into society. Therefore, the primary research question guiding this study was: How do prisoners perceive their correctional education experience?

Secondary research questions guiding this study included:

- What motivates students to attend class?
- How do prior educational and employment experiences affect student motivation?
- What is the institutional culture of the prison as it relates to education, and how does that affect the students?
- Are there discernable differences between the perceptions of prison inmates and prison administration as they relate to correctional education?
- What are the causes of these discernable differences, if they exist?
- What are prisoners' perceptions of what a successful person does? What career and educational aspirations do prisoners have?

To attempt to answer these research questions, I chose a qualitative research methodology; this methodology is designed to inform the conceptual framework for the study. The following section discusses the connection between the research questions and the conceptual framework.

Research Questions and the Conceptual Framework

The research questions for this study were primarily focused on determining how prisoners perceive their correctional education experience with emphasis on the effect of this education upon post release integration/success. The research on correctional education and recidivism (Drakeford, 2002; Gehring, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Silva, 1994) indicates that education while incarcerated is key to changing inmate behavior and beliefs affecting re-integration into society. The availability of programs, the criteria for participation in these programs, and the incentives for program completion are all components of correctional education that were addressed through information offered by the assistant warden and the

corrections educator. This information complemented the prisoner student data by filling in missing pieces of the puzzle that could not be addressed by anyone but a prison administrator.

The bulk of the data for this study came from the prisoner students. The narratives of past educational and employment experiences, current educational experiences, and future education and career goals were the major focus of the data collection process. These perceptions informed many facets of the conceptual framework, including but not limited to background characteristics, perceptions of programming in place, and the use of inmate tutors in adult education classes. Each of these areas will be discussed further in chapter four.

To explore the relationship between participation in correctional education and job readiness upon release, the questionnaire included items that addressed prisoner students' perceptions of success and their future educational and employment goals. These perceptions contributed to the data by informing the Re-Integration section of the conceptual framework.

Phenomenology

Rudestam and Newton (2001) describe a phenomenological study as “identifying and locating participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon that is being explored” (P.92). In this case, the phenomenon is adult education in a correctional setting. Prisoner students are the primary source of data – they are what Rudestam and Newton call “experiential experts of the phenomenon being studied” (p.92). The voice of the prisoner student as participant in correctional education was captured through one-on-one interviewing. Each prisoner student was interviewed for approximately forty-five minutes by the researcher. These interviews took place within the education buildings of the prison – in the context of the study. Observations of adult education classes in session added further contextual data for analysis.

The field notes taken during the interviews and observations enhanced the primary researcher's ability to accurately portray the correctional education setting as well as its participants.

Because no story is ever told from a single perspective, members of the prison administration (the assistant warden and the corrections educator) provided additional information through completing a survey, and several conversations. These perspectives complemented the data derived from the prisoner students and provided a better description of the research setting.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher entered the correctional setting with the understanding that, as a qualitative researcher, she was also a learner (Glesne, 1999). The correctional facility was her classroom, and the prisoner students were her informants. The entire prison environment set the context for the study, as it was a community within itself. The classroom setting, the curricula, and even the staff to prisoner student interaction all informed the field notes – the product of researcher learning. The environment and study participants confirmed the researcher's assumption that, despite three years of studying correctional education, she had so much yet to learn.

An additional role of the researcher in this study was research instrument. According to Patton (2002), "Because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, a qualitative report should include some information about the researcher" (p. 566). I acknowledge that I am an educator and an advocate of correctional education. I was able to put the data and the instrument into perspective and that led to the collection of rich data that is presented in chapter four. The following is a discussion of how the biases of the researcher were identified and then controlled for during the research process.

Researcher Bias

Creswell (2003) describes the qualitative researcher as one who “systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 182). As an educator of teenaged students whose parents are quite often incarcerated, I witness the effects of having an absent parent. Those effects include changes in behavior, being moved from one custodial home to another, depression, and lack of motivation to attend school (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2004). As a result of these effects, I want to determine how to best keep parents, fathers in particular, out of prison and in the home where they belong. Finally, in my opinion, African American males in particular are disproportionately represented in correctional institutions nationwide, and African American males are underrepresented in U. S. colleges and universities. Thus, I not only advocate for the successful re-integration of America’s absent fathers, but I also hope for an increase in the number of African American males who serve as role models in the African American community. Glesne (1999) describes an advocate as someone who takes “a position on some issue that they become aware of through their research” (p. 120). Careful consideration had to be made to be sure that the position of the researcher on correctional education did not interfere with data collection and analysis. Thus, researcher bias was minimized as much as possible.

These biases were monitored throughout the data collection and analysis process. The findings were revisited several times to be certain that the words presented were those of the prisoner students. Researcher biases were listed as part of the field notes as a means of separating personal thoughts and questions from the data. This list served as a springboard for the discussion in chapter five. In all, I reported the findings in a manner that allowed the

participants' words to frame the argument for correctional education. The following is a discussion of the ethical considerations for the study.

Ethical Considerations

Two major factors were constantly considered during this inquiry – participant exploitation and the guidelines for the university institutional review board. Glesne (1999) describes the basic principles of institutional review boards as follows:

- The participant should always be able to make informed decisions,
- Withdrawal from the study without penalty should always be an option for the participant,
- Participant risks must be eliminated or significantly reduced,
- The benefits of participation should outweigh any risks, and
- The researcher must be qualified to conduct the study.

To address each of the principles, a thorough informed consent form (Appendix A) was constructed and carefully explained to each participant. Because the average literacy rate of prisoner students at SSP is grade five, the prisoner student consent form was written to accommodate that reading level. This consent form also stated in plain language that participation in the study would have no effect upon parole board decisions. This was important to ensure that all participants were choosing to take part in the interviews without that expectation. The administrator consent form was written to ensure the same protections; the explanation of study purpose was written in more detail, however. To address researcher qualification, I studied research methodology for three years and conducted a pilot study at SSP prior to conducting this study. Thus, I find that the use of informed consent and the preparation of the researcher successfully protected the participants of the study from a breach in

confidentiality or any other harm that could come to them as a result of participating in this study.

Since prisoner students are a vulnerable population (NIH, 2005), certain safeguards had to be established to ensure their protection from harm and/or exploitation. The proposed study was reviewed and approved by the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). Glesne (1999) recommends that the qualitative researcher understand that exploitation has to do with power, and that the researcher receives the prestige and status of publications or awards while the participants receive no recognition. In the case of the prisoner student who cannot leave the research setting, I had to agree to adhere to an additional set of regulations specifically geared toward prisoners (Appendix E). This set of regulations required that:

1. The conduct of research in the institution complies with professional and scientific ethics and with applicable state and federal guidelines for the use and dissemination of research findings;
2. The research presents no risk to the inmate;
3. The research consists of no more than interviews and/or written questionnaires and surveys, analysis of census and demographic data, or procedures which do not manipulate bodily conditions;
4. Operational personnel may assist research personnel in carrying out research and evaluation;
5. Any direct inmate participation is voluntary;
6. The names of all participants are held in confidence;
7. The results of all social science research are shared with the Department;

8. The research activities will not interfere with the normal operations of the institution;
9. The persons conducting the research are qualified to do so; and
10. The research will be at no cost to the Department, unless conducted at the Department's request.

(State R.S. 15:574.12(D)(2))

In summary, a series of carefully planned procedures was put in place to protect the prisoner students in the study from harm through coercion and/or breach of confidentiality.

Data Collection

Qualitative data is a series of descriptions that can take the form of quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents (Patton, 2002). The collection of data is a process that requires researcher skill and organization. The following is a description of site selection, the pilot study, gaining access, participant selection, the interview guide, and observation and field notes.

Site Selection

Southern State Penitentiary (SSP) is a maximum-security prison housing approximately 5,100 inmates. The prison sits on 18,000 acres of farmland in the southern United States. Over one half of the inmate population is serving a life sentence and will never be paroled. Over 80 percent of the inmates have been convicted of violent offenses. According to the mission statement, it is the institution's responsibility to educate the prisoners and provide opportunities to assist the prisoners in eventually becoming productive members of society. The prison's action plan is consistent with this mission. The plan emphasizes literacy education but promotes all types of correctional education for its prisoners. I chose SSP as the site for the study due to the institution's belief in education for the rehabilitation of the inmate. I have also had an

opportunity to conduct a pilot study at SSP that influences the methodology of the present study. The following section discusses the pilot study and its influences upon the present study.

The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted at SSP in July of 2005 to test the interview questionnaire and research methodology. The participants were five male prisoner students between the ages of 26 and 45 years of age. These participants were graduates of the seminary at the prison. Additional participants included the assistant warden and the director of education. The research methodology called for a semi-structured interview (approximately 40-60 minutes in length) with each participant. The research purpose and informed consent were described to each participant and each participant agreed to be audio taped during the interview. The tapes were transcribed verbatim and those transcripts were coded and analyzed for significant themes.

During the interviews with the assistant warden and the director of education, the importance of education for the prisoners was the recurrent theme. Prior to taking part in classes, however, inmates were required to work at the prison for the first 364 days of incarceration. This time is also to be spent completing moral training – a means of coming to terms with the crime(s) committed and the consequences of the crime(s) on both the inmate and his family/loved ones. To the warden, morality is key to rehabilitation and moral training must take place prior to any educational intervention. The stories of the participants were complementary to those of the assistant warden and the director of education. These stories were in direct contrast to the stereotype of the prisoner. The following is a discussion of the research findings.

Pilot Study Findings

The findings of the pilot study identified the significance of family relationships (children, spouses, and grandparents) to the participants. These relationships were motivation for the men

to continue with their educational attainment. In addition to becoming educated, these men were also educators themselves – they held Bible studies and tutored other men from their dormitories. Additional themes included the influence of prior educational experiences and the impact of correctional education upon future plans. The participants shared their prior experiences with teachers and/or professors; it was evident that the experiences were different, yet the fact that there was at least one teacher who made a huge impact on the participants was consistent with all five inmate students. This teacher served as motivation to do well in school. Each participant discussed a series of negative educational experiences that they at least partially attributed to their incarceration – this is an indication that teachers and administrators in the elementary and secondary school are key to shaping the lives of their students.

The future plans of the participants indicated that they were interested in contributing to society upon release from prison. The majority of participants planned to take part in some form of ministry or motivational speaking in society. For some, jobs were already in place once they returned to society. Key to their testimonies is the fact that they were thankful for their educational experiences and the changes they caused. Further, the participants wanted to share those experiences and cause change in their fellow inmates as well as society at large. Thus, the pilot study indicated the significance of the prisoner voice – the thoughts and experiences of the participants – presented a different side of the prisoner than is typically seen. There were limitations to the study, however, that caused changes in the interview questionnaire for this study. The following is a discussion of those limitations and the changes to the methodology as a result.

Pilot Study Limitations

There were some considerations for the prisoner student that were not expected prior to the pilot study. These considerations include sentence length, age of participant, and level of educational attainment at the time of the study. First, the length of sentence was not specified during participant selection, and there were some participants who did not have the option of parole/release as part of their sentence. This was problematic due to a series of post-incarceration questions that were part of the interview questionnaire. Though the participants in question handled the questions gracefully, the interview protocol was adjusted for the present study to control for the possibility of interviewing a participant who did not have the option of parole/release. The assistant warden agreed to provide me with the length of sentence for the participants of the study (once they are purposefully randomly selected). As a result, I knew which participants would be able to answer the questions about post-incarceration versus those participants who were asked to describe their future educational and employment plans within the prison.

The questionnaire for the pilot study used broad, predetermined age groups (18-25, 26-45, etc.). The participants for the study all fit under the 26-45 year group. As a result, age was difficult to determine for the participants. To more accurately determine the age of the participants, the present study questionnaire asked for the participant's precise age (there were no age groups – just a line next to the question: What is your age?).

Finally, the educational attainment for all of the participants was too similar and not representative of the general population of the prison. The assistant warden made the selection of the five participants for the study based upon her own set of criteria. As a result, I was presented with five of the finest examples of rehabilitation and educational growth in the prison. The

problem with this is that the findings of the pilot study describe a very small population of prisoners – those who have completed a college degree in the seminary. This is not the norm of the prison – these men were the exceptions. To more accurately represent the total prisoner population, the participants of the present study had to be members of classes most taken/attended by the prisoners as a whole. Thus, the present study sought to interview the prisoner students currently taking pre-college adult education classes, those classes that the majority of inmates take. The pilot study was an opportunity to see what worked well and what needed to change. The interview questionnaire was amended to reflect the need to be sensitive to the prisoner who will never be released and to accurately determine the age of the participants, and the participant selection criteria were changed to better generalize the results of the study. The final change to the interview questionnaire was the option to skip a question. For each question, the participant is given the option to refuse to answer by checking a box that reads: I would rather not answer this question. Through these changes, the current study better reflected the voice of the prisoner in a manner that was non-threatening.

Now that the pilot study has been discussed, I will explain how this previous study made gaining access for the present study a much easier process.

Gaining Access

The assistant warden and the director of education of SSP met with me just prior to the collection of data for the pilot study in July 2005. After several phone and email contacts, we met in person and discussed my research needs and goals. I informed the administration that I would need to return to SSP to conduct a larger study in the upcoming months. Thus, when I was approved by SSP to conduct interviews and observe classes (Appendix H), that approval included two trips to collect data: the pilot study and the dissertation research. Since June of

2005, I have kept in contact with the assistant warden at SSP through email and phone conversations. The assistant warden has expressed (verbally and in writing) her support of this study, and she stated that she looked forward to my second visit. For these reasons, gaining entry was not an issue that required formal letter writing and waiting for approval. Rather, I contacted the assistant warden and made an appointment to come out to SSP and collect the data. This contact took place following the dissertation committee's approval of the research proposal. Once the dates for my visit were established, I sent, via certified mail, the administrator questionnaires (Appendix I) for the assistant warden and the director of education. This mailing took place approximately five days prior to my scheduled visit. The administrators had the option of completing the questionnaire prior to my visit. Additionally, I attached the criteria for participation in the study and asked that the assistant warden select the thirty (30) potential participants who met these criteria prior to my visit. The following section discusses the selection of these participants for the study.

Selection of Participants

The primary research question that guided this study was: how do prisoners perceive their correctional education experience? To attempt to answer this question, I searched for a sampling strategy that would provide me with participants capable of providing insights into the correctional education experience. After investigating the various types of sampling, I chose purposeful sampling for this inquiry. According to Patton (2002), "Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). The particular type of purposeful sampling that was used in this study was purposeful random sampling. The primary focus of the data collection process was the effect of correctional education upon the prisoner student. The majority of data therefore had to come from prisoner

students with administrative data and observational data as supplements in the data collection process. The sample size for this type of inquiry does not need to be large; in contrast, the sample size could be as small as one (N=1) (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). However, to fully understand the correctional education setting, and the experiences of prisoner students in that setting, I chose to interview ten prisoner students (N=10) and two prison administrators (N=2). The prisoner students were required to meet the following criteria in order to be included in the study:

- Incarcerated males at Southern State Penitentiary
- At least 50% of the sample must have the possibility of parole,
- Participants must be currently enrolled in one or more of the pre-college adult education programs offered at SSP,
- Any other participants were therefore excluded from the study (with the exception of the assistant warden and the educator).

The criteria were sent via email to the assistant warden. The following section is a description of how the participants of the study were identified and contacted.

Identifying Study Participants

To identify the actual participants of the study, an email (Appendix F) was sent to the assistant warden requesting a sample of at least 30 prisoner students fitting the criteria listed above. From the list of 30 participants, I randomly selected ten (N=10) participants.

Purposeful random selection from the list of available participants made the selection process equitable. The following day, the assistant warden informed me that, due to SSP policy and security reasons, I would not be provided with a list of potential participant names. Instead, I was provided with a listing of one hundred sixty five numbers (1-165) representing the

prisoner students who fit the criteria for participation in the study. The numbers of the prisoner students who were eligible for parole (N=20) were identified. The assistant warden requested that I select fifteen prisoner students from the list of numbers. The students who were selected would then be informed of my study and provided a copy of my consent form to review prior to the interview. From the list of prisoner students eligible for parole, ten numbers were selected. The same number (N=10) of prisoner students was selected from the list of students sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. Though I would only need ten participants, I selected additional participants to account for those who refused to participate, who were ill, or who were otherwise unable to attend the interview. I submitted the list of twenty numbers to the assistant warden and I was assured that at least ten prisoner students who were purposefully randomly selected would be available for interviewing upon my arrival at SSP.

The administrators for the study were chosen using purposeful sampling as well. To find out the most information about the correctional education program, I had to go to the persons responsible for that program. The assistant warden of programming was the first participant – her knowledge of the prison education programs was vast and her advocacy for correctional education could not be masked. The next logical step was to enlist the insight of the educator over the program. This educator is not the same person I interviewed for the pilot study – the new educator recently took over the adult education classes at SSP. Thus, the participants for this study were selected carefully to yield information-rich data.

Rationale for Selecting the Interview Method

To gather the perceptions of prisoner students and to fully understand the correctional education process, the interview was the chosen method for primary data collection. Gay and

Airasian (2003) describe the interview as “oral, in person administration of a questionnaire to each member of a sample” (p. 290). The interview is best used when soliciting information that is personal, lengthy, and that cannot be structured as multiple-choice items. The personal experiences of prisoner students both prior to and during incarceration were the focus of the study, and the interview method best captured the participant responses. In other words, to fully portray the perceptions of prisoner students of the correctional education experience, the participant words had to be a key part of the data collection process. The interview process came with its advantages and disadvantages, however.

Gay and Airasian (2003) find that a well-conducted interview can produce rich, in-depth data. Learning about the most memorable teachers and most influential people in participants’ lives was part of the interview process that demonstrates this point. The disadvantages to the interview are the expense and, as Gay and Airasian describe, “the responses given by a respondent may be biased and affected by her or his reaction to the interviewer, especially if there is not a long time relationship with the interviewer” (p.291). In the case of this study, the expense of the interviews was limited to travel expenses and copying expenses. The researcher was able to use her professional day for data collection, eliminating the cost of an absence from work. Thus, the use of interviewing to collect data from prisoner students and administrators was a wise choice and the advantages far outweighed the disadvantages. The construction of the interview questionnaire follows.

The Interview Guide

Patton (2002) describes the interview guide as a list of “questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview” (p. 343). The purpose of the guide is to be certain that the same set of questions is asked of all participants. The interviewer may then probe the

participants and ask additional questions during the course of the interview. For this study, a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix G) was used to shed light on the research questions and to gain the opinions of the participants on their past and current experiences. The questions were carefully constructed in three parts to capture prior educational and employment experiences, current educational experiences (while incarcerated), and future/post-release educational and employment plans. Though every interview began and ended the same, the use of the semi-structured interview guide allowed for conversations to emerge as the interview proceeded (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

The interview guide permitted each participant to answer the same set of questions about his correctional education experience. The two administrators, who both opted to complete their questionnaires prior to my arrival, answered the same set of administrator questions (Appendix I). After the final interview question (“Is there anything that I have not asked you that will help me better understand your correctional education experience or your future plans?”), I thanked the participant for his participation and expressed my gratitude for his valuable input. I reiterated the terms of informed consent and assured each participant that his audiotape and transcript would be handled securely and disposed of once the interview data was no longer in use. I turned off the tape recorder after each interview and spent five to ten minutes making field notes about participant demeanor and other observations made during the course of the interview.

Recording

Gay and Airasian (2003) describe two forms of recording responses during an interview: manually (written) or mechanically (tape recorder). If responses are recorded manually, space should be provided on the interview guide to record responses. This process, however,

may make the respondent nervous, feeling as if the researcher is writing down every word he or she says. According to Gay and Airasian, "... if an audiocassette recorder or video camcorder is used, the interview moves more quickly, and responses are recorded exactly as given. If a response needs clarifying, several persons can listen to or view the recordings independently and make judgments about the response" (p.292). I chose to use both written and mechanically recorded responses for this study. Extra space was added into the interview guide and a tape recorder was used to document participant responses. This was important to me due to the length of travel and the security issues surrounding the visit.

To most effectively document the interviews, it was necessary to use a recording procedure that limited the loss of data due to mechanical error or writing notes ad hoc. According to Patton (2002), "the use of the tape recorder does not eliminate the need for taking notes, but does allow you to concentrate on taking strategic and focused notes, rather than attempting verbatim notes" (p. 383). Thus, key words, points, and phrases used by the participants were written manually into the interview guide by the researcher.

The tape recorder was tested prior to each interview, and a single mini cassette tape was used for each participant and then labeled with the participant number. Each participant was asked whether the interview session could be audio taped. Each participant agreed to the audio taping, and an audible tape was produced for each participant. The prisoner students did not appear to be nervous in the presence of the audio recorder; some participants even boldly proclaimed that they were not concerned at all about the presence of the recorder. Once all ten tapes were recorded, labeled, and collected, the task of transcription of the tapes became the focus. The following section is a discussion of the transcription of the audiotape.

Transcription

Almost immediately, I chose to transcribe all ten participant audiotapes on my own, as opposed to hiring a transcriptionist to do all the work for me. According to Patton (2002), “Doing all or some of your own interview transcriptions (instead of having them done by a transcriber), for example, provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights” (p.441). The transcription process provided for me an opportunity to re-visualize each participant, a process that brought back rich contextual data about the setting, participant appearance and behavior, and the researcher’s behavior during the interview process. It was amazing to see the amount of recollection that came as a result of listening to the voices of the participants. Thus, transcribing the data myself was an aid in further contextualizing the participant responses.

Field Notes

A final component of the data collection process was the use of field notes. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) describe field notes as “an opportunity to record what researchers see and hear outside the immediate context of the interview, their thoughts about the dynamics of the encounter, ideas for inclusion in later fieldwork and issues that may be relevant at the analytical stage” (p.133). The researcher used her field notes to draw sketches of computer labs where classes took place, to describe the appearance and demeanor of the participants and administrators, to describe the interaction between researcher and other prison staff, and to document personal reflections upon the lengthy interview process. Many of the field notes were written onto the Observation Protocol sheets; some sketches were written onto separate lined pages set aside for additional comments. In all, the field notes made the collection of extraneous data convenient and effective.

Summary

In summary, data collection took the forms of one-on-one interviews, brief classroom observations, and field notes. Additional conversations with prisoner administrators were necessary to fully capture the context of the correctional setting. Data was collected through pencil and paper as well as mechanical and electronic means. Interviews, observations, and field notes were manually recorded on paper. The ten prisoner student interviews were audio recorded as well. Email was used to conduct follow-up inquiries with prison administrators. The audiotapes were transcribed by the researcher. The data collection process was therefore well planned and executed. The following section is a description of how the data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative study begins with the start of the study and is an on-going process thereafter (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The analysis of data entails sifting through, categorizing, and making sense of large amounts of data. The following is a description of the coding, categorizing, interpreting, and reporting of data in the study.

Coding

The practice of coding is a continual process of “sorting and defining...scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose” (p. 135). These data include observation notes, interview transcripts, documents, and researcher notes. This method of organization allowed the researcher to put similar pieces of data together for interpretation. Interview transcripts, observational notes, and field notes underwent the coding process. The researcher carefully reviewed each document and labeled the text with abbreviated themes, or codes. The coded sections were then copied from the documents and pasted into matrices (this will

be further discussed in the following section). Each major code identified a concept or central idea for the study (Glesne, 1999). These concepts and ideas were derived from the research questions for the study. For example, if a participant stated, “the teachers didn’t care about us... they just wanted a paycheck,” the code would read PR-TEACH to indicate a prior experience with a teacher. A separate log was kept to document the various codes that were assigned to the documents. An additional log was then created to show how various codes were being grouped together. The latter log aided the researcher in organizing the finding statements for chapter four. The process of coding, categorizing, and grouping was continued until there were no more documents to be analyzed. The following is a description of the use of matrices in the analysis process.

Matrices

Glesne (1999) describes matrices as a means of data display for interpretation. These data displays should aid the researcher in identifying the components of the study, though these components may change over the course of analysis. For the purposes of this study, thematic matrices were used. These matrices aided the researcher in identifying themes that occurred and reoccurred in the data. For each matrix, the theme title was prominently displayed across the top (ex: Success). The participant pseudonyms were listed in the left column of the matrix. The relevant quotes for that theme were listed to the right of the participant name. This data was copied and pasted from the interview transcript to the matrix using a word processing program. Any additional contextual data from the field notes was recorded in the appropriate matrix using RESEARCHER as the participant name. This triangulation of data contributed to finding credibility in the study (Glesne), and allowed the researcher to test for consistency between various data sources (Patton, 2002). With a set of thematic matrices

prepared, the next step was the finding statements and the reporting of these findings. The following section is a description of this process.

Reporting the Findings

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) describe the reporting of the findings as the “culmination of the research process” (p. 287). Further analysis of the data takes place as the researcher transforms the matrices into findings and written commentary. Important elements of the findings include

- An account of the research methods and justification for those methods,
- Demonstration by the researcher that the findings are derived from the data,
- A guide through the key findings of the data,
- An explanation of both untypical as well as recurrent themes from the data, and
- Sparing use of direct quotes from the data.

Establishing Trustworthiness

To successfully solicit accurate and detailed responses from participants of the study, the researcher had to establish trustworthiness. This began with establishing rapport with the participants, and this had to be done rather quickly due to the relatively short time spent with the participants. Glesne (1999) describes this rapport as the equivalent to trust, which is key to soliciting a detailed response to research questions. To ensure the credibility of the findings and interpretations, the researcher must establish trustworthiness with the participants. Glesne suggests the researcher spend adequate time at the research site, and to be aware of researcher bias and subjectivity while at the site. Due to the lack of ample time to spend at SSP, the researcher had to establish trustworthiness with the prisoner students through rapport. This took place through the warm greeting (including a firm handshake) and thorough explanation of the

study prior to beginning the interview. I was always conscious of the facial and body language of the participants, and I was certain to establish a connection between the participant and myself. I am certain that some sense of rapport was established with each participant. I also made positive and encouraging remarks about prisoner students' current educational experiences and future educational and employment plans during the course of the interviews. This aided in reassuring the participants that the researcher's intentions were good.

The establishment of trustworthiness with prison administration took place over nearly a year. Since May 2005, I have been corresponding with the assistant warden through U.S. mail, email, and telephone calls. The researcher also got an opportunity to meet the educator for this study and to explain the research purpose. Thus, the researcher was able to gather information-rich data from the study participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) use four criteria for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish credibility, the evaluation of the findings to determine whether they are a credible representation of the data, I transcribed the audio tapes verbatim. Additionally, I made certain that the words presented in the study findings were solely those of the participants. To address transferability, the degree to which the study findings can be transferred beyond this study, I carefully describe the population and sample and the procedures followed during the study. Dependability, the assessment of the researcher's ability to collect data, analyze data, and generate theories, was addressed through my evaluation of pilot study procedure and findings. Based upon the pilot study, the methodology was revised and further detail was added to the procedure to strengthen the data collection process. Finally, to address confirmability, the determination of how well the study's findings are a reflection of the data collected, I made constant reference to the raw data (transcripts) throughout the process

of reporting and discussing the findings. In addition to the matrices created to analyze the data, a table was created to connect each participant to characteristics unique to that participant. Thus, the data collection and analysis processes were carefully thought out and executed to ensure the clear and thorough representation of the prisoner student voice. A discussion of the delimitations and limitations of the study follows.

Delimitations

The researcher acknowledges certain delimitations to the study, primarily involving the nature of the setting. First, the study is delimited to males, as SSP is a correctional facility for men only. It is further delimited in scope to prisoner students who were participating in pre-college adult education classes. This study does not include prisoner students taking courses in the seminary, taking vocational/technical classes, or taking correspondence courses.

Limitations

Gay and Airasian (2003) define a limitation as “some aspect of the study that the researcher knows may negatively affect the study but over which he or she has no control” (p.91). There are a few limitations to this study that warrant mentioning. Time constraints and sample selection were issues that could not be controlled for. First, the researcher was unable to spend more than one hour with each prisoner student. This was due to the students’ busy work and school schedules. Additionally, a member of the prison staff, a gentleman from the classification department, had to escort me everywhere I went. Thus, staff and participant availability was limited.

Sample selection was also a limitation of the study. I was unable to select participants from a list of eligible prisoner students. Instead, I supplied a list of eligibility criteria and prison administration selected the participants based upon this criteria. To decrease the effect of this

limitation, I used a purposeful random selection process to get the ten prisoner students for this study from the list of 165 eligible participants as identified by prison administration.

Summary

The method for any research study is its foundation – without a plan there would be no study. The preceding chapter was a description of the research plan for this study. A phenomenological study, the method called for open-ended interviews and classroom observations. The use of an Observation Protocol and field notes enhanced the data for the study. Data analysis consisted of the use of coding and thematic matrices. Trustworthiness was established through establishing rapport, and the delimitations and limitations were addressed at the close of the chapter.

The final report for this study consists of chapters four and five: the Findings and the Discussion. Chapter Four, the Findings, discusses the findings based on themes developed through coding and data analysis. This chapter includes a rich description of the study setting, participants, and descriptive quotes and commentary to accompany each finding. Chapter Five, the Discussion, is a connection between the findings, the literature, and the conceptual framework of the study. Other interpretations and implications of the study findings are also discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The primary purpose for conducting this study was to determine the perceptions of prisoner students as they participate in correctional education. Through one-on-one interviews and classroom observations, the researcher was able to learn about the correctional education environment from the perspective of the prisoner student (and the prison administrator). The significance of the study was centered on the missing voice of the prisoner student from the literature. Thus, this study sought to uncover this voice while learning what it is like to be a student in prison.

The primary research question guiding this study was: How do prisoners perceive their correctional education experience? To sharpen the focus of the study to include prior, present, and future experiences and expectations, the following secondary research question further guided the study:

1. What motivates students to attend class?
2. How do prior educational and employment experiences affect student motivation?
3. What is the institutional culture of the prison as it relates to education, and how does that affect the students?
4. Is there a discernable difference between the perceptions of prison inmates and prison administration as they relate to correctional education?
5. What are the causes of the discernable difference, if there is one?
6. What are prisoners' perceptions of what a successful person does? What career and educational aspirations do prisoners have?

Data analysis for this study was centered on emergent themes from observations and prisoner student and administrator interviews. This analysis is presented here in two major sections. The first section is a description of Southern State Penitentiary and an introduction to each participant. The second section is a presentation of emergent themes that frame the correctional education experience through the words of prisoner students.

Southern State Penitentiary

History

Established in the early to mid 1800's, Southern State Penitentiary was the state's first true prison. The prison was leased out to private businessmen who barely clothed, fed, and housed the inmates. In exchange for these living conditions, inmates were expected to work long hours manufacturing products for profit. While the prisoners worked hard and were barely taken care of, the lessees earned a tremendous amount of profit. To increase productivity, prisoners were often brutally beaten (Prison Web Site, 2006).

By the end of the 1800's, a reform movement began in response to newspaper reports of prisoner abuse, and the state resumed control of the prison. By 1916, a Board of Control was established and a General Manager was hired to oversee the prison operations. To save money, the General Manager fired most of the guards and appointed trustees from the inmate population to guard their fellow prisoners. The General Manager did away with the striped uniforms, and he purchased 8,000 acres of land from neighboring farmers to nearly double the size of the facility (Prison Web Site, 2006).

The prosperity of SSP was soon over, however. World War II brought about severe budget cuts for the prison, the black and white striped uniforms were re-instituted, and the prison nearly fell apart. The prisoners were again neglected and brutalized.

By the mid 1900's, inmates began to protest the harsh treatment and hard work at SSP and the media was once again exposing these poor living conditions to the world. With a newly elected governor whose platform centered on the clean up of SSP, conditions began to improve again. However, by the early 1960's, the prison budget was dramatically cut again and the large number of inmate assaults at the prison led to SSP being known as the Bloodiest Prison in the southern United States (Prison Web Site, 2006).

In the 1970's, SSP had its first female warden, a well-known advocate for prison reform. The trustees were no longer used to guard the prisoners. Guards were hired in large numbers, and the prison was then able to begin rehabilitative efforts and to administer adequate medical attention to its prisoners (Prison Web Site, 2006).

Today, SSP is an American Correctional Association (ACA) accredited facility, and the prison's training academy and health care center are nationally recognized. New inmate facilities are being planned and constructed, and inmate educational programs and organizations flourish throughout the facility.

SSP Today

Established in 1835, Southern State Penitentiary sits on nearly 20,000 acres of rich farmland in the southern United States. It is the only maximum-security prison in the state. There are approximately 5,115 inmates currently housed at SSP, and approximately 1,700 men and women are employed at the facility.

Of the 5,115 inmates at SSP, the vast majority (90%) are violent offenders. Over one half (68%) of the population is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. The average sentence is 82.5 years. The average age of an inmate is 37.8 years old.

The mission of SSP is “to provide meaningful opportunities to enhance, through a variety of education, work, social service and medical programs, the individual’s desire to become a productive member of society, while providing a safe, stable work environment for employees” (Prison Web Site, 2006). This mission is reflected in the prison’s educational and vocational offerings. The list of programs is extensive:

- ACT Testing for inmates
- Job Skills Program
- Pre-Release Exit Program
- Step Toward Educational Progress
- Vocational Training in the following areas: body & fender, carpentry, culinary, electrical, golf course management, graphic arts, heavy equipment operator, horticulture, hospital orderly, laundry technician, library clerk, painting, plumbing, warehouse, and welding.

In addition to the educational programs offered, there are rehabilitative programs and organizations at SSP. These programs include:

- Character Counts: mental and moral character classes: over 90% of the inmate population participates in this program.
- Parenting Skills: offered to all inmates at SSP who are within 12 months of release.
- Substance Abuse Program
- Faith-Based Programming (Bible College)

There are an additional twenty one inmate organizations for self-improvement. The prison also has its own magazine, The Voice, and its own radio station. Both are run by and for inmates. In summary, SSP is an American Correctional Association accredited institution organized and operated to maximize prisoner improvement and post-release success.

SSP: A Community Within

Thinking back to my first visit to SSP for the pilot study, I remember marveling at the 20-mile stretch of road that led to the prison gates. The winding road is quite inviting; its black asphalt surface is an indication that it is a road often traveled and much cared for. This time, for the twenty mile ride down to the gates, I was reminded of the tragedy of the recent hurricanes as I witnessed broken and bent trees where there were once very tall oak and cypress trees. Where the road was formerly lined with lush greenery, the color most seen on this trip was the grayish brown of the devastated and dying foliage. The houses appeared to be in good shape, ranging in size and prestige from rusty mobile homes to magnificent plantation houses tucked away off the road. Just as the clouds appeared to threaten rain, however, I rolled slowly into the gates of the prison.

I distinctly remember being so excited during the first visit that I went through the wrong security check line. This time, I was certain to pull into the correct line, where I was met by two female armed guards and one male armed guard, all dressed in navy blue uniforms. Not as friendly as the set of guards I had met during my first visit, but pleasant enough to keep me at ease, two of the guards went to work taking my car apart (searching for weapons, drugs, and contraband) while the other guard called to prison administration building to alert my escort of my presence. The guards went through my carefully prepared interview bag and found my tape recorder and audiotapes. The recorder was confiscated for a few moments while the guards called to verify whether I would be allowed to bring the recorder in (apparently, my gate pass should have stated that the tape recorder was allowed). My equipment was returned to me; I placed it back into its respective place in my interview bag. My cellular phone was confiscated, however, and I was given a ticket to retrieve it after my interviews were over. I was provided

with a large foam board visitor sign, resembling the size and appearance of a license plate, to put on my dashboard. I was then directed to drive through the gates and into the parking lot of the administration building – just 10 feet away from the gate. I found a space near the entrance of the administration building and gathered my interview bag, loaded with pre-arranged folders for each participant, as well as Observation Protocol sheets and Field Notes sheets. By the time I gathered my things and locked my purse in the trunk of my car, a tall gentleman was standing in front of the administration building. He told me his name was Edward Walker, and he would be my escort for the day.

Mr. Walker first took me into the administration building down a well-lit hallway lined with administrative offices. We went to Assistant Warden Celia Franklin's office to meet Sharon, the warden's secretary, and a gentleman named Leonard Clark. After we shared a hug and exchanged warm greetings, I provided Sharon with a bound copy of the pilot study, and Mr. Clark showed me the list of 165 participants that I was asked to select from. The randomly chosen inmate names were highlighted in three colors: pink for prisoner students with parole dates, yellow for prisoner students ineligible for parole, and green for the additional participants I selected (in the event that a prisoner student declined participation, was ill, or otherwise unavailable). Mr. Clark gave Mr. Walker a copy of the inmate list and we were off to begin the interviews.

SSP is broken up into a series of individual compounds called camps. Mr. Walker informed me that we would have to travel to three camps in order to conduct all ten interviews. Apparently, adult education (literacy) and GED preparation classes are offered in camps M and N – an inmate interested in any other educational program would have to move to the camp where the main education building is located (the main education building offers literacy/GED as

well). Because the prison is so large, and the camps are spread out amongst the grounds, we had to drive to each camp along the paved roads of the prison. Our vehicle, a white late model Ford, rattled along the roads paved in asphalt and assorted rocks. Along the way to the first camp, I noticed the familiar – rows of crops of corn and cabbage and other vegetables, ripe for picking, and inmate art (eagles and other animals) painted onto the sides of various buildings we passed. I did not notice any inmates out in the fields tending to the crops. I asked Mr. Walker where the inmates were who handled the fields and he informed me that, since the hurricane, prison staff decreased and therefore reduced the number of guards left to supervise the field workers. Again, I was reminded of how far-reaching the hurricane's effects were.

When we arrived at Camp M, our first stop, Mr. Walker quickly found a parking space in front of the main building and we proceeded to the entrance. Every section of the individual camps and the entry to each camp is secured by a large gate, operated by an armed guard. Once the guard at Camp M acknowledged our presence, she buzzed us through the first gate, which quickly closed behind us. We were now between two sets of gates, standing in front of a sign-in window. The armed guard was protected by an iron grill in front of the sign-in desk; there was only space for us to reach one hand in and sign the log. Mr. Walker greeted the guard and told her that we were going in to interview some prisoners. The interior gate buzzed and opened and we were officially inside the community called Camp M. The first interview, I learned, would take place in a small office belonging to a classification officer in Camp M. Classification officers process incoming inmates and those inmates interested in enrolling in classes. My first participant, Paul, was waiting outside in the hallway with a look of curiosity on his face. I welcomed him with a warm smile and firm handshake, and the interview began.

Participant One: Paul

The little office belonging to the classification officer was pretty simple: a large desk took up the majority of the room. There was a chair just in front of the desk and there were bookshelves, a computer and a fax machine behind the desk on the back wall. Sitting across the desk from me, Paul was a picture of uncertainty. He scanned the office I was borrowing for the interview, taking a moment to observe me. Noticing his anxiety, I quickly introduced myself and explained the study. Additionally, I explained the three sets of questions I would be asking, and he appeared to become less anxious with each passing minute. Soon, I learned that he had grown up in Texas and was enrolled in special education classes as a child. He described himself as a “wild child,” a student whose teachers felt he acted out due to his boredom. Drugs and hanging out with the wrong crowd soon led Paul to withdrawing from school. Today, Paul credits the drug use for his difficulty with learning, especially math. A recovering addict, he enrolled in classes at SSP to appease his mother and his children. A former plumber and electrician by trade, Paul was unoptimistic about future career and educational endeavors. This was due in part to the length of his sentence – he is not eligible for parole for another forty years.

Once I finished making my post interview notes, I cleared the participant one and field note folders from the classification officer’s desk. I was whisked out of Camp M to the car with the SSP emblem printed in blue across its side, the small Ford that had obviously been driven a great deal on the prison grounds, and we were off to Camp N to conduct three more interviews.

The exterior of Camp N was quite the same as Camp M... we were unable to park directly in front of the main building, however, so we had to walk across the small, barren street in front of Camp N to get to the main gate. There the procedure was the same – we entered the first gate,

signed the log, and entered the interior gate. Interesting to note at Camp N was the small store and the visiting time that was taking place that day. First, as we entered the interior gate leading to Camp N, there was a 30-40 foot walkway, called a fence line, leading to another security gate. This gate resembled a chain link fence, only it was much stronger and taller than residential grade. This time the gate at the end of the fence line was not mechanical – rather, a young female guard came to the gate and asked where we were going. Mr. Walker informed the guard of my research needs, and the guard used a large key on an even larger key ring to open the gate. To the right, immediately after entering the gate, there was a very small shack like house. The house was enclosed in a gate that left a 5 foot by 5 foot space in front of the house. There was a bench along the gate just opposite the house. Painted on the front of the house were pictures of vegetables and there was a sign with the names and prices of various foods. The painting was intended to give the impression of a general store. The store was closed and empty when we first arrived at Camp N.

Prior to taking me to the education building at Camp N to conduct interviews, Mr. Walker took me through a set of double doors into a long, narrow room filled with men, women, and children. They were talking and laughing with each other. To the right of me there were cooks preparing everything from fried fish to nachos and cheese. The scene resembled a cafeteria or a smorgasbord with a variety of foods displayed behind a glass showcase. The cooks stood with serving spoons in hand, ready to serve the next customer. Mr. Walker greeted these gentlemen as we passed them. To the unknowing eye, the occasion would be some sort of large family gathering, like a family reunion. Yes, this was a family gathering, but the cooks were inmates from the culinary program and the men sitting with their families were prisoners from Camp N enjoying the privilege of visiting day. Inmates dressed in blue jeans and tee shirts sat at small

round tables surrounded by family members who were laughing and smiling. The room was crowded, which made me wonder about the issue of security. How safe was a gathering this big where there is no supervision? Yet, as I looked about the room more closely, I noticed guards throughout the room and at the double doors, standing watch over the morning's activities. I thought, this was the most beautiful but sad thing I had seen at the prison. Having shown me around the room, Mr. Walker showed me out of the cafeteria and into the education building. As we passed the small store house, I noticed a few prisoners had gathered and the shutter-like doors were open for business. I marveled at the community within the prison that I had witnessed so far.

The education building in Camp N was modest, with small classrooms lining a single hallway. Also in this education building hallway were four to six offices, presumably those of classification officers. An officer came out of one of the offices and he and Mr. Walker discussed where I would conduct my interviews. They chose to send me to a classroom in the hallway. The classroom was no larger than 20 feet by 20 feet. There was one window across the back wall, approximately six inches tall and three feet wide. There was one entrance/exit to the classroom, a steel door with a large window across the top (periodically, during the interview, I saw Mr. Walker and/or the guard on duty peek into the window to check on me). About ten student desks were in the classroom in no particular order. There was a small mahogany teacher's desk underneath the window, and a chalkboard to the right of the door.

Two of my three participants from Camp N were standing in the hallway waiting for me. I smiled and said, "Who wants to go first?" Participant two, Michael, eagerly volunteered. We entered the small classroom side by side and the interview began.

Participant Two: Michael

Michael eagerly sat down to talk with me in the tiny classroom in Camp N. We sat opposite each other, each of us in a student desk. He smiled and warmly greeted me, then listened intently as I described the study and the consent form. Once we began talking, I learned that Michael had been a good student until the eighth grade. It was at that point that he began consorting with older boys and selling drugs. The money became more important to him than school, so he dropped out. Never having had a legitimate job, Michael was incarcerated soon after leaving school. Too young to be housed in the general population, he was placed in a one-man cell when incarcerated. He had to stay there until he was old enough to be housed with the other prisoners.

Today, Michael has no children and is not married; he divides his time between boxing for the Department of Corrections and studying to take the GED test. He described his motivation to continue in school as “me wanting to be a better man... a better person... my family... moral support.” Upon release, Michael hopes to start his own small business designing and selling urban clothes.

Participant Three: Darren

Adjusting his glasses on his face, Darren enthusiastically entered the classroom and took a seat before me. A self-proclaimed class clown, he recalls going to school and doing just enough to pass. Darren dropped out of high school at age 17 in order to work to support his newborn daughter. He regrets having to do this, and his reason for enrolling in classes at SSP was “because I never had a chance to finish school.” Darren’s correctional education experience was jeopardized when he was kicked out of adult education classes for misconduct. Four months

later, however, Darren was given another chance, in another camp, to redeem himself in class. He has been doing well in his adult education classes since.

Participant Four: Alvin

Alvin was the first participant who appeared suspicious of me and my intentions. He sat across from me in his student desk with his arms folded. He admitted to me that he woke up disgusted and uninterested in participating in the interview: “at first I was about to back out. I woke up disgusted...but I said, man, I signed up, so I’m going down there.” After talking with me for about twenty minutes, Alvin was at ease and sharing his life experiences. After just one month in high school, he dropped out to sell drugs full-time. He described his neighborhood as a “fashion show” where everyone was concerned with money and materialistic things, and he wanted to fit into that lifestyle. Though he had a promising future playing high school football, Alvin still chose what he described as a life in the streets. At the same time that he was incarcerated, Alvin was father to one son who was then beginning to act out in school. This motivated Alvin to enroll in classes – to become a better role model for his son. His passion for writing poems and rap lyrics were also a significant motivation. Though he currently is not eligible for parole, Alvin aspires to take poetry classes via correspondence.

For the remaining seven interviews, I was to go to Camp L, also known as the main prison. This is where Mr. Walker’s office is located, and the location of the state-of-the-art education building. The two-story structure was built approximately two years ago. Just as my escort had done during the pilot study, Mr. Walker took me on a tour of the law library. There, inmates were looking through law books and using computers that lined the back wall of the library. Two inmates who were talking at a desk stopped what they were doing for a moment, just long

enough to observe me and greet Mr. Walker. We turned to exit the library, the inmates returned to their work, and we were on our way up the elevator to the classrooms upstairs.

In contrast to the small, traditional classroom in Camp N, the classrooms in the main prison's education building were much larger and more open. Each classroom was about 40 feet by 30 feet, with a large 6 foot by 5 foot window in the wall near the door overlooking the hallway. The door had a large window across the top of it as well. There were two 6 foot by 6 foot blank beige bulletin boards, the same color as the walls and floor in the classroom. The green chalkboard adjacent to the door was the only bit of color in the room.

The new adult education program involves the use of computers, so the final element of the classroom was two rows of approximately six Dell computers on oak computer desks, flanking opposing sides of the classroom. In an occupied class, students were observed working from workbooks as well as on the computers. Some prisoner students worked alone, where other students were working with an inmate tutor on the workbook assignment.

I was given an empty classroom just around the corner from the Bible College to conduct the remainder of my interviews. I took a seat at the teacher's desk next to the chalkboard and I placed a computer chair on the opposite side of the desk. Once I was given consent to record the interview by the prisoner student, I placed the tape recorder at the end of the teacher desk closest to the interviewee.

Participant Five: Ralph

Dressed in a pair of jeans, black rubber boots up to his knees, and holding a pair of black work gloves, Ralph appeared pleasant and eager to speak with me. A military child, Ralph described a life of moving from school to school up until ninth grade. His parents expected him to make decent grades, and he managed to do so. However, Ralph admitted that even though the

teachers and the opportunity to learn were right before him, he did not take advantage of these opportunities. Instead, he got involved in gang activity in Chicago and began a life of crime. This led to him dropping out of school. Ralph worked several jobs prior to being incarcerated... He enjoyed working with people at a local hotel and working as an orderly at a hospital the most. Now, Ralph divides his time between working, watching the news every day at 5:30 p.m., and studying to take the GED test. His goal is to have “some educational skills” when released from prison. He would also like to be a role model to “youngsters that’s out there” as he pursues his dream of becoming an X-ray technician.

Participant Six: Arnold

Arnold strolled into the classroom and took a seat before me, a huge smile on his face. I soon learned that he was a self-described “bad kid” as a child, arguing with and insulting his teachers. This was very disappointing to his mother who doted on him and provided him with his every desire. Arnold admits that he simply did not care about school, though he was interested in math and science. Instead of applying himself in school, Arnold was more interested in girls and selling marijuana. He was busted at school for possession of marijuana and was kicked out of school as a result. Arnold opted not to return to school when he was able. Instead, he joined the family business – installing carpet, wood, and tile floors. This was his occupation up until his incarceration. With a parole date in a year, Arnold has plans on obtaining his GED and then attending carpentry class. He feels that the combination of his flooring experience and the skills he will acquire in carpentry class will prepare him for owning his own contracting business upon release.

The time of day was about 2:30 p.m. and I had been interviewing and observing non-stop since 9:00 a.m. Mr. Walker's co-workers had prepared a potluck lunch; he was kind enough to bring me a plate of food from their luncheon. In less than ten minutes, I gobbled down the food and drank the bottle of water given to me by Mr. Walker. I wiped my hands and prepared the folders for participant seven. A participant from the pilot study stuck his head inside the door of the classroom to say hello. During our catching up conversation, Mr. Walker appeared in the door to check on me (he'd been doing this all day – giving me space to conduct interviews while checking up on me every few minutes). He asked me to collect my things and to relocate to his office, close to where he needed to be to conduct other business. Thus, the remaining interviews took place on the first floor of the education building in the relatively large office of Mr. Walker.

The central focus of Mr. Walker's office was a large oak desk sitting in the middle of the room. On top of the desk was Mr. Walker's collection of little green army men in various battle poses. A few manila folders and miscellaneous inmate paperwork were in piles on top of the desk; I carefully placed my own documents on a clear space in the middle of the desk. Scanning the room, I noticed two computers and a large printer along the wall opposite the front of the desk. There were no other remarkable features of the room. I sat the tape recorder at the edge of the desk opposite me where there was an office chair for visitors. I was prepared for participant seven.

Participant Seven: Jared

When Jared sat down to talk with me, he recollected enjoying going to school. He said that he was on the honor roll up until the third or fourth grade. His favorite subject was history; he enjoyed reading history books. Jared was a curious child, though, and often found himself investigating things that were illegal. By fifth grade, Jared was incarcerated at one of the state's

juvenile detention centers for the first time. The crime was selling drugs. Though Jared tried to work a construction job to get away from the drug life once released from the juvenile detention center, he soon found himself selling drugs again. He was incarcerated in 2000 on a drug charge, and there he sat before me – filled with regret.

After spending 2 ½ years in a maximum security cell block (where inmates are housed one to a cell and allowed one hour outside the cell for recreation), Jared was allowed to join the general population and begin taking classes. Though tutors came and visited him in his cell, Jared much prefers the freedom of dormitory lifestyle and being able to go to an actual class. In the future, Jared hopes to get into a graphic arts program at the prison. Afterwards, Jared aspires to take the Body & Fender course, so that he can detail and design automobiles upon release. He enjoys going to the hobby shop and creating crafts in his spare time, and he hopes to complete his education so he can be “content with myself.”

Participant Eight: Nathan

With his gray wool sailor’s hat pulled firmly over his head, Nathan took a seat before me and let out a deep sigh. He was scheduled to take his quarterly test, but he missed the test due to our interview. I offered to interview him later, but Nathan assured me that he would be permitted to take the test later. I took a good look at Nathan while he settled in his seat and held his manila folder, decorated with a single 3-dimensional cross and a hand-drawn picture of the Bible. He appeared sad, serious, and deep in thought. I soon learned that Nathan’s mother died when he was five, and his father was incarcerated when he was just seven years old. Sent to live with a grandmother and then an aunt, Nathan and his sister were encouraged to sell drugs to help earn money to pay the bills. Though Nathan loved learning and enjoyed going to school, he found the

shift in priorities after the loss of his parents to be too powerful to sustain his desire for education.

Today, Nathan feels ambitious and enjoys attending classes. He feels he has always had the potential to go to college, and he would like to take the welding course so that he can work offshore upon release. Nathan would also like to impress his father who was released from prison in 2000. Most importantly, Nathan wanted me to know that he would spend the rest of his life “saving souls” through his gospel rap and humanitarian deeds.

Participant Nine: Jarvis

Both tall and extremely muscular, Jarvis stepped humbly into Mr. Walker’s office and took a seat. He meekly placed his hands in his lap and spoke in low tones with a lowered head. Every response was “yes, ma’am” or “no, ma’am” for the first few minutes of our interview. At twenty-five years old, Jarvis struck me as still very child-like – very innocent. Yet, given our surroundings, I settled in to hear his story.

Jarvis told a story of being a child who just couldn’t settle down and participate in school for a long period of time. He said that teachers tried calling home and pulling him to the side. These interventions were short-lived, however. Jarvis’ mother tried to alter Jarvis’ behavior by sending him to work a summer program for at-risk teens. Despite all efforts, Jarvis ended up a teenage father of two children (one year apart) and a prison inmate all at the same time.

Today, Jarvis wants to continue to the completion of his GED so he can take care of his children. He would like to take up a trade in computers because his mother works in the computer field.

Participant Ten: Randall

As Randall settled into his chair, he greeted me and informed me that there were at least four more participants waiting to see me. Just then, Mr. Walker came to the office door and said the same. The time was four o'clock – I told Mr. Walker that the other participants would not be necessary – he went to send the other gentlemen back to the dormitory. I turned on my recorder and began my final interview of the day.

Randall recalls having an aunt who worked at his school. He said that he was treated fairly well as a result. However, Randall's desire to misbehave prevailed, and he dropped out of school in the eleventh grade. Randall worked for some time in a ship yard as a welder, though he had no formal welding training. Soon after, he found himself incarcerated, eager to be to his child "what my daddy never was to me." He aspires to improve his abilities in English and Reading in order to pass the GED test. Randall hopes to earn certificates in welding and cooking after reaching his goal.

The day of interviews and observations ended near 5 p.m. Though I had not had an opportunity to do more than observe a few moments in a GED class, I felt that the contributions of Ms. Drake and the ten participants would provide me with ample data to analyze. I was exhausted yet preoccupied with thoughts of data analysis. I had already begun to consider themes that emerged during the interviews – places where I had noticed changes in the facility, differences between pilot study and current participants, and assumptions I made that turned out to be false. With so much to do, and so much going on in my mind, I made the trip through the main gate of the prison where I was asked to open my trunk (to check for attempted escapees)

and I was off down the twenty mile road that led to the highway. The following section is a description of the emergent themes of this study.

Emerging Themes

Each prisoner participant brought his history, current experiences, and future aspirations to this study. Through my analysis of the transcripts, I searched for common experiences and meanings between the participants when discussing their correctional education experience. Initially, I found ten recurring themes when coding the interview transcripts. Through the quotes of the prisoner students and the written notes of the administrators, three major themes emerged, and some of the original themes became sub-themes that further elaborate on the correctional education experience. Two or three themes were combined to form one theme (ex: Teachers, Students, and Behavior became Regret) First, success is a concept that has a distinct meaning and achievement path that goes beyond the acquisition of a job that pays the bills. The prisoner students' perceptions of success influenced their study habits, their motivation to attend and persist in the classroom, and their future educational and employment plans. The second theme, regret, is an exploration of how the life choices and experiences of the prisoner inmates impact the correctional education experience. A third and final theme, rethinking the correctional education experience, reveals prisoner student perceptions of the previous and current GED programs at SSP. Each theme and sub-theme is presented including prisoner student quotes that capture the experience of being a correctional education student. Table 1 is a representation of the themes that emerged from the study, along with their sub-themes. Following the table, a detailed description of each theme/sub-theme, including participant quotes, is included.

Table 1 Emerging Themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Internal 2. External • Studying • Future Plans
Regret	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Educational Experiences • Teachers
Rethinking the Correctional Education Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Now v. Then (GED Program at SSP) • Inmate Tutors

Success

The prisoner student perceives success as both a set of occupations and a set of behavioral characteristics. These characteristics include motivation, which brings the prisoner student into the classroom and keeps him there. Studying is also a behavior that indicates a desire for success. To realize this success, however, the prisoner student must also make a plan for the future to bring him to success. When asked about success, the respondents offered definitions that ranged from the spiritual to the simple. Many respondents felt that the ability to care for self and loved ones was an indication of success:

Jarvis: He just... he takes care of all his business... his family... he really ain't got no worries or nothing. If he married or however it is... out working...the kids in school. He got his house or home, so there's no worries or nothing. He's making it. Not depending on no one else.... He doing it himself.

Michael described success as “making it” out there in the world, and Darren felt that taking care of one's responsibilities indicated success. For Darren, Bill Gates is a prime example of a successful person, having accomplished so much:

Bill Gates, for example. Bill Gates was a bookworm. All he did was read books when he was small. But as time got on, the books... he learned so much from those books that, look at him now... the inventor of Microsoft. I look at him as like, he's successful.

Nathan's self-proclaimed spiritual growth contributed to his definition of success... putting God first. For Nathan, there is wisdom to be gained through the tough experiences in life. To be successful, then, is to do the right thing by helping others:

In my opinion, having an ambition to do what he has to do. Having the courage, willpower, determination not to quit, determination to help somebody else. Doing for others, not stepping out, just trying to be self-sufficient. Willing to go the extra mile for him, or if it's for somebody else, that's what I find a successful person.

Jared's description of success is connected to the individual and his motivation to achieve:

Well, successful, it kinda, you know, it goes all different type of places. Successful is when I'm more or less content. So, a person being – I mean, you can have nothing and just be content with yourself and be successful. When you feel like that about yourself and there's really no obstacle you can't, you know, battle. Take you where you wanna go. You can accomplish anything you want to accomplish because you're not looking for

motivation, you motivate yourself. You know, as long as you got the drive and the will to keep on, success is at the end of the line.

Motivation is a sub-theme of the findings; the motivation to attend classes, in the case of this study, come from two main sources: the family and self-revelation. The following is a description of motivation as it applies to the correctional education experience.

Motivation

The study participants were both internally and externally motivated to participate in the GED program. For some, participation was simply a means of satisfying requirements for parole: Paul says, “You sittin’ here doing nothing... they gonna look at you like what have you been doing?” Other prisoner students felt that the motivation for attending was a practical one, to get to the next step in the correctional education process, trade school. Ms. Drake, the primary educator at the prison, told me that the education programs are in levels. Those who are not reading and completing mathematics above a 5th grade level must first participate in adult literacy classes. The next step is the GED course. Once the students have successfully tested out of the GED program, he receives his diploma and is then eligible for trade school/vocational school. Thus, all of the participants made some reference to the GED being a step toward further educational achievement. Jarvis, for example, wants to get his GED so he can find a computer class to participate in. Randall wants to be a cook and he knows that getting his GED is the first step. Nathan’s response indicated that he, too, has a plan for further education:

If I find if I get that GED, I can take the step and go get that trade. And so when I go back out there, I have a GED and a trade.

Even the participants who were externally motivated expressed some degree of internal motivation to attend classes. Some of this motivation was due to family members....mostly the students' mothers and children. Jared had this to say about his son:

That's my motivation – my son. I keep a picture of him everywhere I go. That's really my heart racing right there. I really made a vow to... I'm gonna still be there for him even though I'm in here.

Jarvis was focused on his children and his mother:

What made me attracted at first... I was out in the field. So my next move was to get in school and get my GED. Everybody in my family got it but me. I wanted to get that for my mom and me too.

Later, Jarvis talks about his two children, ages 8 and 9, who he wants to see that he is going to school too. He wants to go to school so he can better relate to their school experiences. Randall was concerned about showing his mother that he has been taking steps toward rehabilitation:

“Well, I wanted to get my GED for myself. And my son...my mother.... Show them I've changed. Sorry it took this, but I'm glad I'm not dead.” In that same conversation, Randall realized that he also wanted to get his GED for himself: “So I want to get it for myself. I always try to do things to please my mom, or do it cause she telling me not to. This was just for me.”

Paul appeared to be the most reluctant to participate in correctional education, stating that he attended so that his children and his mother would be satisfied that he was doing something.

Still, this qualifies as internal motivation:

“I was just sitting here doing nothing... you know like my daughter... my mom... they wanted me to do something. I guess I so it so I can say I'm doing something.”

Still other inmates were motivated by the desire to change their lives:

Darren: My motivation... I could say learning... that will motivate anybody to do anything. If you don't want to learn, I don't know what to say about you.... I wanted to finish school because I never had a chance to finish school. At the time I got busted on the charge I was in my senior year of high school. I never got a chance to finish. So that's one of my reasons why I want to get my GED.

Ralph: I wanted to better myself before I go home. I never took things very seriously until I got incarcerated and now I see a lot of things that I did that I saw... I just took things for granted. So in order for anyone to help you, you have to help yourself... so now this is my time to help myself while I got the opportunity.

Given Ralph's desire to help himself, I will now talk about the study time that students devote to obtaining their GEDs.

Study Time

The literature on correctional education does not deal in specific with study time, but I did find this aspect of the prisoner students' lives important. To be truly successful, is it necessary for the students to study to prepare for their GED tests? First, I learned from Mr. Walker, my escort, and the prisoner students, that there is no designated study time. There is only school and work time, yard time, and lights out, which occurs at 10:30 p.m. Study time, then, is at the discretion of the prisoner student. For some, reading and studying is a regular part of the day. Three of the ten participants stated that they study everyday. Nathan's explanation of study time is a testament to his love for reading:

I study everyday... cause I won't stop. I won't stop studying... I read everywhere. It depends on what you want to say is studying. As far as reading I read, I go back and meditate on what I read... I read law. With the mind there's no limit.

The remaining seven participants either don't study at all or find time to study in the dorm when they can. Part of the problem of studying in the dormitory has to do with lack of materials to take back to the dorm:

Randall: We can't take no books out. So whatever, you might have to write something down and bring it to the dorm. You got a lot of dudes you might know...dudes from around the way... man, show me how to do this or whatever.

Randall complained that though he could "write something down... write some problems down to take to the dorm," his work schedule also poses a problem:

After I leave from school, I have to go to work. I work at metal fab. And they building a lot of steps for the FEMA trailers. So sometimes we be stuck out till six o'clock. I don't, I go back and read my English because that's where I'm lacking. I have an English book in there and I'll go and read the basic things.

Several other participants explained to me that the GED books and folders had to stay in the classroom, but they would use newspaper and magazine articles to sharpen their reading skills in preparation for the test. Jared explains as follows:

The work isn't hard. I had been doing the studying on my own, and it's not particularly school work. Basically, history, politics... I read a lot and stuff like that. Magazines... I'm always reading something. See when you go through schoolwork, you find that you run through all of that stuff. Newspaper articles you have even read stuff similar to these things.

Though he is adamant that he does not study in the dormitories because he already knows the GED material, Alvin does read spiritual books in the dorms. Jarvis does not study much at all, however. He finds that there are distractions in the dormitory: "There's a lot of distractions.

Sometimes, I might go for a while... sometimes I won't be there long cause there's lots of distractions in there." Therefore, to find time to study, in whatever form, was a desire of the participants that often went unfulfilled. The future plans of the participants influenced the amount of study time and motivation they possessed. The future plans will now be discussed.

Future Plans

So when does motivation to attend class and taking time to study translate to success? The connection to success comes with the post-release that prisoner students make. The post-release goals of the participants varied from being a cook to working as an X-ray technician. I was not interested in the participants' career goals as much as I was interested in the steps that it would take to get to that goal, and if the goal was realistic. Two participants were interested in becoming cooks. For Randall and Alvin, cooking has been a desire for some time. Randall's mother is a cook, and he wants to follow in her footsteps. He said that he has always loved cooking, and that he is really good at smothering okra. Alvin shares the desire to cook with his sister and mother. They are both cooks, and he feels that the talent must run in the family:

I was gonna mess with cook... I was gonna try a cooking class, because my mama was good... my mama and my sister. They can get down, so it's got to be in me too. So I'ma try... but I never made my way down the walk to get into it... and then they said I needed a GED to get into it.

Several of the prisoner students had aspirations of going into business for themselves. Jared, for example, wants to go into business with some of his friends from the neighborhood. He wants to paint and refurbish old cars. To do this, he knows that he needs complete his GED, go to graphic arts school, and then he wants to go to body and fender school as well:

Basically got a whole biography written on cars I did, me and a few of my partners and what we are hoping to do... I got a list of people that I done already dug through the books and found. I'm trying to get on of my partners to start it before I get out.

Arnold, a former floor installer, wants to get his GED and then go to carpentry school so that he can open his own contracting business when he is released.

Those participants who wanted to have careers in computers and medicine were aware of the steps they had to take to meet their goal for success. Michael, for example, discussed with me the steps he thought he had to take in order to get a job in computers:

Michael: First I will probably have to learn how to conduct business...how to do business.

Researcher: You know you're gonna have to go back to school, right?

Michael: You know I been taking books... I been reading a lot of books in here, but there ain't nothing like really getting a full understanding.

Later, Michael told me that he knew he would probably have to go to ITT Technical School if the prison didn't offer correspondence in computer technology.

Regret

A major theme that emerged from this study was regret of prior decisions. After incarceration, each inmate began to reflect upon his life and the mistakes he made to end up in prison. Each participant expressed regret for disappointing their children, their parents, and/or their loved ones. They also regret dropping out of school, engaging in criminal activity, and being confined. Two sub-themes that were consistent with all of the participants are prior educational experiences and prior teachers. The participants regret the behavior and lack of effort they exhibited up until they dropped out of school. Each participant was able to identify at

least two teachers who positively impacted their lives for at least a short period of time; they regret the fact that those teachers' attempts to intervene in their lives were unsuccessful. The following sections further elaborate upon these sub-themes of regret.

Prior Educational Experiences

A recurring theme in the data was regret of past experiences or decisions. The decisions made in elementary and middle/high school and the external influences were most discussed. Each participant sat before me and shared at least one regret that he had in his pre-incarceration life.

For the participants of this study, school was a place where they were either influenced by what they call the wrong crowd, or they simply acted out and ended up in trouble. Seven of the ten participants admit that hanging around with the wrong crowd was the cause of much of their trouble in school. Five participants admit that selling drugs led to their dropping out of school (as well as their incarceration). Michael, for instance, saw no purpose for going to school:

I dropped out in the eighth grade after I started making so much money at a young age. I felt I didn't need school anymore... It went to... it didn't matter no more at that particular point because I guess I got bigheaded with the money.

Several participants described the allure and excitement of the street life and how that led to them selling drugs. All of these participants expressed regret for this behavior. One case in particular was complex and did not fit in any one category. Nathan's mother died when he was five years old. His father was incarcerated when he was seven years old (and his father was not released until 2000). Nathan and his sister were sent to live with their aunt who could not afford to raise them. According to Nathan, who professed to love learning and going to school, he was literally forced to sell drugs:

Yeah, I had a passion... but when I bring school up, there be so many issues that come to my mind. At the time I wanted to learn, nobody wasn't there 'cause the parents, my elementary years, I was going through a devastation. My dad had just got locked up when I was seven. My mom died when I was five. And I had to go stay with my auntie and I was about thirteen years old. She was telling us she couldn't make it 'cause she had took her sister's two children on, and she couldn't work. She didn't have no income, so we was introduced to the street game. We was selling drugs, getting permission from our parents to sell drugs. I couldn't focus on what I really wanted to do. And I had to watch out 'cause people be like man, you acting like it's tough for you... you selling drugs, you going to school dressed in Ballys. I mean, I had everything... the money was coming in, but it was the motive behind the money. You know, we wasn't getting the real, like man, we gonna save some money and go to college or something like that. It wasn't nothing like that. It was like, man, I need to pay the bills this month, we need to do this month.... There was no support there, you know, as far as encourage us to do things... it was all about taking care of the bills and that's, that was the issue right there. It wasn't school, it was the bills. More than anything... or get put out.

For Jared, his life was filled with stories of misbehavior and regret. In the fifth grade, Jared was a student at the state reformatory for problem children. He remained there until he was in the eighth grade. By age fifteen, Jared was being tried as an adult and sentenced to do hard time at SSP:

After that I kinda got off into the drug life... I was selling drugs. Basically up to my incarceration. This charge now, I bonded out on that charge. I got this charge when I was fifteen. And I bonded out, they tried me as an adult, and I tried to do the right thing... got a

job.... It wasn't nothing but a little easy job at the store, and I started going to school. This time, I kinda like, branched out from my family, like I wanted to be grown. So they was handling me like I was grown. I was living with a woman and all kinda stuff like that. And eventually I stopped going to school again. I went back to selling drugs and that led up to me coming to prison.

Teachers

Not all stories of past experiences and regret were focused on drugs. Many inmates talked about influential teachers and how they regret the fact that they did not take advantage of the opportunities and attention they were given. Darren talked about Ms. Jackson, a teacher who knew his father and would threaten to call his home when he misbehaved:

Every time she'd see me, if I didn't participate in class, she'd say 'I'm gonna tell your father.' I was like, you don't know my father. But when she actually told me who my father was, I was like, man, this woman actually knows my father.

Other participants describe teachers who were fair, who encouraged them to do their best. They spoke of mother figures, of supportive teachers, and those who loved to teach. Their regret was the failure to see and accept the help at the time. Jarvis remembered teachers who lived in his neighborhood:

Some of them stayed around in my neighborhood. And some of them watched me grow up, so they was almost family too. But I never would listen to 'em. I know what I was doing – I knew right from wrong. I just chose the wrong way. ...They would always tell my mama, or they would always call me to the side and tell me to slow down. Every now and then I'd get back in the rhythm of doing my work....after a while, I'd stray away... back into foolishness.

Similarly, Jared recognized the efforts of his teachers and expressed regret for choosing not to listen to them:

Well, teachers, they gave a lot of support. You know, sometimes I used to be hanging out, arcade and things, and they might have sons and might ask me questions, call the house, come to the house... but I wasn't really buying it. I wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Arnold, who described himself as a "bad kid," regretted his treatment of a particular teacher and his lack of effort in general:

Arnold: Going to school not to really learn nothing. Just the fun part of school... play with the other kids and I got in a fight with one of my teachers one time. It wasn't really a fight. They had this girl, she had a crush on me and she wrote my name on the desk. This little fat girl. And she wrote my name on the desk and I was chasing her around the school and stuff... and this teacher came and grabbed me and I called her all kind of names... and she just broke down and started crying and stuff...they called my mom and it was a big ole stuff.

Researcher: And how did your mom feel about this?

Arnold: She was hurt. I was like the baddest one in the family. I don't know... I just really didn't care about school. Which I wish I would have, but at that point... at this time in my life, you know, the things I coulda learned... it's hard to learn as you're older, at least for me it is.

Thus, as a man, Arnold recognized his missed educational opportunities due to his misbehavior.

Paul's problems in school were linked to his substance abuse problem. Paul's addiction to drugs made his high school years troublesome. He reflected back upon a few good teachers:

When I got to high school, I had a couple of really good teachers that actually made an effort. That's why I started going back to high school. The principal named Mr. McCabe and my homeroom teacher named Ms. Wallace. And they really made an effort to help me... 'cause I was an addict at this time. And I missed school all the time. And they made an effort. They'd come pick me up in the morning, you know, and take me to school. And I really started getting into school because they were... I don't know, they were just cool. But then I took off and went to California when I was sixteen ... but if I would have stayed in Houston then I probably would have finished...

Thus, teachers were in place along the way that had the potential to positively influence these students. The choices of the prisoner students to misbehave and/or participate in criminal activity led to their regret while incarcerated. The regret often led prisoner students to resolve to improve their lives through education. The third and final theme shows prisoner student perceptions of the actual GED classroom.

Rethinking the Correctional Education Experience

The primary research question for this study is: how do prisoner students perceive their correctional education experience? The final set of findings focus on this theme. The sub-themes – school now vs. then and inmate tutors, shed further light upon what a prisoner student experiences in the correctional education classroom.

School Now v. Then (GED Program)

Southern State Penitentiary is currently implementing a new GED program that is individualized. The new program is in its infancy, according to Ms. Davis, the primary educator in the study. She feels that overall the students enjoy the current class. The students come to class for approximately 3 ½ hours per day. During this time, they work out of GED preparation

books and folders containing sample problems and passages. Additionally, a GED prep computer program is used to supplement the paper materials. Inmate tutors are a part of the class; they assist the students with their practice work and make Ms. Davis aware of when they are ready to take a practice GED test. The practice test indicates areas of weakness, and the students can then go and work on those weak areas. When a student scores well on the practice test, the student is then eligible to take his GED test.

The prisoner students had mixed responses to the new program. Two participants expressed a desire to go back to the way the program was. The former program used teachers and inmate tutors. The students would work out problems on the board and receive feedback from the teachers. Ralph expressed his mixed feelings about the new program:

If you want to strive and achieve your GED, but the program, the program is... maybe by the program just now starting, Ms. Davis, she just now getting things going. Maybe in a few months when they get things organized... maybe it might pick up. But right now, it's... it's shot.... I would keep the computers, but as far as the self-help thing in the classroom with the folders, I would put it back like it was...

Jared felt that his personal ability to compute and comprehend was sufficient. He was more concerned for the lower performing students, and he suggested that some form of grouping of performance levels to better serve the lower functioning students be implemented:

Some people need to be divided from the other people so they can work as a group. Those people right there, I feel like, if they were separated then they could work together and move up the levels together... they'd feel more comfortable. Knowing that they got somebody to sit next to them and you know, we can relate. Here you got me – I'm on the eleventh grade level, and he on the fourth grade level, and he sitting right on side me. He feel like he don't

belong. You know, and, he might ask me something, and I'm giving the right answer, but he might feel like "he lying" and ask the tutor. The tutor give him the same answer... Well how you know this? I'm like man, I been there, you know? And it's kinda like, felt like you belittling him or something... you make him feel small. I don't think that's cool, right there.

Nathan reported similar feelings toward the need to group levels in the classes:

The program... it's really, it's a self help program. At one time we did things on the board... people had the opportunity to come to the board... a lot of people is not... take for instance me and you. Your capabilities of knowing stuff may be greater than mine. Everybody is not on the same level of doing things. And the program that's being run now... it's a nice program, don't get me wrong, but it's really not helping a lot.

The majority of prisoner students expressed a desire to return to the days where the prisoners and students challenged each other in class. Alvin captured this perspective:

Well, it's alright, but it was more exciting then, cause it was... there was different rules they would have. They had teachers there. They would make you... you know... you'd be challenged in class, you know, on the chalkboard. Do this and do that... you know. It motivated you to want to come, you know. I'm not saying it's not... but I liked it the old way. A lot of people liked the old ways because it was more, I say fun, you know... that drive, the excitement, you know. It's like we're back in middle school challenging one another. Make an A or something, you know.

Despite the desire to go back to the old GED program where social interaction played a bigger part, the majority of prisoner students feel that, regardless of the method of delivery, if you come to class to learn, you will succeed. Jared expressed a need for students to be more ambitious:

It's like if you don't come with the intentions of wanting to learn, you aint gon get it. If you come and you want to be fed, it aint gon happen like that. That's why you gotta get it how you live it – simple as that.

Then there are the students who were excited when asked how they felt about going to class. Nathan, for instance, was overjoyed as he discussed his classes. He sat up straight in his seat and his eyes lit up as he said:

Oh, man... I feel so... I feel... my ambition... man! Ooh... I feel great about school. I feel I'm gonna take advantage of what's going on. Now I see I can have a daily routine that it's mandatory... I can't get out of it. I find myself... I find my learning is proliferated. It feels good.

Arnold's lack of experience with computers made his participation in the new GED class troublesome at first. However, over time he was able to get involved and enjoy the class:

I liked the method they had at first, but I kinda like the little method they got going on right now. Computers and stuff like that... see I never did computers and stuff... and I'm like man, I don't know nothing bout no computer and stuff like that, and I was interested in it, and once this dude showed me how to work the computer, I just come in class now and just, I be rushing to get into class now, you know. Trying to work these computers, you know. It's a challenge, that's something I wanna do because I feel there's gonna be a lot of computers in the next couple of years, there's gonna be a lot of things working on computers. But, uh, that's why I'm here.

Therefore, Arnold was resistant to the new GED program due to its use of computer-generated supplementary material. Over time, not only did Arnold desire to attend classes because of the computers, but he also recognized the value of computers in the job market/real world.

Darren shared Nathan's feelings about school, and he shared Jared's confidence in his academic ability. He was kicked out of the GED program previously because of misconduct. After four months, he was given the opportunity to re-enroll in the GED course. Darren remarked about his experience:

I feel wonderful about it. Wonderful. I'm learning... and I'm helping somebody else learn too. Because I recently took a test, and it requires that you have a 450 for this test. And when I come back... I haven't been back here for I say about two months... so they threw a test at me... I took the test and I made a 430 on it. They had some people who had a 440, some people had a 500, some people had a 450... and I'm like man, for the two months I've been in here, and I got a 430... I could just imagine if I had been here six months... like y'all been here six months. I coulda passed this. I got a 430... now I know what I gotta do. I gotta go in here the other four months that I missed, and I'ma learn. And that's what I'm doing now.

Thus, the prisoner students of this study had mixed feelings about the changes in the GED curriculum/program. The most important aspect of the program that the participants wanted to see return is the pupil to pupil interaction. They missed the challenged of working problems out on the board, showing off their ability. The use of inmate tutors, the second sub-theme of this section, will now be discussed.

Inmate Tutors

Since there are no formal teachers in the new GED program, the inmate tutor is the main contact person. To become an inmate tutor, a prisoner student must complete the GED program and pass the GED test. The responsibility of the inmate tutor is then to assist the prisoner students preparing for the GED test by offering help and informing the primary educator when a

practice test is needed. The issue of inmate tutors was also mixed – some prisoner students enjoyed their presence while others found their assistance useless or ineffective. Four of the ten participants felt that the inmate tutors were ineffective in their roles. Paul felt that the inmate tutors “just take it to do nothing.” He felt that he was not getting the help in math that he needed from his tutors. Ralph felt that he, too, lacked the assistance he needed from the inmate tutors. He described the GED program and its tutors as follows: “He [the tutor] aint really gonna give you too much information... it’s really like ordering a GED off television. They send you one thing, you take the test, and you send it back in.” Jarvis, who professed to have a passion for learning, voiced his aggravation at the behavior of some inmate tutors: “Aw, man, them people... I feel like I’m a rose amongst thorns when I’m around them.” Jarvis felt this way due to the off task conversations that he said occur in the classroom. These conversations, Jarvis said, are often filled with profanity. This is offensive to Jarvis who is “in the Bible real, real deep.” Jarvis felt that the motives of some inmate tutors were not good ones:

Most of the things they do... they get to class to get out of the field. And when they get in there they don’t do nothing. But some of ‘em do something... but they make it hard ‘cause when they talk, I can’t read stuff...”

This makes it difficult for Jarvis to comprehend what he is reading. However, Jarvis found that the talking caused him to read over the same passage many times, which, he claimed, enhances his understanding of the topic.

Jared’s description of the classroom environment captures a day in the life of an inmate tutor:

Well, on the inmate tutor side, you got two tutors and about maybe ten people. Everybody working on something different. You know, and the tutor have to run from here to there. Then it kinda frustrates me in a sense, cause they don’t shut up and I be reading. So it’s

kinda like, it's good in a sense, then again it's really not. But they do they part... they play they part, you know... they help where they can help.

Jared was one of the two participants who found the tutors to be effective, or at least doing their job. Two more of the participants felt that the inmate tutors do the best that they can. Alvin, for example, showed support for the inmate tutors, many of whom are his friends. Randall was also supportive, showing the role of the tutor in the classroom:

They cool people, you know. If I have a question, I'll ask 'em. If I get stuck, man come help me with this. They'll show me... as far as that, you know, we don't have no problems. They sit down and do they thing... they give us our little booklet, the book we need to go to work.

Thus, in all, the opinion of the participants was split down the middle. The use of inmate tutors is effective in the eyes of the prisoners when they are helping to get their students prepared for the days work, and when they sit down and work one-on-one with a student. The inmate tutor, who is ineffective, according to the participants, is the tutor who comes to class to avoid hard labor in the field, who talks loudly about topics other than education when they should be working.

When compared to the perceptions of prisoner students' correctional education experiences, the prison administrators of this study shared a different set of views on the available programming. Ms. Drake, for instance, finds the inmate tutor-ran GED and Literacy programs to be working well. She admits that the program is in its infancy and that some revision may have to take place, but finds the overall program to be a success thus far. This view is in contrast to the concerns of the prisoner students who feel that the tutors are ill prepared to instruct: in addition to lacking the training to teach the prisoner student, the participants believe that inmate tutors

often come to work in the classroom to avoid working in the fields, and the tutors are not as effective as Ms. Drake feels they are. Other participants find the tutors helpful, but they feel that the student to tutor ratio is so high (1:10) that the tutor is overwhelmed and unable to affect the students. Drake spends time with the prisoner students when setting up their programming and when giving the practice and actual GED tests, but her presence is not a regular fixture of the classroom. This is due in part to the overwhelming nature of Ms. Drake's job since the budget cutbacks due to recent climactic events eliminated the rest of her staff. Without polling the participants to evaluate their experiences in the new GED/Literacy program, Drake is unaware of the issues presented to the researcher of this study.

Similarly, Warden Franklin believes that the correctional education programs at SSP are of the highest quality in the state, and very comparable to the best programs in the nation. However, Warden Franklin spends her time traveling between two cities as a result of the budget cuts, so she does not get a chance to visit the classroom as much as she would like. Consequently, there is not much of an opportunity to speak with the prisoner students to determine the effectiveness of the new program. This is not to say that the administrators are not firm believers in the correctional education program and that they do not want the program to succeed. To the contrary, the lack of funding for additional personnel to oversee the programs is the issue that prevents these administrators from adequately evaluating the new GED/Literacy program to determine its effectiveness.

Summary

The correctional education experience is a product of the past experiences of the prisoner student as well as where the student hopes to go in the future. The past experiences include those regrettable actions that led to the incarceration of the prisoner student. The family and children

of the prisoner student provide motivation to attend and persist in classes; there is also an element of self-motivation that drives the students to continue in school. The experience of the prisoner student is one that is influenced by many factors. The following chapter is a discussion of the findings and their implications for elementary and secondary education, higher education, and correctional education.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

This study investigated the experiences of prisoner students in the correctional education classroom. Using the phenomenological research design, I described the self-reported experiences of ten prisoner students at Southern State Penitentiary in an attempt to understand their experiences in pre-college adult education classes. Based on the narratives provided by the participants in this study, participation in correctional education is essential to re-integration into society. Three broad themes emerged from the interviews that assist understanding the past, present, and future hopes of the participants. These themes include perceptions of success, regret of prior actions/decisions, and rethinking the correctional education experience. This chapter consists of an overview of the study followed by a discussion of the findings. Following this discussion is a revised conceptual framework, implications for policy and practice in elementary/secondary education, higher education, and correctional education, as well as recommendations for further research.

Overview of Study

The conceptual framework for this study was created as a representation of my understanding of the correctional education experience and the contributing factors (Drakeford, 2002; Gehring, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Silva, 1994). The literature on recidivism, background characteristics, and motivation contributed to the creation of this framework, just as it was the basis for the creation of the research questions. Previous researchers have focused primarily on correctional education's impact upon recidivism (Hrabowski & Robbi; Silva). However, since the prisoner student is central to correctional education, the purpose of the study was to understand correctional education from this perspective. As a result, the data and discussion

from this study will benefit three facets of education: elementary and secondary education, higher education, and correctional education. Given the target population and intended audience, the primary focus for this study was to shed light upon the following primary research question:

How do prisoners perceive their correctional education experience?

To further investigate the experiences of the prisoner students in the correctional education process, additional questions included:

1. What motivates students to attend classes?
2. How do prior educational and employment experiences affect student motivation?
3. What is the institutional culture of the prison as it relates to education, and how does that affect the students?
4. Are there discernable differences between the perceptions of prison inmates and prison administration as it relates to correctional education?
5. What are the causes of these discernable differences, if they exist?
6. What are prisoners' perceptions of what a successful person does? What career and educational aspirations do prisoners have?

To understand the prisoner student's experience in the correctional education classroom, ten prisoner students from SSP participated in one-on-one interviews. All ten participants were male students in the adult literacy or GED preparation programs. Each participant shared his prior educational and employment experiences, current experiences in the correctional education classroom, and his future career and life goals. This provided the researcher an opportunity to glimpse at the correctional education experience from this rarely examined perspective. Two prison administrators responded to a set of questions and observations were made through the research process.

The remainder of this chapter is focused on 1) a discussion of the findings of the study, 2) the revised conceptual framework, 3) the study's implications, and 4) recommendations for future research. The first section, discussion of the findings, connects the study's findings to the literature review in chapter two.

Discussion of Study Findings

From the study data emerged three major themes: success, regret, and rethinking the correctional education experience. Each of these themes had at least one sub-theme that further enlightened the researcher on the correctional education experience. The following is a discussion of the study findings as they relate to the literature in chapter two. For each section/theme, I will examine the similarities and differences between the findings and the literature. I will begin with success and the three sub-themes: motivation, study time, and future plans.

Success

For the participants of this study, success had different meanings for the participants than the literature suggests. The literature on successful reintegration simply states that a prisoner who is able to gain employment and remain out of prison is successfully reintegrated (Drakeford, 2002; Gehring, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Silva, 1994). In previous studies, successful reintegration is measured using recidivism statistics (Drakeford; Gehring; Hrabowski & Robbi; Silva). The prisoner students from the present study indicated that success was more intrinsic in nature than being able to find a job. To truly be successful, the participants felt that they had to be "making it," doing something that they enjoyed as opposed to having a job to pay the bills. Only one participant ever mentioned money when talking about success. For the participants, success comes from:

- "Putting God first",

- “Taking care of business”,
- “Having no worries”,
- “Working”,
- “Not depending on no one else”,
- “Learning”,
- “Contentment”, and
- “Being able to overcome obstacles”.

(Hall, 2006 – Study Transcripts)

The similarity between the literature and the participants’ definitions of success is the fact that a return to incarceration would be an indication of failure. Each one of the participants, at some time during the interview, expressed a desire to “get outa here.” This sentiment was even shared by those who were not eligible for parole. Alvin, for example, expressed a hope that he would be granted clemency or that he would someday become eligible for parole through an appeals process. Thus, the prison environment, though much more humane and “free” than it had been historically, is no place that any man wants to be. Success, then, is freedom from incarceration. Successful reintegration into society means finding a job and relating well within society; for prisoner students, however, this concept of success is much simpler. This is not to say that finding and keeping a job are not realities to prisoner students. However, the job is the means to the end that is a sense of self-worth and belonging to the society. These participants realize that success as they define it is only possible through educational attainment/learning a trade. Thus, the participants are motivated to attend classes by their goal of becoming successful men in society. Motivation, a sub-theme of success, is the next focus.

Motivation

Pelissier's (2004) study on inmate motivation to change is discussed in chapter two. That study focused on inmate motivation to change. This form of internal motivation is initiated by the inmate and serves as a driving force for participation in an educational or treatment program. External motivation, then, is pressure or incentives from an outside force such as the criminal justice system, prison administration, or even family members. Pelissier states that since most correctional education classes are voluntary, it is important to possess internal motivation. For the Pelissier study, older males who planned to return to a home with children tended to possess internal motivation to participate in programs.

The participants of the present study were both internally and externally motivated to change. The majority of the participants expressed a desire to impress loved ones (Nathan wanted to impress his father; Jarvis wanted to get his GED for his mother) and children. Of the participants with children (N=8), all of these men mentioned their children as a motivator. For some, it was the ability to show their children that being in school was a good thing for everybody. For others, the motivation came from the thought of being able to get a good job and take care of their children.

Those participants who were externally motivated were few. Paul, for example, has no ambitions for a career because he is not eligible for parole for another 40 years. He is attending classes to satisfy his mother and two children – to show that he is not just sitting around doing nothing. According to Pelissier (2004), this type of external motivation may not be sufficient to sustain Paul to the completion of the GED program. And, since Paul has no real plan for the future, he sees nothing beyond getting up and going to school each day. In the case of

motivation, then, the literature is consistent with the findings of this study without fault. The next major theme, Regret, is the focus of the following section.

Study Time

The literature on correctional education does not mention study time. However, I found studying to be an indication of desire to change. The majority of the participants studied when they got a chance, not as a daily routine. This is due to a lack of instructional material to bring back to the dormitory, scheduling conflicts, and noise/distractions in the dormitory. What each participant indicated, however, was that studying could take the form of reading a law book, spiritual material, or even making precise calculations in the hobby shop. For these prisoner students, the material on the GED test could be replicated using everyday texts such as newspapers, books, and religious material. The participants may not be able to take the GED preparation material back to their dormitory, but they are able to make each reading or calculating experience a GED preparation exercise. This indicates that the majority of the participants (with the exception of Paul, who did not appear to be very interested in doing his best in school) were motivated to study in order to achieve success. If given no materials to study, the prisoner students find a way to study with what materials they do have at their disposal. The following section addresses future plans for prisoner student success, the driving force behind motivation and studying.

Future Plans

The literature on correctional education does not mention the future plans/goals of inmates; instead, there is a focus on obtaining correctional education to “get a job” in order to stay out of prison. This study, then, contributes to the literature as it reveals prisoner students’ descriptions of what they hope to do upon release, and what preparation must take place to realize that goal.

The voice of the prisoner student here is very different than expected. This voice revealed that, in most cases, much thought has been put into what will happen after release. The future plans of the prisoner students are unique in that they match the prisoner students' interests as well as his desire to make a good living (and stay out of jail as a result). Further detail on this significant contribution to the literature follows.

After asking the participants to define success, I asked about future career and/or educational aspirations. The assumption was that the prisoner students would give the names of particular professions/trades offered by the prison. This was the case for some participants. Nathan, for example, aspires to become a welder. Randall would like to be a welder and a cook. Alvin aspires to become a cook like his mother and sister. These careers represent vocational classes offered at the prison. The participants heard about these classes and/or saw a fellow inmate working in these professions and then decided to pursue that career. Other prisoner students, however, expressed career aspirations that were a combination of vocations/trades or simply not offered at SSP. Alvin wants to write raps for others to perform and he hopes to be a poet. These career goals are consistent with his status as a lifer. Though he will never be released into society, he will be able to have a career within the micro community that is SSP. Jarvis and Jared wish to take computer courses. Jarvis' goal to work with computers, as his mother does, may call for a correspondence program (the prison only offers graphic arts on the computer). However, Jared researched the available programs at SSP and learned that there was a graphic arts program that fit his future plan of designing and detailing cars. Jared also includes the Body & Fender course in his future plans as a means of accomplishing his goal of becoming an entrepreneur.

Other aspiring entrepreneurs – Arnold and Darren – show that future plans drive the prisoner student’s course choices. Arnold, a flooring installer by trade, aspires to take the carpentry course so that he can establish his own carpentry business upon release. Darren hopes to establish his own clothing store; he may even want to design some of the urban wear sold in his store. This goal of entrepreneurship may call for correspondence courses in business and design/fashion. Key to the participants’ future plans is the fact that they hope to move beyond the jobs that are stereotypically held by ex-convicts (i.e., dishwasher, sanitation worker, and welder). The type of success that the participants aspire to will not be accomplished through such menial work (in most cases). These men want to own businesses and to climb the ranks of society... their goals are realistic and attainable through correctional education. Most important is that every participant acknowledged that to achieve their goals, education of some kind is the first step.

Regret

Though the literature does not directly address regret, the participants in the study indicated that they regretted their past educational experiences. Parkinson and Steurer (2004) find that most prisoners have encountered some sort of academic difficulty in the past. Mageehon’s (2003) study of incarcerated women showed that the prior educational experiences of the prisoners impacted the type of learner they became in the correctional education classroom. If we assume that all prisoners have experienced some degree of negativity in their past educational lives, does this mean that they all experience some form of regret as part of the change process? Surely, the participants in this study indicated that they wished they had taken advantage of the good teachers that were in place. They wish they had made wiser decisions than selling drugs or participating in gang activity. They regret being unable to raise their children due to their

incarceration. This is similar to the literature on correctional education and background characteristics. The literature (Chappell, 2004; Gunn, 1999; Newman & Beverstock, 1990) identifies prisoners' background characteristics that determine motivation and academic ability. This background information is uniform; it includes prior educational and employment experiences, family socio-economic status and level of education, and history of substance abuse. The prisoner student brings these background characteristics with him into the correctional education classroom, and they are often the cause of his regret. Coming from a poor home and being forced to drop out of school and sell drugs like Nathan, for example, is an example of background characteristics leading to regret. Thus, the findings are consistent with the literature that states that prior educational experiences impact the learner. The prisoner student is motivated to change/attend classes primarily because he regrets the fact that he did not graduate or did not pay attention in class when he could have gone on to college. However, there is more to regret than education. The background characteristics and patterns of thinking of the prisoner are so intertwined that it is difficult to determine what prompts a student to want to change. However, we can assume that where regrets are many, the desire to make a change is natural. Given that the correctional facility is a place of many regrets, we can assume that the desire to change abounds. Therefore, despite the fact that motivation is a sub-theme of success, the motivation to change and attend classes is also tied into the prisoner's regret of past events that led to his dropping out of school and/or incarceration. Additionally, the interactions with teachers that the prison students missed out on are lost – without teachers in the correctional education classroom, that experience will never be replicated in this GED program. Thus, instead of having an opportunity to experience the teacher-to-student interaction now that they can appreciate it, the prisoner students are left to learn independently (with the assistance of

inmate tutors). Motivation to apply oneself fully to his studies, then, is a possible result of this missed opportunity that most participants expressed. The following section is a discussion of the GED classroom as perceived by these prisoner students, so desperate to change. The following section is an explanation of the changes that were made to the conceptual framework (Figure 1) as a result of the study findings.

Rethinking the Correctional Education Experience

The study findings reveal the participants' desire to possibly revise two parts of the correctional education experience: the new GED program and the use of inmate tutors. The following discussion places the inmate tutor within the context of the new GED program and argues for an evaluation of the program's use as it is.

The Inmate Tutor

My research on correctional education instructors only turned up articles and studies on teachers in the classroom. A main focus of the interviews was the inmate tutor. A single article (Geraci, 2000) mentioned the use of inmate tutors who were first trained to play this role in the correctional education classroom. This training does not take place at SSP, however. Rather, to become an inmate tutor, the prisoner student must pass the GED test. The participants had mixed feelings about the use of inmate tutors in the GED classroom. They felt that the tutors did not help as much as they were supposed to, and, those that were fully equipped to help others were overwhelmed by the 10:1 ratio in the GED classroom. Researchers have recommended that correctional educators take some set of specialized courses for dealing with the needs of prisoner students (Moeller, Et. al, 2004; Wright, 2001). According to Ms. Drake, the principal of the GED school at SSP, there is no formal curriculum or training for correctional educators. This was also confirmed by the literature (Moeller, et. al, 2004), which states that though there are

some general understandings about correctional education, there is no prescribed curriculum. Instead, the researchers state that the adult education and literacy classes should include the basic skills (including speaking, listening, and problem solving), some sort of individualized instruction, accommodation for deficient students, and a school-to-work transition system. The majority of correctional educators are certified high school teachers from neighboring towns. These teachers have not been, through their secondary education training/education, trained to serve this type of population. Neither are the inmate tutors trained to provide services to the prisoner students. Thus, the use of inmate tutors is something that has not been evaluated for effectiveness. Further, the GED program using inmate tutors in place of teachers is only being used in two other places in the state thus far. So are the inmates who complain about the lack of support from inmate tutors making a valid point? Or does the program need more time to work well, and do the inmate tutors need more training? Better still, do correctional educators in general need a training program tailored just for this population? The research has not fully examined this phenomenon, nor has prison administration evaluated the effectiveness of its use. However, it is evident that some sort of training program should be considered to serve the correctional population.

Summary

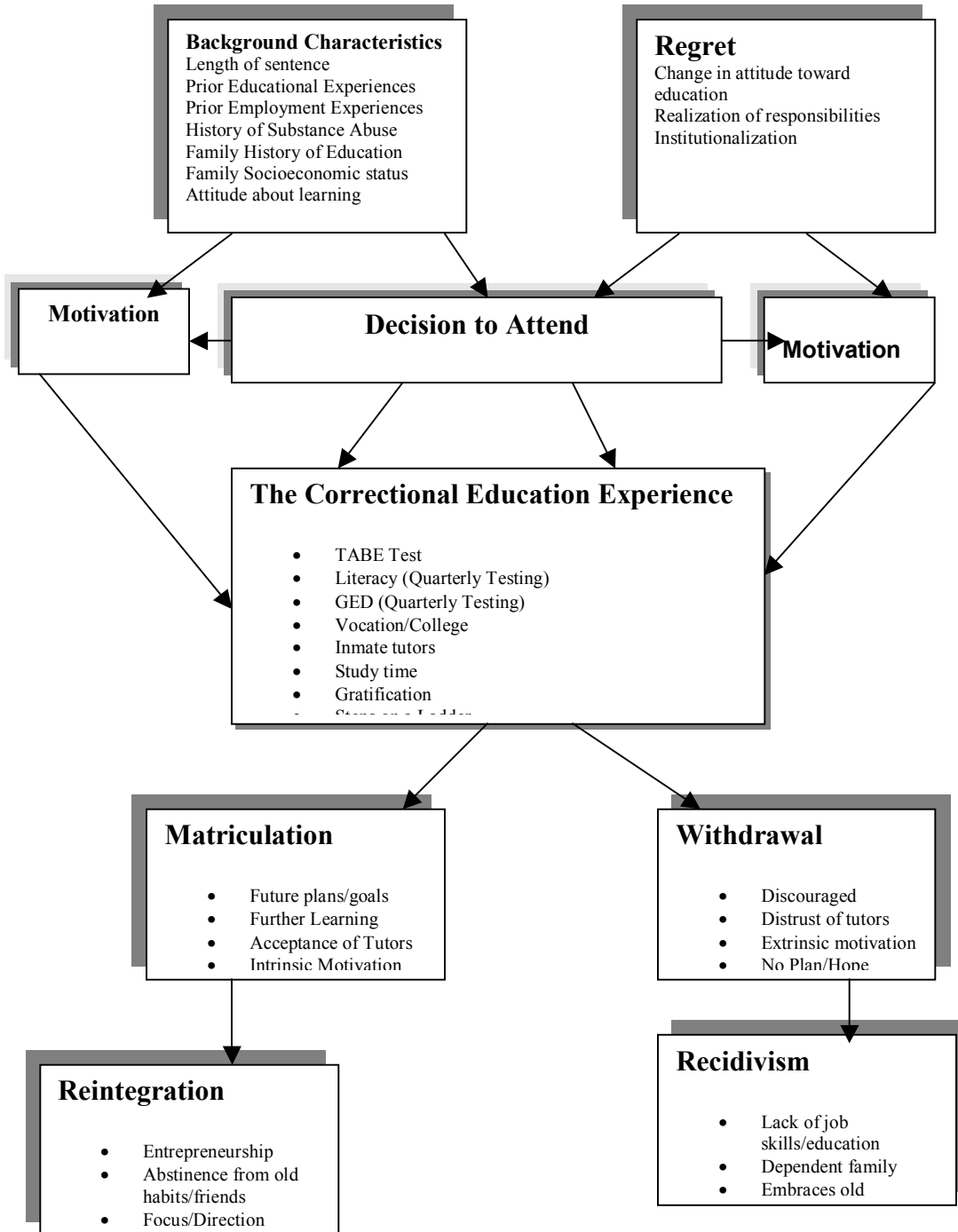
This was a discussion of the study findings. The study brought for the first time the voice of the prisoner student on what it means to them to take part in correctional education classes. First, the study indicates a meaning of success that goes beyond the material. True success is a feeling for the participants, not a series of accomplishments. The participants of the study understand, however, that to achieve this feeling of success, it is necessary to make a plan, enroll in the appropriate classes, and then remain motivated until completion. Quite often, the urge to

become successful came to the participants as a result of regret of past educational, employment, and life experiences. Dropping out of school, disrespecting teachers, and refusing to take advantage of the educational opportunities that were offered were some of the most expressed regrets. Loss of children due to incarceration was also a frequently expressed regret that motivated participants to get into school and do well. The study tells us that to be successful at any program of study, the participants realize that they must have drive to achieve – motivation. This motivation, be it internal or external, shows that the prisoner students desire change, often passionately. Thus, school becomes a focus for the participants – a means to achieve success. This focus requires the prisoner student to put forth effort, in the form of studying, and to have plans for the future. The following section is an explanation of the changes proposed for the conceptual framework (Figure 1) as a result of the study findings.

Revised Conceptual Framework

The original conceptual framework (Figure 1) focused on the background characteristics of the prisoner student as the basis of the decision to attend classes. These background characteristics included length of sentence, prior educational experiences, prior employment history, history of substance abuse, family history of education, and family socioeconomic status. The prisoner student's correctional education experience was the focus of the study; this section is therefore the center of the conceptual framework. This was the area that was most enhanced by the study findings. From the correctional education experience, the prisoner student may matriculate and possibly successfully reintegrate. The prisoner student may also withdraw from classes and risk returning to the correctional institution after release.

Figure 2: The Revised Correctional Education Experience



After interviewing the ten prisoner students for this study, several changes can be made to the framework to better represent the experience of the prisoner student. Figure 2: The Revised Correctional Educational Experience is a visual representation of the findings of this study. The changes to the original framework (Figure 1) are discussed below.

Parallel to the background characteristics is a new box entitled Regret. After incarceration, a prisoner's thinking changes from things of the outside world to the new community behind the prison walls. This section of the conceptual framework includes regret. Many participants expressed regret over their prior decisions, especially the decision to drop out of school. There appears at some time to be a subsequent change in the prisoner's attitude toward learning/education. Through seeing other inmates going to class, some prisoners decided that class might be the way to go. Others simply found that sitting around doing nothing was not a good way to live within the prison community. Finally, the prisoner begins to realize his responsibility. No longer can a man live carefree when incarcerated. Instead, he begins to think about the needs of his family members – his children – his wife – his parents. He begins to think about how he will serve as a role model and/or support system to his children. He considers how he will impress the parole board. These thoughts may lead to some serious life decisions, including the decision to attend classes.

The decision to attend classes prompts the prisoner to become an active participant in the education process. Only two participants were asked whether they wanted to get into the GED class. This was part of their classification process when they first arrived at SSP. Every other participant had to stand at what the inmates call the fence line, the fenced in area where prisoners reside. From the fence line, I observed inmates trying to get Mr. Walker's attention, asking him

to enroll them in a class. Mr. Walker would tell them to see him the next day and then move on. Thus, the decision to attend is an active process of waiting at the fence line for someone who can help him to get into class. Motivation is a surrounding factor in the correctional education process. They begin to think in terms of goals and future plans. This motivation and persistence at the fence line is what leads to attendance in correctional education classes.

Once in the literacy or GED class, the correctional education experience begins. This includes applying oneself in class as well as finding time to study. Studying does not always imply picking up a textbook and referring to a particular lesson. The prisoner students reported reading law books, magazines, and newspapers as methods of studying. Working in the hobby shop (making rocking horses and other wood crafts) requires the use of fractions and decimals; therefore, the inmates receive hands-on experience with the material on the GED test. The literacy level of the inmate determines which class (literacy or GED) he will participate in. If a prisoner student has a literacy level of 0 – 4.9 (just below the 5th grade level), he would attend literacy classes. If a prisoner student has a literacy level of 5th grade or higher, he would be placed in the GED class. To be eligible to take the GED practice test, he must have a minimum 10th grade literacy level. Once a student has taken and passed the GED test, he is eligible to:

- become an inmate tutor,
- take vocational classes, or
- take college courses.

The acquisition of knowledge during this stage increases prisoner student self-esteem and encourages thoughts of extending the educational attainment beyond the GED. The further along (educationally) a student advances, the more the future becomes a serious consideration. Thus,

the correctional education experience is grounded on motivation to succeed upon release and focused upon the continual acquisition of knowledge while incarcerated.

The final aspect of the conceptual framework is the outcome of learning. If the prisoner student persists and completes the class and/or a program of study, the probability of successful reintegration is high. Successful reintegration for the members of this study included starting a small business in refurbishing cars or remodeling homes. Most inmates understand the need to abstain from old habits and friends that may encourage a return to criminal behavior. Instead, there should be a sense of focus and/or career and educational direction that increases the chance of success on the outside. Successful reintegration means the return to society with the intent to do what it takes to remain there.

Just as Darren explained, there are times when a prisoner student enrolls in classes and then ends up withdrawing. In his case, he joked around and was asked not to return. Alvin indicated that he had participated in GED classes several times, yet he had not attended class enough to complete the program. Thus, failure to complete a literacy or GED class is a valid issue. This failure to persist may be the result of internal factors such as poor self-esteem or lack of motivation to become a better man. Two participants expressed a distrust of inmate tutors who might misuse or belittle them. This may discourage a student from seeking help in an area of weakness. Perhaps other prisoner students may withdraw from classes because they initially enrolled for the wrong reasons. To enroll in classes to please a parent or to impress the parole board (as Michael described) does not guarantee completion of a program. These are external motivators and they may result in completion, but Pelissier (2004) states that internal motivation is a much better predictor of success. A final reason why a prisoner student may not persist in a literacy or GED class is the lack of a plan or a lack of hope for the future. The majority (68%) of

the prisoners at SSP are incarcerated for life without the possibility of parole. These inmates may attend classes without seeing a point to it – without having a plan for what will happen next. Thus, several factors could potentially lead the prisoner student to withdraw from his literacy or GED class. If he does not return to classes prior to release, the risk of recidivism is much greater.

Recidivism, the return to incarceration after being released into society, can result from withdrawal from classes. Without a GED and/or job skills, a newly-paroled man may encounter great difficulty when trying to get a job. This would be problematic because the research shows that the family members of parolees often look forward to the financial support of the parolee when he is released. If these factors are combined with a return to the same neighborhood and friends that the man left behind, then the likelihood of re-incarceration becomes much higher than if he persisted in correctional education and moved toward successful reintegration.

The key to the conceptual framework is that the prisoner student has choices. He is able to improve his chances of success on the outside through education. It is up to the prisoner student to be motivated, however, to study and persist.

Study Implications

After reporting the findings, discussing the findings, and revising the conceptual framework, I will now discuss the benefits of this study to three facets of education: elementary and secondary education, higher education, and correctional education. The prisoner student affects each of these areas. Elementary and secondary teachers have an opportunity to impact young and impressionable students at an early age. Though the teacher cannot take the child out of the home environment, the infusion of caring and encouragement into the classroom, by the teacher, may increase student engagement and decrease the desire to rebel/misbehave. Higher

education and United States prisons have been connected since the early 1900s. This union should be strengthened and funding should be increased for higher education in order to provide more opportunities for prisoners to earn college credit/degrees while incarcerated. The further the educational gain, the more likely the prisoner student will leave the prison and successfully re-integrate (Chappell, 2004). Finally, correctional education is able to hear the perceptions of prisoner students pursuing their GEDs. This information, along with the future career goals of these students, will assist prison administrators and policymakers in deciding which programs to offer to their prisoner students. The following is a more detailed description of each section.

Elementary and Secondary School Teachers

Given that the background characteristics and prior experiences of the prisoner student influence his attitudes about school as an adult (Mageehon, 2003), the information in this study may benefit teachers in elementary and secondary schools. The participants of both the pilot study (N=5) and the current study (N=10) found that they were most engaged in school when they had teachers who treated them fairly, with respect, and who encouraged them to do good things. Teachers who put forth effort beyond the call of duty (stopping by a student's home, taking time to pull a child aside in or out of school, for example) were most fondly remembered. These exemplary teachers were not isolated to either elementary or secondary school. Prisoner student responses indicate that teachers who care and encourage exist from kindergarten to twelfth grade. So how can these teachers influence prisoner re-integration into society? There are two implications for K-12 teachers: the prevention of future crime commission through reaching out to at-risk students, and accommodating the needy child of an incarcerated parent.

As a teacher, I am able to identify behaviors that indicate a child's disposition toward criminal activity. This student may resist authority, ask to leave class often, and slouch in his

desk (or go to sleep in class). He may also live with a single parent or custodial parents who do not offer supervision and support for learning. The student whose test scores and participation are low, whose attendance is poor – these factors send up a red flag that the child needs intervention. Many schools have begun using positive behavior programs to redirect the troubled student. Those who cannot be reached through these means are often sent to juvenile detention centers; this is quite often the precursor to incarceration.

What if teachers found a way, while in class and on the school grounds, to reach out to students they feel are at risk? Though each prisoner student was able to name at least two teachers who positively impacted their lives, is this enough for a 12-year school career? Is it that these children slip through the cracks unnoticed, or do we educators witness a child's downfall and refuse to get involved because it is too much trouble or, worse yet, we just don't like the child's attitude? Most important to teachers is the need to recognize these undesirable behaviors as a cry for help –and to act on them.

So what about the student who has been in your fifth period History class for twelve weeks and you do not pay attention to his sleeping in class because 'at least he's not disturbing anyone'? Other than the school counselor, does anyone pull his cumulative folder and examine his family history? Has anyone called home to find out whether there is a medical condition or tragedy that occurred in the family that may have prompted this behavior? Quite often, when teachers do get to know their students' histories, they find an absent parent due to death or incarceration. However, just as Nathan described, many times the teachers are not aware of the personal tragedies of their students. Instead, the teacher dismisses any thought of helping the disruptive or antisocial and nonconformist child in order to save the children who came to school to learn. This ideology has one flaw – the disruptive child is still a child. And every child,

regardless of how disruptive they may appear to be, needs and craves the attention and direction of adults he looks up to.

The literature shows that the child of an incarcerated parent exhibits these behaviors, and that they often do not have a stable home life (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2004; Nurse, 2004). Perhaps it then becomes the teacher's responsibility to nurture and provide structure for that child for at least the seven hours a day when they are at school. Speaking as a teacher, I now have a different outlook on that apparently needy student who causes teachers to roll their eyes as he strolls carelessly down the hall. I realize that to be truly effective as a teacher, I must extend my reach beyond the students who comply with the rules and actually participate. On his first day as an administrator, the new principal at my school asked that each teacher try to impact at least two students per day. Why not extend that positively to the students who need it most?

Higher Education

The field of higher education has been participating in correctional education since the late 1800s (Glaser, 1997; Warburton, 1993). Typically, the community college or university offered courses through correspondence. Later, professors began to travel to the prison to hold class. Today, the most recent innovation in the prison – higher education connection is distance learning. The goal for all of these methods is to provide a college education for incarcerated men and women. Given the need for job security to successfully re-integrate into society (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002), more course offerings are essential to this successful re-integration. Jared and Jarvis expressed a desire to go into computer-related career after release. The program offerings at SSP, however, are limited in that graphic arts is the only program in the computer field. Through correspondence and/or distance learning, the career options and/or opportunities are greater, increasing the likelihood that prisoner students will have an opportunity to pursue a

career that they enjoy and that is profitable. Thus, this study benefits higher education as it provides a description of available programs and establishes a need for community college and university sponsored degree programs, specifically in the medical and computer technology fields. If such programs were available, prisoner students like Jared, Jarvis, and Ralph would have an opportunity to realize their goals prior to release and get off to a great start at a new crime-free life. Perhaps, if more programs/courses are offered through the community colleges and universities, more federal and state funding would be allotted to higher education institutions to run/staff these programs. The following is a discussion of the implications for the field of corrections.

Correctional Education

Research shows an increase in funding sources for U.S. prisons and correctional education (Wilkinson & Rhine, 2004). The amount of funding has not increased significantly, however. Given the budget cuts that occurred as a result of the recent hurricanes, SSP was faced with laying off its educators and switching to a program using only inmate tutors. With a new computer- and tutor-based program, teachers would ease the transition for the prisoner students. Ms. Drake expressed regret over the teachers (N=3) who were laid off as a result of the budget cuts following the hurricanes. She would rehire those teachers (or other certified teachers) if the funding became available. Therefore, funding adequate enough to hire certified teachers to oversee the educational programs is needed at this time.

The participants of this study indicated a desire to have teachers instead of inmate tutors because of the perceived lack of professionalism of the tutor and the tutor's inability to effectively assist the GED students. Geraci's (2000) study indicates that inmate tutors are those who have completed the GED program, passed the GED test, and completed a tutor training

program. This type of training is necessary for inmate tutors to be able to assist the unique prisoner student population. This is also true for teachers of middle and high school who come to the prison to teach. Just as these teachers had to learn pedagogy, and just how higher education instructors learn andragogy, correctional educators from every background should be given, at minimum, a seminar on teaching the prisoner student. The training would better prepare inmate tutors and certified teachers from outside the prison for dealing with learners with diverse needs, substance abuse problems and mental disorders, and learning disabilities. Additionally, a course or seminar on teaching prisoner students would equip teachers and tutors with the tools needed to adapt to changing inmate schedules, transfers in and out of class, and new arrivals to the class. The GED program is individualized, but having a well-trained teacher and/or inmate tutor in the classroom would make it easier to administer one-on-one time for academically needy students. Thus, correctional education could benefit from the results of this study by recognizing the need for training for inmate tutors and teachers. This training, and possibly a handbook for one the job reference, would enhance the quality of correctional instruction. It is therefore important to correctional education to find a way to ensure that this limited resource – the inmate tutor, is being used properly and in the best capacity.

Future Research

The prisoner students who were interviewed for the pilot study (N=5) and the current study (N=10) expressed gratitude for being asked to share their experiences and perceptions. Alvin, for example, states, “Nobody comes to talk to the population.” By population, he meant those prisoners housed in the general population. Alvin felt that if attention was given to correctional education, that attention was geared toward the Bible college students. It is therefore this

researcher's opinion that future research should focus on interviewing more prisoner students about their correctional education experience.

Research involving prisoner students could take many forms. This study actually could have been broken up into a series of more focused studies to provide more in-depth data. First, the post educational and employment experiences could be a study within itself. By interviewing prisoner students about these experiences, the researcher could possibly determine characteristics of school-age children that predict possible incarceration. Just as teachers of K-12 are able to identify the need to nurture and encourage from the information in this study, a study focusing solely on past experiences would provide teachers with a starting point for identifying at-risk behaviors from a unique source – a former at-risk student/child.

The study of the inmate tutor would also provide valuable information for correctional education, since the program is a new one and there are only two prisons using the program at the time. An evaluative study would enhance the ability of correctional administrators to utilize inmate tutors in place of certified educators. Perhaps inmate tutors themselves may have concerns that they wish to share that could then be addressed by administrations as a means of program improvement. The use of a training seminar for inmate tutors (focusing on andragogy and inter-personal relations) could be a topic of discussion in a focus group of correctional educators and/or administrators. In all, an examination of the inmate tutor would benefit this newly implemented GED program.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to discover the correctional education experience from the perspective of the prisoner student. Through one-on-one interviews with ten (N=10) males at Southern State Penitentiary, I was able to shed light on what it means to attend classes in prison.

The findings indicate that the prisoner student is filled with regret over past educational experiences and life choices. This regret is then a motivator for change – an impetus for attending class and “making something out of myself.” The motivation to attend and persist in class also comes from both internal (friends, family, self) and external (judges, parole boards, prison administrators) sources, and this motivation may or may not result in persistence in a GED course. The field of correctional education could benefit from this study by examining the GED program and its use of inmate tutors. Providing a training course for correctional educators could enhance the quality of instruction of both certified teachers and inmate tutors. The field of elementary and secondary education could benefit society at large by reaching out to at-risk students before they have a chance to be incarcerated. Finally, the field of higher education could benefit from this study’s findings by finding ways to provide additional program offerings for the prisoner students. Perhaps, by introducing new courses and programs of study, the federal and state governments would find a way to provide more funds for the field of correctional education. In all, the study changed this researcher’s perception of the prisoner student. Rather than focusing on the crime and the hardened criminal who was incarcerated, it is important to remember the person behind the prison identification number – the man who merely wants to “make it.”

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Appendix

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP,
COUNSELING AND FOUNDATIONS

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form: Student

Voices Behind Bars

Statement of Informed Consent: Student Participant

Investigator: Renee S. Hall, M.Ed.

504-280-6448

- Title of Research Study**
Voices Behind Bars: Correctional Education from the Perspective of the Prisoner Student
- Purpose of the Research**
The purpose of this research is to find out how prisoners feel about taking classes while in prison. I would like to find out the reasons prisoners decide to attend classes, how these classes change the prisoners' lives, and the past school and job experiences of prisoners. By interviewing prisoner students, I will be able to tell prison administrators about the benefits that prisoners feel they gain from taking classes. I will use the data from this study for dissertation writing, conferences, publication, and the results from this study will be released to the administrators. I will use direct quotes of prisoners in my report, but I will not list the prisoners' names.
- Procedures of the Research**
Each prisoner/participant will voluntarily agree to be interviewed for about 40-60 minutes. All interviews will be conducted in person by myself and will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Direct quotes from these transcripts will be used in the reporting of the findings; false names/fake names will be used when direct quotes are used. Tapes will be erased and discarded at the end of this study.
- Potential Risks or Discomforts**
Participants may feel uncomfortable discussing past school experiences and/or future school and career goals. Participants will be allowed to take breaks if needed.
- Potential Benefits to You or Others**
Results of this study may be used to provide prison administrators and policy and decision-makers with documented responses of students taking classes in prison.
- Alternative Procedures**
Participation is entirely voluntary and prisoners may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without a problem.

*JNO offers the best value for
our tuition dollar."*

Kaplan/Newsweek College Catalog 2002

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2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, Louisiana 70148
504.280.6661 fax 504.280.6453

*"UNO is rated as one of
the top schools supporting
diversity."*

- Kaplan/Newsweek College Catalog 2002

A Member of the Louisiana State University System Committed to Equal Opportunity

7. **Protection of Confidentiality**

Participants' names, specific work environments and identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. Names will not be identified on audiotapes or transcripts. I will transcribe, or type, the interview tapes. The signed consent forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will be kept in a safe and private manner by myself. If the results of this study are published, participants' names and identifying information will be disguised.

8. **Compensation for Participation**

There will be no money or other payment for participation in this study. Participation in this study will not change parole outcomes, nor will good time or other rewards be given to any prisoner for participation in this study.

9. **Questions After the Study**

The study does not involve more than minimal risk to the participants, since there will be no medical treatment or physical activity. However, should there be any questions or concerns resulting from participating in this study, or for any other questions about this inquiry, please feel free to contact Dr. Jim Killacky or Renee Hall at 504-280-6448. If you want to talk about your rights as a human subject, call Dr. Anthony Kontos at the University of New Orleans (504-280-6420).

10. **Signatures and Consent to Participate**

I have been informed of all procedures, possible benefits, and potential risks involved in this investigation. The study has been explained to me and my questions have been answered. By signing this form, I give my permission to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Signature of Participant

Name of Participant (PRINT)

Date

Signature of Researcher

Name of Researcher

Date



Appendix B

Informed Consent Form: Administrator

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, COUNSELING, AND FOUNDATIONS

Voices Behind Bars

Statement of Informed Consent: Administrator

Investigator: Renee S. Hall, M.Ed.

504-280-6448

1. **Title of Research Study**
Voices Behind Bars: Correctional Education from the Perspective of the Prisoner Student
2. **Purpose of the Research**
The purpose of this research is to determine the experiences of prisoner students in correctional education classes. This includes the reasons prisoners decide to attend classes, how these classes impact the prisoners' lives, and the past educational and employment experiences of prisoners. By interviewing prisoner students, the researcher is able to add prisoners' perceptions to the existing data on the effects of correctional education. Data from this study will be used for dissertation writing, conferences, publication, and the results from this study will be released to the participating administrators.
3. **Procedures of the Research**
Participants will voluntarily participate in interviews lasting approximately 40 - 60 minutes. All interviews will be conducted in person by the researcher and will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Direct quotes from these transcripts will be used in the reporting of the findings; pseudonyms will be used when direct quotes are used. Tapes will be erased and discarded upon completion of this study.
4. **Potential Risks or Discomforts**
Participants may experience some uneasiness discussing the educational experiences of the students taking part in this study. Participants will be allowed to skip questions if needed to maintain the privacy and integrity of the academic program being studied.
5. **Potential Benefits to You or Others**
Results of this study may be used to provide prison administrators and policy and decision-maker with documented, qualitative responses to the student experience in the correctional education classroom. These responses can aid administrators with policy and curricular decision-making.

1st value for
"
: Catalog 2002

348 Bicentennial Education Bldg, *Lakefront Campus*
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504.280.6661 fax 504.280.6453

*"UNO is rated
the top school
diversity."*

- Kaplan/Newsweek

A Member of the Louisiana State University System Committed to Equal Opportunity

6. **Alternative Procedures**

Participation is entirely voluntary and individuals may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

7. **Protection of Confidentiality**

Participants' names, specific work environments and identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. Names will not be identified on audiotapes or transcripts. The project director will transcribe the interview tapes. The signed consent forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner by the researcher. If the results of this study are published, participants' names and identifying information will be disguised.

8. **Compensation for Participation**

There will be no monetary or other compensation for participation in this study. Participation in this study will not affect parole outcomes, nor will good time or other administrative incentives be awarded to any prisoner for participation in this study.

9. **Questions After the Study**

The study does not involve more than minimal risk to the participants, since there will be no medical treatment or physical activity. However, should there be any questions or concerns resulting from participating in this study, or for any other questions about this inquiry, please feel free to contact Dr. Jim Killacky or Renee Hall at 504-280-6448. If you want to talk about your rights as a human subject, call Dr. Anthony Kontos at the University of New Orleans (504- 280-6420).

10. **Signatures and Consent to Participate**

I have been informed of all procedures, possible benefits, and potential risks involved in this investigation. The study has been explained to me and my questions have been answered. By signing this form, I give my permission to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Signature of Participant

Name of Participant (PRINT)

Date

Signature of Researcher

Name of Researcher

Date

Appendix C Human Subjects Approval Form

**University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans**

Campus Correspondence

Dr. Jim Killacky
Renee Hall

1/24/2006

RE: Voices behind bars: Correctional education from the perspective of the prisoner student

IRB #: 02oct05-a

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines.

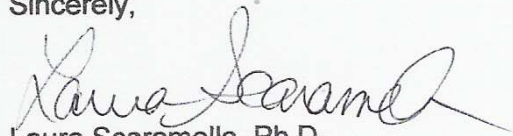
Please be advised to take caution when reporting any of your findings to the correctional institution or to the participants themselves. Do not include any identifying information, including race, when reporting your findings and please be sure to have all investigators approve the document before submitting any report.

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!

Sincerely,



Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.

Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans

Form Number: 02oct05-A

(please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: James Killacky Title: Associate Professor

Department: Education, Counseling, and Foundations College: Education

Project Title: Voices Behind Bars: Correctional Education from the Perspective of the Prisoner Student

Dates of Proposed Project Period From _____ to _____

Approval Status:

Full Board Review

Expedite

Exempt

Project requires review more than annually. Review every _____ months.

Approved Date: 1-24-06

Deferred Date:

Disapproved Date:

*approval is for 1 year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.

1st continuation Signature of IRB Chair _____ Date: _____

2nd continuation Signature of IRB Chair _____ Date: _____

3rd continuation Signature of IRB Chair _____ Date: _____

4th continuation Signature of IRB Chair _____ Date: _____

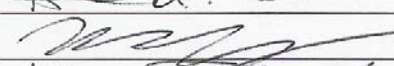
Committee Signatures:



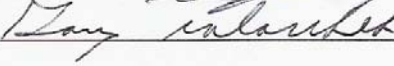
Laura Scaramella, Ph.D. (Chair)



Pamela Jenkins, Ph.D.



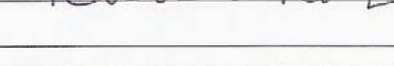
Anthony Kontos, Ph.D. (Associate chair)



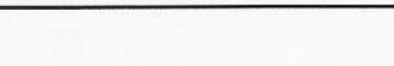
Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.



Gary Talarchek, Ph.D.



Kari Walsh



Kathleen Whalen, ~~ESW~~ LCSW

L. Allen Witt, Ph.D.



National Cancer Institute
U.S. National Institutes of Health | www.cancer.gov

Appendix D

NIH Certificate

NCI Home

Cancer Topics

Clinical Trials

Cancer Statistics

Research & Funding

News



Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams

Completion Certificate

This is to certify that

Renee Hall

has completed the **Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams** online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 06/26/2005.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nih.gov>

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP,
COUNSELING AND FOUNDATIONS

Appendix E

Regulation Letter

June 13, 2005

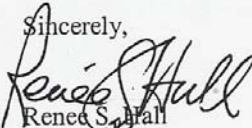
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

I received a copy of the State of Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections Field Operations regulations [REDACTED] R.S. 15: 574.12 (D) (2)). I read the document in its entirety, and I understand all six subsections of this regulation. As a result, I will follow all procedures set forth by this regulation.

I assert that my research practices will comply with sections A(1-6) and B of item 6, Procedures, as prescribed by the regulation.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Renee S. Hall
Doctoral Student

Cc: Jim Killacky, Advisor

----- Original Message -----

From: "Renee S Hall" [rhall@uno.edu]

Sent: 02/14/2006 11:59 AM

Cc: <renjonashall@cox.net>

Subject: Scheduling of Second Visit [REDACTED]

Appendix F

Contact Letter (Electronic E-mail)

Dear Warden [REDACTED]

First, let me say thank you to you for all of your efforts with my pilot study as well as the parole board. I did receive the letter from the parole board and the Institutional Review Board has approved my study. I am going to meet with my committee on February 23rd to iron out any issues they might have with the study (my proposal defense). I should be ready to come out to Angola to collect data thereafter. I was wondering when was the soonest time that I would be able to come out and conduct interviews after the 23rd (I would LOVE to make it out before the end of the month - [REDACTED]). I will need to interview ten (10) prisoners currently participating in adult education classes. The criteria for participation in the study are:

1. **Incarcerated males**
2. **Aged 26-50**
3. **At least 50% of participants must have the possibility of parole**

The IRB wants me to have a list of at least 30 prisoners from which I will randomly select the ten participants for the study. Will it be possible for you to provide me with such a list once I get there? Or would it be easier for you to randomly select the ten participants so that you will have time to notify them of my visit?

I will send you the consent forms and copies of the questionnaires by the end of the week (where would you like me to send them?)... basically, I am repeating the same study with more participants. Because it's a large document, I will bring your copy of the pilot study with me and present it to you when I return to Angola.

Please call me at 504-701-8010 or email me to let me know when will be a good time for my visit. Please let me know if there is anything that you need me to bring along with me.

Thank you again for your invaluable assistance, and I look forward to finally working with you again at the end of my doctoral studies.

Sincerely,
Renee S. Hall
Doctoral Student
University of New Orleans

[https://mail2.uno.edu/exchange/rhall/\[REDACTED\]%20Re:%20Scheduling%20of%20Second%20...](https://mail2.uno.edu/exchange/rhall/[REDACTED]%20Re:%20Scheduling%20of%20Second%20...) 4/7/2006

**Voices Behind Bars: Prisoner Perceptions of
Correctional Education**

**Renee S. Hall, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student
University of New Orleans**

**Interview Guide
Students**

Interview Guide – Student
Dear Student,

Please take a moment before we begin our interview to answer these brief questions. If you would rather skip a question, please check “I would rather not answer this question.” When you are finished, please let me know so we may begin the interview.

Thank you for your time.

1. What is your age? _____

- I would rather not answer this question.

2. Do you have children?

- Yes/ How many? _____
- No
- I would rather not answer this question.

3. What is your ethnic background?

- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- European American
- Native American
- Other _____
- I would rather not answer this question.
-

4. What is your marital status?

- Married
- Separated/Divorced
- Widowed
- Single
- I would rather not answer this question.

5. Were you employed before you were incarcerated?

- Yes/ What was your occupation? _____ [Go to Question #6]
- No [Skip Question #6]
- I would rather not answer this question. [Skip Question #6]

6. If you answered yes to question 5, about how many hours per week did you work (before you were incarcerated)?

- Less than 20 hours per week
- 20 –39 hours per week
- 40 or more hours per week
- I would rather not answer this question.

7. What education/training/faith-based program(s) are you currently participating in?

Job Skills Academic Training Program

Theological Seminary

Pre-Release Exit Program

__ Life Skills

Step Toward Educational Progress

__ Adult Basic Education

__ GED

Vocational Training

Other _____

I would rather not answer this question.

8. Are you a tutor in any educational, trade/skills or faith-based programs?

Yes/ Which Program/course? _____

No

I would rather not answer this question.

- If you had difficulty learning, did your teachers work with you to find ways to make learning easier for you?

During Incarceration

- Why did you start taking classes at this institution? How did you find out about joining class?

- How long had you been here (in prison) before you decided to take part in classes?

- How do you feel about school now? How do you feel about the teachers you come in contact with today? Would you be interested in taking other/additional courses after you finish this program?
- What have you heard about classes from other inmates? What had you heard before you joined the class?
- Do you experience peer pressure to attend or not attend classes?
- How much time are you given after classes to study? How much time do you spend studying after classes?
- What is the most important part of this course/program to you?
-

After Incarceration

- What do you hope to gain from this course (what do you hope to accomplish by taking this class)?

- What type of job do you hope to get when you are released? How much money do you hope to make? What type of education/training do you think you will need to get this job?

- Is there anything that I have not asked you that will help me to understand your plans after leaving prison?

Southern State Penitentiary

(Pseudonym used to protect the identity of the institution)

Appendix H

Secretary

June 10, 2005

Approval Letter (Southern State Penitentiary)

TO: [REDACTED]
Assistant Secretary/Adults

FROM: [REDACTED]
Assistant Warden/Programming

RE: Approval for Research Project

In accordance with Departmental Regulation C-01-005, entitled Social Science Research Regarding Prisons, Inmates and/or Effects of Incarceration, I am forwarding the following attachments for final approval.

Upon receiving your approval, the [REDACTED] State Penitentiary will allow Ms. Renee S. Hall, a doctoral student in the Department of Education at the University of New Orleans, to perform an on-site survey on *correctional education* [REDACTED] beginning in mid to late June 2005.

She is requesting to observe the classroom and to interview the Warden, inmates and education staff.

Ms. Hall's request, which complies with the above mentioned department regulation, is attached for your review.

Your consideration is appreciated. I may be contacted at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Assistant Warden/Programming

Attachments
cc: [REDACTED]

**Voices Behind Bars: Prisoner Perceptions of
Correctional Education**

**Renee S. Hall, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student
University of New Orleans**

**Interview Guide
Administrator/Educator**

1. Prison Administration/Educators

- What types of funding sources do you have at your disposal for correctional education? [Administrator only need reply to this item]

- What is your philosophy on correctional education in the United States?

- How do you feel the correctional institutions in Louisiana fare when compared with the nation (when considering correctional education)?

- Which programs are most used by students? In which programs are the students most successful?

- What is your preferred teaching style [educator only]?
- How does your preferred teaching style link with the correctional education curriculum [educator only]?
- What do you do to address different student learning styles [educator only]?
- What percentage of your students has a learning disability? Are there services available to those students who have learning disabilities?

- What impact, if any, do transfers, job details, court dates, and other interruptions have upon class/program scheduling?
- Are there any additional programs that you would like to provide to students if funding was available?
- How would you rate the literacy levels of the students in this institution? How does that affect employment or education in the prison?
- What percentage of students would you say are internally motivated to change their lives upon re-entry? Do you feel that those students who involuntarily participate in educational programs can have the same or similar outcomes (in terms of success upon re-entry) as those who volunteer?

- How are the education programs preparing the students for work/re-entry in Louisiana?
- What type of relationship do you have with the students? If you work closely with the students, what advice do you give them about the future/re-entry?
- What would you say to taxpayers about providing tax dollars for correctional education?

- Are there a success stories that you would like to share with me?

- Is there anything that I have not asked you that will help me in my study?

Vita

Renee Hall is a New York native currently residing in Metairie, Louisiana. She is a poet, writer and high school English teacher. This year is her seventh year of teaching in the Jefferson Parish Public School System.

Hall's accomplishments include a thirteen year marriage to a talented baker, four intelligent and creative children, and a volume of poetry entitled *To Whom It May Concern: My Words, My Thoughts, My Heart*. Her research interests include correctional education, the role of African American professors/administrators in higher education, and women in higher education. In the future, Hall intends to continue her research on correctional education and pursue a professorship at a local institution.