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Education on the Inside: Incarcerated Students' Perceptions of Correctional Education Programs

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EDUCATION ON THE INSIDE: INCARCERATED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
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Dedication

This work is affectionately dedicated to my parents Kenneth and Devonia Cage. You believed in me when I was filled with self-doubt. You encouraged me to accomplish the goal. Your faith never wavered. For this and much more I am forever grateful.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of my late grandparents, James and Iola Cage. I know you're watching from heaven.

Acknowledgments

Abstract

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The United States has alarmingly high incarceration and recidivism rates. Many

of those incarcerated have less education than their general population counterparts.

Correctional education programs have a proven ability to reduce incarceration and

recidivism rates by helping rehabilitate people. Current research on incarcerated students

primarily focuses on the external benefits of correctional education programs such as

recidivism. A limited amount of research is represented in the literature on incarcerated

students' perceptions about their academic experiences. The purpose of this study was to

explore incarcerated students' perceptions regarding their correctional education

experiences. The study particularly investigated students at a Louisiana correctional

institution. A qualitative case study methodology was utilized to examine the lived

experiences of seven incarcerated students who participated in semi-structured

interviews, which were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

The study found that several barriers prevented students from earning a high

school diploma prior to incarceration. Findings of the study indicated ways in which

incarcerated students are motivated to participate in correctional education programs.

Study findings revealed how students' self-reflections have shaped their academic

experiences. Findings in this study will have implications for practice and policy by

providing an understanding of the issues incarcerated students encounter.

Recommendations for future studies were made based on outcomes of the study and

address ways in which research could be expanded to address the existing knowledge gap

regarding incarcerated student perspectives.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Worldwide, roughly over 10.2 million people are incarcerated in penal institutions (Walmsley, 2013). In the United States, more than two million adults are incarcerated (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013). Accounting for just 5% of the world's population, the United States houses nearly 25% of the world's prison population (Gudrais, 2013; Talvi, 2007). Each year over 700,000 incarcerated adults are released from federal and state prisons to return to communities (Davis et al., 2013).

A majority of people who are incarcerated enter prison with no job skills or training and low literacy rates. The United States Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) conducted a study of 1,300 incarcerated persons and found that "the incarcerated population is disproportionately male, Black, and Hispanic, relatively younger, and has lower levels of educational attainment." (The United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014, para. 3). The study revealed that people in prison have lower literacy rates compared to the average American household population. Approximately 30% of incarcerated adults in the United States performed at a literacy proficiency level below high school credential and 23% scored at high school level. Half of incarcerated adults in the study performed below high school credential in numeracy; and similarly the population scored low in technology-rich environments (NCES, 2014). The literacy and numeracy rates of the incarcerated population are indicative of a clear need for some form of correctional education.

On average, people who are incarcerated are typically less educated than the general population. Harlow (2003) found in a study of incarcerated people between 1991

and 1997 that approximately 40% of adults incarcerated in state and federal institutions did not receive a high school diploma. By comparison, 18% of the general population during that time period did not have a high school credential (Harlow, 2003). The United States Department of Education (2016) also indicates that high school dropout rates for the general population in the United States decreased from 12.1% to 6.5% between 1990 and 2014. Yet, the dropout rates for the corrections population remained steady. Over half of the general population has some college education, while less than one-fourth of all people incarcerated in state and federal prisons have any college education (Harlow, 2003). Most people in prison were unemployed or underemployed prior to incarceration (The United States Department of Education [DOE], 2009). In addition to low educational attainment, incarcerated people often lack career related skills and a steady work history, which is significant in the process of returning from prison to society. The lack of education and job skills for people in prison is significant because projections indicate that 95% of people imprisoned in the United States will eventually be released. Most jobs in the workforce now require (or at least prefer) some level of postsecondary education. Furthermore, studies indicate that incarceration has the ability to weaken an individual's aptitude for achieving gainful employment (DOE, 2009). Due to the lack of education and training, many people released from prison relapse to criminal activity. The constant cycle of being in and out of prison makes it difficult for the people to acquire meaningful education and work experience.

According to a survey of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, only 11.8% of people in state prisons and 20.3% of people in federal prisons received some college education (The United States Department of

Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2009). By comparison, 57% of adults 25 and older in the United States completed at least some college education (Pew Research Center, 2013). In 2003, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) assessed the English literacy of 1,200 adults in 31 state and 12 federal prisons (Greenberg, Dunleavy, & Kutner, 2007). This was the first time incarcerated persons had been assessed for literacy since 1992. When compared to adults living in households, people who were incarcerated had lower average prose, document, and quantitative literacy. The study also revealed that incarcerated people who had participated in some vocational training had higher literacy rates than incarcerated individuals who had not participated in any vocational training during their incarceration period (Greenberg et al., 2007).

Key findings in a large meta-analysis of correctional education studies suggest that correctional education has a significant, positive impact on recidivism. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit organization that uses research and analysis to support policy improvement and decision making. The RAND Corporation indicated that on average, participation in prison education programs decreased the odds of recidivism by 43%. The study conducted by the RAND Corporation also found that post-release employment was 13% higher among formerly incarcerated people who participated in academic or vocational programs compared to their peers who did not participate in such programs. Moreover, the study suggested that correctional education programs are cost effective. For every dollar invested in correctional education, incarceration costs are reduced by four to five dollars (Davis et al., 2013). Research also demonstrates that overall, people in prison want to find gainful employment upon release and those who do find gainful employment are less likely to return to prison. A research study found that 26% of

formerly incarcerated people regretted not receiving job training during incarceration (Visher, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). According to one study, participation in correctional education and training programs was more likely if incarcerated people believed participation in such programs would lead to gainful employment post-release. Moreover, the same study demonstrated that incarcerated individuals who enrolled in correctional education programs were more likely to maintain employment and earn higher wages than those who did not enroll (Stana, 1993).

Hetter (2015) reported that people incarcerated at the Eastern New York Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison, defeated the debate team at Harvard College. In addition to defeating Harvard, the prison debate team has also defeated nationally ranked teams from the University of Vermont and the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York. Though the prison debate team was viewed as competition thought to have the least chance of winning, the team was able to overcome barriers with the help of correctional education. Bard College in upstate New York started a correctional education initiative called the Bard Prison Initiative. The program provides an opportunity for incarcerated individuals to earn a degree at Bard College while serving their sentences. Carlos Polanco, a 31-year old on the prison debate team, noted that he and other teammates were "graced with the opportunity" (Hetter, 2015, para. 5) to participate on the team. In reference to the instructors and administrators involved in the Bard Prison Initiative, Polanco stated that "they make us believe in ourselves" (Hetter, 2015, para. 5). This further supports the notion that correctional education programs have a positive impact on incarcerated persons' outlook.

Statement of the Problem

The United States is ranked number 20 in educational achievement but is ranked number one in incarceration (Chang, 2012a; The Learning Curve, 2014). The two most notable states for high incarceration rates are California and Louisiana. With California's large general population, there is no surprise that prison overcrowding in the state is a major issue (American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC], 2014; Guetzkow & Schoon, 2015). The state of California has 34 correctional institutions and still faces challenges with prison overcrowding (California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation [CDCR], 2015). Overcrowding has become such an issue that several people in California state prisons are transferred to out-of-state facilities in Arizona, Oklahoma, and as far as Mississippi (CDCR, 2015).

The state of Louisiana has been referred to as "the world's prison capital" (Chang, 2012a). The state imprisons more people per capita than any of its United States counterparts, including California. The incarceration rate in Louisiana is almost five times the rate as that for the country of Iran, 13 times China's rate, and 20 times the rate in Germany (Chang, 2012a). One out of every 86 adults in Louisiana is incarcerated (Chang, 2012a; LDPSC, 2014). The participants in this study were from the Louisiana adult, male incarcerated population.

Louisiana has operated under three strikes laws (Chang, 2012b). Three strikes laws are state laws that enforce harsher punishments for people who commit a felony three times. Sentencing under three strikes laws is usually 25 years to life. Three strikes laws are huge contributors to the increased prison population in the United States.

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections reports that 46% of adults in prison in Louisiana released in 2008 returned to prison within five years (Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections [LDPSC], 2014). With almost half of the Louisiana adult incarcerated population returning to prison, correctional education is a promising strategy. Correctional education programs help to assist people in prison with finding gainful employment post-release, circumventing re-incarceration, and addressing issues of prison overcrowding caused by three strikes sentencing (Davis et al., 2013).

Lack of education combined with the negative stigma associated with incarceration contributes considerably to recidivism. Re-incarceration rates can partially be attributed to formerly incarcerated people lacking the appropriate skills, knowledge, and training needed to successfully reintegrate into society. While some formerly incarcerated people have managed to successfully reintegrate into society by gaining employment, returning to school, and becoming productive citizens, others will commit new crimes and return to prison or jail. It is estimated that within three years, 40% of those incarcerated adults released from prison are expected to be re-incarcerated (Davis et al., 2013). Correctional education programs aim to reduce recidivism rates by providing people with education and training while in prison. Several studies have shown that rehabilitation programs such as correctional education have a significant impact on not only developing the person incarcerated but also positively impacting society by producing more productive citizens, rather than hindrances (Adams and Benneth, 1994; Eisenberg, 1991; Flanagan, et al, 1994; Gainous, 1992; Jenkins, Steurer, & Pendry, 1995; Karpowitz & Kenner, 2003; Little, Robinson, & Burnette, 1991; Menon, Blakley,

Carmichael, & Silver, L., 1992; Porporino, & Robinson, 1992; Saylor & Gaes, 1991; Smith & Silverman, 1994; Vacca, 2004; Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2000).

With the rapid growth of the prison population, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the perspective of people who are incarcerated. By studying incarcerated student viewpoints of their correctional education experience, the researcher aimed to gain insight on how educational experience influences the individual. There is a growing need for research on the incarcerated student population. This study was designed to learn more about this population and contribute to this research area.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to discover and understand the lived educational experiences of incarcerated students taking HiSET (high school equivalency exam preparation), adult basic education, and vocational courses in Louisiana. This study used qualitative research as a means to "hear silenced voices" and "empower individuals to share their stories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Since incarcerated persons are essentially cut off from society, they are often treated as insignificant or powerless. This study sought to hear the marginalized voices of incarcerated students. This study aimed to empower incarcerated students to share their untold stories. The research examined three major aspects related to incarcerated student educational experiences: the past, the present, and the future. The study emphasized student perceptions of the correctional education experience based on previous educational attainment, current educational involvement, and future expectations for post-release success. The study aimed to understand why people in prison chose to enroll in courses, the perceived benefits of taking courses while incarcerated, interactions with peers and correctional staff, and future career/employment

expectations. By exploring the thoughts, emotions, and perspectives of incarcerated students enrolled in education programs, insight on the dynamic influences of correctional education were revealed. Additionally, the study explored correctional education staff perspectives. Specifically, the intention was to uncover any observations or experiences that described the learning environment, the educational culture, student interactions, and educational programming.

This study is important because it involved listening to marginalized voices of incarcerated students regarding their learning experiences as they are the direct recipients of the educational programming. Traditionally, in higher education, measurement tools are used to determine institutional effectiveness. Direct feedback from students is often used to improve instructional practice and institutional effectiveness. However, for special populations such as incarcerated students, there is not much data which reports student perceptions about their learning experiences. Incarcerated students have a vested interest in correctional education programs and should be able to exercise their voices about the programs. This study explored how incarcerated students make meaning of their educational experiences.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study was: How do incarcerated students perceive their correctional education experience? Secondary research questions were as follows:

2. What are incarcerated students' career/employment expectations after release?
3. What motivates people in prison to take classes?
4. How does previous education or work experience impact the correctional education experience?
5. Which aspects of the program do students perceive as successful?

6. Are there any distinguishable similarities in student perceptions and staff perceptions of the correctional education program?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study identifies adult learning theories as they relate to the prison environment and correctional education. The framework establishes the basis for the research conducted in the study. Since the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of incarcerated student learning experiences through the individual perspective, the framework focuses on student motivation, learning, and persistence. The study also addresses how the external environment impacts student learning outcomes. The theories presented relate to the impact prison education programs have on students' thoughts, feelings, environment, and motivation; attributes that can lead to positive learning outcomes, improved behavior and lower recidivism rates. Given that the goal of the study was to explore incarcerated student perspectives of their correctional education experience, the theoretical foundation for the study focuses on social learning theory, transformative learning, student integration and persistence, and self-determination theory.

Social learning theory suggests that behavior is learned by observing and mimicking others (Bandura, 1995). The theory also states that learning occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments for certain behaviors. The more a behavior is rewarded, the more likely a person is to exhibit that behavior. Conversely, the more a behavior is punished, the less likely a person is to display that behavior. An examination of incarcerated student educational attainment from the social learning theory standpoint indicates that lower levels of educational attainment exist among people in prison because individuals in their environment also have low levels of educational attainment.

The social learning theory approach also implies that the more exposure people in prison have to educational settings, the more likely they are to behave like educated individuals. Self-efficacy is also a major component of Bandura's (1995) social learning theory. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their own ability to yield a desired result based on their actions (Bandura, 1995). In an academic setting, self-efficacy can have a positive influence on academic success. However, for incarcerated students lower levels of self-efficacy can exist because of the prison environment and individual education experiences (Allred, Harrison, & O'Connell, 2013).

According to Jack Mezirow (1997), transformative learning theory is a change process that alters how individuals make meaning of their learning experiences. The process transforms frames of references (Mezirow, 1997). Frames of reference "selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). Transformative learning theory implies that individual behavior changes based on perception. For incarcerated students, the implication is that their perceptions about their correctional education experiences help to change behavior outcomes. A major element of transformative learning is a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma is a life event or a series of events that serve as a catalyst for a change in perspective (Mezirow, 1997). The dilemma causes individual reflection of experiences and beliefs. For example, incarceration could be considered a disorienting dilemma that causes challenges for individuals. Correctional education programs offer incarcerated students a deeper understanding of self, an opportunity for discovery, and influences transformative learning.

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) developed an integration model of student persistence. Tinto proposed that two main factors serve as predictors of student persistence: academic and social integration. Although Tinto's work is based on persistence of traditional, undergraduate students, studies have indicated that his findings are applicable to other types of students including adult students (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985). Bean and Metzner (1985) presented a similar model for predicting student persistence for adult students. Bean and Metzner's (1985) model suggests that adult student persistence or departure is based on the following factors: 1) academic variables such as high school GPA, 2) student intent to leave or stay, 3) background and defining variables such as demographics, previous academic performance, and educational goals, and 4) environmental factors outside of institutional control. The models developed by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Bean and Metzner (1985) are suitable for examining incarcerated student integration and persistence as these students have similar experiences. Certain elements of the above mentioned models of student integration and persistence were applicable to the incarcerated students in this study.

Self-determination theory is a motivation theory that addresses goal-directed behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The theory explains that humans have innate psychological needs. Deci and Ryan (2000) note that humans have three basic needs: 1) autonomy, 2) competence, and 3) relatedness. Autonomy is the individual need to have control over choices and actions. Competence is the need to have a sense of mastery or a perception of being adept. Relatedness refers to the need for a sense of belonging through positive relationships. The foundation of the theory is that people are motivated

by interests that provide satisfaction of those three basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

Self-determination theory is appropriate for examining incarcerated students' motivation for enrolling in correctional education programs. Deci and Ryan (2000) noted that the three basic needs are needed by all humans regardless of culture or background. If these innate psychological needs are not met, negative psychological consequences will result. The theory implies that when incarcerated students have all three basic psychological needs met, they become internally motivated which in turn increases academic performance.

Significance of the Study

Qualitative research techniques were used in this study to contribute to the current body of knowledge on correctional education by providing a picture of the perceived benefits of correctional education programs from the student perspective. Data collected in the study was directly related to student participation in programs and activities that the correctional institution provided for their learning and personal development. Through interviews, the study examined perceptions on correctional education experiences during imprisonment including incarcerated student perceptions of courses, learning environments, classroom interactions, and instructors. The study results provide a snapshot of how incarcerated students view their learning experiences and what they gain from correctional education programs. The findings from this study provide insight on which aspects of the program are most effective as perceived by incarcerated students. The findings also contribute to current research on adult students and special populations. The theoretical foundation for this study is based on the following theories: social

learning theory, transformative learning, student integration and persistence, and self-determination theory.

Definition of Terms

Administrator: Individual responsible for supervising operations in the prison including the incarcerated population, prison employees, and budgetary functions.

Adult Basic Education (ABE): Educational programs geared towards students 16 years or older who are not enrolled in school and want to improve their basic reading, writing, mathematics, listening, and speaking skills.

Corrections: The administrative system guiding the treatment of people in prison.

Correctional Education: Educational programs and activities that occur inside prison.

Correctional Institution: The facility where incarcerated persons are housed and take educational courses. Interchangeable with prison.

Document Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to search, comprehend, and use information from non-continuous texts such as job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and food/drug labels.

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): An alternative to a high school diploma.

HiSET: A standardized examination which measures academic knowledge and proficiency equivalent to those of a high school graduate. The examination covers the following content areas: Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science.

Incarceration**:** Confinement to a prison or correctional institution while awaiting trial for an offense or as punishment for an offense.

Literacy: The ability to read and write.

Parole: The conditional release of an incarcerated person, under supervision, until the expiration of the term of imprisonment.

Pell grant: Funds provided by the government for students to pay for college. Unlike loans, Pell funds do not have to be repaid.

Penal: Relating to the sentencing of people to prison under the legal system.

Probation: Occurs prior to or instead of prison time, subject to a period of good behavior under supervision.

Prose Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts such as newspapers, brochures, editorials, and instructions.

Quantitative Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to identify and perform computations using numbers that are embedded in printed materials. This includes activities such as balancing a checkbook, calculating a tip, filling out an order form, or calculating loan interest.

Recidivism: A tendency to relapse into criminal behavior.

Rehabilitation: The reintegration of formerly incarcerated people to society.

Vocational Education or Vocational Training: Education or training which prepares students for a specific trade. It directly develops expertise in techniques related to technology, skill, and scientific technique to span all aspects of the trade.

Assumptions

Creswell (2009) noted that in any kind of research study, the researcher conveys a set of beliefs as well as philosophical assumptions. The assumptions of this study aimed to provide a context for a deeper understanding of incarcerated student perspectives on correctional education programs. The following assumptions were made about the participants in this study: 1) it was assumed that participants would answer all questionnaire and interview questions; 2) it was assumed that all participants were literate

and had the mental capacity to read, understand, and answer questions, 3) it was assumed that all participants had successfully enrolled in at least one correctional education course, 4) it was assumed that all participant recollections were accurate, and 5) it was assumed that at least half of the participants would have the possibility of parole. Based on the literature review, it was anticipated that approximately 68% of the participants would be black, approximately 31% would be white, and 1% would represent other races. It was also anticipated that participants would have low levels of educational attainment prior to incarceration. Lastly, it was anticipated that half of the incarcerated student participants were serving an average sentence of less than six years.

Delimitations

The primary delimitation of this research study is that results may only be applicable to participants in this study. The study is not representative of all incarcerated student perspectives on correctional education programs. Only participant perspectives are represented in the study. Another delimitation of the study is that it does not examine the effectiveness of correctional education programs but rather, students' perceptions about such programs.

Limitations

As with all research, there are limitations to this research study. The number of participants in the study was limited due to restricted access and time constraints. Due to the nature of the prison setting, the researcher did not have complete control over the recruitment and selection of participants. Although, the methodology used in the study does not require a large sample size. Another limitation to the study is that research conducted in this study was not used to make generalizations about the larger population

of correctional education participants but rather gain a greater understanding of participant outlook. An additional limitation to the study is that the participants were housed in a local correctional facility which typically has a higher turnover rate due to release or transfer of incarcerated persons. This typically causes a barrier to program completion.

Organization of the Study

This study encompasses five chapters. Chapter 1 of the study includes the introduction, statement and significance of the problem, research purpose and research questions, definition of terms, researcher assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. The remainder of this study will focus on various aspects of correctional education and student experiences. Chapter 2 comprises a search description, a literature review on correctional education in America, a brief history of correctional education in America, funding for correctional education, recidivism, the correctional population, theoretical framework, and summary of the research. Chapter 3 provides detailed information about the methodology used in the study including research design, research questions, setting, participants, data collection, data analysis, and a summary. Chapter 4 describes the findings of the study and includes reflections on the visit, general program information, participant backgrounds, student themes, staff themes, program themes and a chapter summary. Lastly, Chapter 5 consists of a review of the research questions data, discussion of the findings, a review of theoretical framework, implications for the study, recommendations for future research, and final conclusions.

Summary

Correctional education is a key component of rehabilitation of people in prison. The American prison population is an over-representation of citizens with low levels of educational attainment. Correctional education programs are designed to give people in prison an opportunity to rehabilitate and prepare for successful re-entry into society upon release. This research study attempted to capture a snapshot of the incarcerated student viewpoint of correctional education, thus indicating the influence of correctional education programs on individuals.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This chapter explores literature relevant to correctional education in the United States of America. Topics in this chapter will provide an overview of the main research areas related to the study. Within the section, a brief sequential history traces the expansion of American correctional education programs. This chapter addresses obstacles and advantages in correctional education program funding. The effects of prison education programs on recidivism are also demonstrated in this chapter. United States general prison statistics are provided as well as specific prison statistics for the state of Louisiana. A theoretical framework regarding the research for the study is also presented.

Search Description

The American Psychological Association (2009) recommends that research sources be reliable and include primary reports that represent the most current information when possible. Initially, the literature search in this study was limited to a five-year period spanning between 2012 and 2017 to provide the most up-to-date information. The literature search was expanded beyond the five-year time span for two main reasons: 1) to demonstrate a historical timeline of correctional education and 2) a limited number of current references were available to support research topic. Included in the references are various articles, books, research studies, and journals. A literature search of relevant literature was performed from July 2016 to September 2017 using search engines from the American Correctional Association, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, United States Department of Education, United States Department of Justice, and University of

Memphis University Libraries to find various titles. References collected during the

search of literature came from a variety of sources including public libraries, academic

advisor's library, researcher's personal library, interlibrary loan, and corrections

administrators' library. The literature selected for this study is pivotal and establishes

basis and trustworthiness. Key search terms are as follows: *correctional education,*

correctional education success, correctional education theory, corrections population,

funding for correctional education, history of correctional education, incarceration rates,

incarcerated persons, inmate literacy, inmate perspective, prison education, prison

funding, prison release, prison statistics, prison system, recidivism, rehabilitation, and

social reintegration.

History of Correctional Education in America

 Sabbath schools. Since the late 18th century, correctional education has been a

part of United States history. Correctional education can be traced back to America's

first prison, Walnut Street Jail, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Fisher, 1970;

Gehring, 1997). In 1791, Walnut Street Jail was the first recognized prison to provide

religious education in an effort to rehabilitate incarcerated people (Edge, 2009). The

earliest form of prison education was introduced through the Quaker movement as moral

and religious instruction based on a strict rehabilitation philosophy known as the

Pennsylvania System (Gerber & Fritsch, 1995). Under the Pennsylvania system,

incarcerated individuals were housed in solitary confinement units and only received

visitation at night from a chaplain who would read biblical texts (Schmalleger, 2007).

Literate people in the prison were given bibles and other religious texts during Sabbath

school (Gehring, 1995). Between 1789 and 1875, Sabbath school was a major

component of rehabilitation.

In 1801, the state of New York offered elementary education classes to exemplary

people in prison. The courses were offered as winter sessions. With the lack of prison

personnel to provide education, classes were taught by other, more educated individuals

who were also incarcerated (Fisher, 1970).

Louis Dwight was a prison reform activist who visited people in jail, delivering

bibles. In 1825, after observing the poor conditions for people who were incarcerated, he

founded the Boston Prison Discipline Society, a prison reform group. As a result of the

Boston Prison Discipline Society, Sabbath schools became a more prominent part of

several prisons in the northern region of the United States. An article by Albert Roberts

(1969) reported the following:

> Dwight and his associates primary concern was in parting religious beliefs to the
>
> inmates.   However, the Sabbath schools did provide the infant stage of prison
>
> education, and inmates were more aptly prepared for a satisfactory adjustment to
>
> society upon release than many of us realize. Louis Dwight was the first national
>
> figure in American prison reforms. (p. 14)

Louis Dwight initiated one of the first efforts towards rehabilitation of

incarcerated persons. Dwight and his supporters used Christian redemption, the belief in

salvation and deliverance from sin, as a means of gradually changing behavior through

religion. Those who opposed Dwight's methods claim that his methods were

rudimentary and forced religious beliefs on incarcerated people. However, Dwight's

methods yielded results; research indicates a positive shift in behavior of incarcerated

people after attending Sabbath school (Fisher, 1970). One of the more notable prisons that the Boston Prison Discipline Society tried to improve was Auburn State Prison in New York. In addition to providing religious education, the Boston Prison Discipline Society also worked to improve conditions for people with mental health challenges (Torrey, 1997).

        The evolution of the prison system and prison education. Auburn State Prison has historical significance in the American prison system. The prison opened in 1816, initiating a punitive and administrative structure based on isolation, corporal punishment, and group labor. The founders of Auburn believed in severe punishment for people who were incarcerated and that rehabilitation was a lost cause (Edge, 2009). Captain Elam Lynds helped establish the Auburn prison system and endorsed totalitarianism which supported the belief of total power over the prison population.   The architecture and methods at Auburn became the prototype for prisons throughout the United States (Ryder, 2002). During the 1820s, Auburn developed a penal method in response to prison overcrowding. The Auburn system gave incarcerated individuals work assignments during the day and placed individuals in solitary confinement at night, giving very little attention to the personal and educational needs of the people who were incarcerated (Gehring, McShane, & Eggleton, 1998; Silva, 1994). Known as the silent system, this method grew in popularity because it produced more revenue for the prison. Moreover, prison administration believed that isolation was more effective at reducing deviant behavior (Edge, 2009). The Auburn system was favored over the Pennsylvania system in which people in prison received moral education largely due its economic feasibility and mass production (Gehring, McShane, & Eggleton, 1998). Between 1826

and 1840, education in prison shifted from religious education to more secular education such as reading, writing, and mathematics (Fisher, 1970; Gehring, 1995).

Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania was a leading institution in prison reform. The prison housed notorious criminals such as mob boss Alphonse "Al" Capone and bank robber William "Willie" Sutton (Eastern State Penitentiary, n.d.). In 1844, Eastern refined the ground-breaking system of separate incarceration (keeping people in solitary confinement) first implemented at Walnut Street Jail. The prison focused on implementing methods of prison reform as opposed to penal enforcement. Eastern developed a library for incarcerated people, allowed lights on in cells until 9:00 p.m., employed a non-religious educator, and allowed congregational singing in the prison (Fisher, 1970). The development at Eastern helped to begin a shift in the prison system towards more support for correctional education.

A major shift for correctional education occurred in 1847 when correctional education became recognized by law. The state of New York enacted a law that legalized academic instruction in correctional institutions. Both New York state prisons, Elmira and Sing-Sing, were appointed two academic instructors each based on this legislation (Fisher, 1970).

The Reformatory movement in corrections began around 1870 in the United States. Correctional education was no longer restricted to religious or ethical learning. Instruction in prisons continued to shift from religious studies to more basic skills-oriented education (Fisher, 1970). The American Correctional Association (formerly the American Prison Association), founded in 1870, is the oldest association established explicitly for practitioners in the correctional profession (American Correctional

Association [ACA], 2002). During the association's first meeting in 1870, guiding

principles for corrections in the United States and Europe were established. The

establishment of the ACA marked the beginning of significant changes for corrections

such as prison industry, the reward system, and correctional education (ACA, 2002;

Fisher, 1970).

In 1870, approximately 53% of the incarcerated population in the United States

was considered illiterate. During the same time period, the Detroit House of Correction

(renamed to Western Wayne Correctional Facility in 1986) was pioneering in the field of

correctional education. The Detroit House of Correction enrolled nearly two-thirds of its

prison population in correctional education courses. The prison used correctional

education as a part of a system to rehabilitate individuals (Fisher, 1970).

In 1876, the reformatory model of imprisonment was introduced in New York and

regained support for correctional education programs. The Elmira Reformatory, under

the direction of Zebulon Brockway, was a prison built for the purpose of rehabilitating

people who were incarcerated between the ages of 16 and 30 (Edge, 2009; Roth, 2006).

The leadership at Elmira Reformatory was instrumental in shifting the prison system

approach from severe retribution to a more rehabilitative method. Brockway is

considered to be among the most successful leaders in prison reform, advocating for

prison programs designed to educate and reform people as opposed to chastising

(Gehring, 2001). According to Gehring (2001), Brockway arranged academic

instruction, diet and exercise programs, and documented records of educational and

physical performance of incarcerated persons. The reformatory system emphasized

academic and vocational training. Professors were hired from Elmira Women's College

(present day Elmira College) and the Michigan State Normal School (present day Eastern Michigan University) to teach courses in general ethics, history, geography and economics. It should also be noted that the reformatory system in New York was the first system to practice the concept of parole (Fisher, 1970; Gehring, McShane, & Eggleton, 1998; McKelvey, 1936).

Mckelvey (1936) noted the "The Elmira Reformatory gave education for the first time an important place in the correctional process. The first superintendent, Zebulon Brockway, disclosed significant ability in working with the specialists in the college neighborhood…" (p. 110). Brockway hired a professor by the name of Dr. R. Ford who was placed in charge of the entire correctional education program at Elmira. New instructors were hired at the institution including six public school principals and three attorneys. The new instructors taught elementary classes. The institution also introduced a summer session as a regular term. Courses were offered in industrial arts, plumbing, tailoring, telegraphy, and printing (Mckelvey, 1936). The Elmira system was innovative in utilizing community resources, recognizing different learning needs for people in prison, and identifying individual differences among people. Elmira notably brought a community presence to correctional institutions. The system recognized the need for different levels of instruction for people in prison and attempted to assess and satisfy their specific learning needs. According to Fisher (1970), "Elmira has [*sic*] advanced classes in geometry, human physiology, sanitary science, etc., and there were elementary classes for students needing these classes" (p. 188). In addition to traditional academics, Elmira added vocational training for incarcerated people. By the early 1900s, Elmira had partnered with reformatories across the United States (Fisher, 1970).

From 1901-1918, prison reform became more progressive, shifting to a more democratic pattern (Gehring & Wright, 2003). The new ideals about prison reform became more successful and controversial (Edge, 2009). Thomas Mott Osborne was a prison reformer most notably known for his leadership in the development of prison libraries, reformatories for women, and democracy in corrections (Gehring & Wright, 2003). Osborne believed that correctional facilities should resemble a place of hope and healing rather than a place of torture and madness (Edge, 2009). Osborne is credited for introducing the philosophy that culture and education best prepare people to reintegrate into society (Helfman, 1950). Around 1913, Osborne developed a self-governance plan that was most notably associated with the Mutual Welfare League. The Mutual Welfare League was an association designed to provide effective correctional education for incarcerated individuals (Gehring, 2001). Osborne instituted the Mutual Welfare League at Auburn in 1914 and later at Sing Sing. The association was developed to allow democracy for incarcerated people to be expressed through rules for self-governance and self-discipline (Helfman, 1950). Osborne conducted an undercover operation in which he disguised himself as a person who was incarcerated for one week in order to get a better understanding of the prison system operations at Auburn (Edge, 2009). After the undercover operation, Osborne implemented changes to the prison system that resulted in reduced tension amongst people in prison, fewer disciplinary issues, fewer altercations, and increased productivity (Dorpat, 2007).

In the early 20th century, the vocational education and training movement began (Hyslop-Margison, 2000). As the workforce in the United States shifted from agrarian to industrial labor, vocational education became more prominent (Benavot, 1983; Silva,

1994). The changes in the labor force impacted the education system in prison. More people enrolled in correspondence courses which increased distance learning opportunities. Incarcerated individuals would mail their completed assignments to professors through the postal service and in turn, professors would mail the next assignment back to individuals. This mail exchange went back and forth until the course was complete. In 1914, University of California, Berkley professors started a correspondence college program at San Quentin State Prison (Gehring, 1997; Hall, 2006, Justice, 2000). Correspondence courses expanded throughout the United States to land grant colleges in states such as Massachusetts, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois (Silva, 1994). In the early 1920s, Columbia University offered the first higher education courses in prison through correspondence courses (Edge, 2009). Columbia University along with some other land-grant institutions offered courses in agriculture, real estate, salesmanship, and remedial education. Sing Sing prison began offering college level courses in 1923 through Columbia University (Provenzo & Renaud, 2009).

As more people began to advocate for prison education, programs expanded from religious education to non-religious academic study. Programs became more geared toward educational studies that would best prepare people for release and for the labor force. During this time, people in prison began to do more skilled work in prison. Suddenly, education and training was not only a benefit for the individual confined to prison but also for the prison itself. In essence, people who were incarcerated provided free labor. The biggest shift came from support at the legislative and prison administrative levels.

Increased support for prison education. Around 1929, two significant improvements were realized in correctional education: (1) correctional education is vital to the success of modern rehabilitation and (2) correctional education should be on the same level of quality as adult education programs in society (Fisher, 1970). The improvements came about as a result of the rapid collapse of prison industries, the establishment of the Federal Prison System with advanced educational facilities, and responsiveness from criminologists regarding rehabilitation and recidivism (Fisher, 1970). By 1933, approximately 60%-70% of all people in federal prisons were enrolled in some form of correctional education (Fisher, 1970).

Austin MacCormick was a criminologist and prison reformer. MacCormick also served as the Assistant Director of the United States Bureau of Prisons from 1929-1933 and Commissioner of Correction in New York City from 1934-1939. From 1927-1928, MacCormick conducted an extensive survey of correctional facilities at both male and female institutions. MacCormick also visited state, federal, Navy, and Army prison facilities. MacCormick found that correctional education institutions were not operating to full potential due to numerous reasons: unclear goals, insufficient funding, poor facilities, adhering to public school methods, failing to customize academic programs and a shortage of qualified instructors (Fisher, 1970; Gehring & Wright, 2003; Hunsinger, 1997; MacCormick, 1950).

Based on findings from surveying institutions, MacCormick developed a theory for a comprehensive correctional education program. MacCormick's philosophy was that people could be rehabilitated through individualized education and ethical training. MacCormick believed that rehabilitation was not a one size fits all approach and that

education should be designed to fit the learning needs and interests of the individual. (Hunsinger, 1997; MacCormick, 1950).

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale established the first degree program for people in prison in 1953, graduating 25 people from Menard State Prison located in Menard, Illinois (Ginsburg, 2010). In addition, Illinois offered state funded degree programs for people incarcerated at Vienna State Prison in Vienna, Illinois and Graham Correctional Center in Hillsboro, Illinois. Though the emergence of correctional education degree programs was slow and inconsistent during the 1950s, the Higher Education Act of 1965 increased access to higher education by allowing incarcerated individuals to use Pell Grant funding to pay for college courses.

Project Newgate was an enterprising correctional education program that began in 1967 in the Oregon State Penitentiary (Clendenen, Ellingston, & Severson, 1979). The postsecondary education concept was developed from the national Upward Bound Program. The Upward Bound Program is a government initiative designed to prepare students from low income families for college and is funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity (Clendenen, et al., 1979). College programs were established to create an environment that simulated a college campus environment in prison. Incarcerated students were allowed to live in separate quarters from other people housed in the facility. The project consisted of three stages: (1) the in-prison stage which allowed people to take full-time accredited postsecondary courses as well as receive counseling and therapy services in prison; (2) the transitional stage which allowed people to attend day classes in the community and then return to the prison at night; and (3) the release

stage which provided post-release assistance with counseling and therapy services as well as financial support through program completion (Clendenen, et al., 1979).

The biggest expansion of correctional education programs was between 1968 and 1982. During this time period, correctional education programs increased from 13 to 350 in the nation's prisons (Provenzo & Renaud, 2009). Given the expansion of correctional education programs, there was a need to justify the use of federal funding. The success of postsecondary programs in prison was evaluated based on the re-incarceration rate. These studies found that prison education programs had a significant impact on decreasing recidivism (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). The researchers also noted a significant decrease in prison expenditures for incarcerated persons. During the 1990s, a great deal of research literature on correctional education programs was presented in an effort to counter budget cuts and the elimination of correctional education programs (Steurer & Smith, 2003). Research studies were conducted to evaluate the merit of correctional education programs such as GED training, vocational education, life skills training and postsecondary education (Adams & Benneth, 1994; Eisenberg, 1991; Flanagan, et al, 1994; Saylor & Gaes, 1991; Gainous, 1992; Jenkins, et al, 1995; Little, Robinson, & Burnette, 1991; Menon, Blakley, Carmichael, & Silver, L., 1992; Porporino, & Robinson, 1992; Smith & Silverman, 1994).

More recently, correctional education programs continue to gain support at the political level, albeit it challenging. Former Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, noted the following:

Without education, job skills, and other basic services, offenders are likely to repeat the same steps that brought them to jail in the first place … This is a

problem that needs to be addressed head-on. We cannot say we are doing

everything we can to keep our communities and our families safe if we are not

addressing the high rate at which offenders are becoming repeat criminals. (Pew

Center on the States [Pew Center], 2011, p. 2)

Jay Inslee, Governor of Washington State appointed members to the newly established

Washington Statewide Reentry Council (Pettigrew, 2016). The Council is charged with

researching trends related to reentry and reintegration. The group is responsible for

making recommendations to the legislature on policy and funding. Karen Lee who is

CEO of Pioneer Human Services and also serves on the Council stated "The current

revolving door back into the prison system is not working and it is costing us hundreds of

millions of dollars every year" (Pettigrew, 2016, para. 4).

There have been several innovations, changes, and improvements to correctional

education programs since the late 18th century. As correctional education continues to

evolve, it is important to remember how far such programs have come. Correctional

education programs have expanded beyond routine biblical scripture readings to

programs aimed at addressing the academic needs of the individual. People can now

receive degrees and certificates while incarcerated. Programs have reached a pivotal

point where there is confidence that such programs can rehabilitate people through

education and training. Academic study in prisons has reached a level of quality that is

comparable to that of traditional educational programs. Prepared with education and

skills sets, there is hope for individual post-release success. With continued support,

education programs in prison can continue to become more innovative. Innovations in

academic and vocational training demonstrate advancement in rehabilitation (Clendenen,

et al., 1979; Edge, 2009; Fisher, 1970; Gehring & Wright 2003; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Helfman, 1950; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2005; MacCormick, 1950; McKelvey, 1936; Provenzo & Renaud, 2009; Roberts, 1969; Silva, 1994; Torrey, 1997).

Funding for Correctional Education

Federal government fiscal support for correctional education at the state level can be traced back to the mid-1960s. Former U.S. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Higher Education Act in 1965 which allowed people in prison to receive federal funding effective in 1972 (Ubah, 2004). The funding was provided as a means of federal support to higher education for incarcerated individuals. The amount of dollars expended on correctional education accounted for approximately 1% of the total federal budget for education (Meiners, 2007). Yet, this small percentage was sufficient enough to maintain college level correctional education programs for almost 90% of people in state prisons (Meiners, 2007). Since the Higher Education Act of 1965, correctional education has teetered between several wins and losses for funding support.

The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG) program was authorized in 1972 by Congress as part of the amendments to the Higher Education Act. The BEOG is more commonly known today as the Pell Grant, renamed after its sponsor, Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island. The grant was designed to provide financial support to help low income and working class people attend higher education institutions (Gehring, 1997). Moreover, the Pell grant made it possible for people in prison to receive federal financial aid. Due to their low income status, incarcerated people were eligible for the maximum amount of funding through the Pell grant (Silva, 1994).

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During the Clinton Administration, funding for higher education was withdrawn for incarcerated people with the passage of the 1993 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, more popularly known as the Crime Bill. Several federal grant funding sources for correctional education were stripped during the 1990s (DOE, 2009). The Crime Bill removed all Pell Grant funding for postsecondary education in prison, although people in state and federal prisons only accounted for less than 1% of total grant awards. It should be noted that eligibility for grant funding was not eliminated for people in local correctional facilities. However, the length of stay at local jails is typically not long enough to benefit. When incarcerated individuals became ineligible for Pell grants, the number of people enrolled in correctional education programs decreased drastically in several states. For example, the number of postsecondary correctional education programs in New York dropped from 70 to 4 due to lack of grant funding. The states of California, Iowa, Virginia, and Washington all experienced similar declines in enrollment. Conversely, states such as Indiana, North Carolina, and Texas maintained enrollment largely due to the fact that postsecondary correctional education programs in these states received state support from diversified funding sources. In fact, the largest correctional education programs in the United States are those that are supported by multiple funding sources (DOE, 2009; Erisman & Contardo, 2005).

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1998 eliminated funding from being used by several people in prison by including a special provision for student eligibility. Section 483 of the amendment to the legislation addresses student eligibility. The section lists terms of eligibility for Title IV student assistance which includes any grant, loan, or work assistance. One of the specifications in the amendment addresses

suspension of eligibility for drug-related offenses. Based on the number of violations, suspension of eligibility could range from one year to indefinite suspension (DOE, 2009, 2011a; Ubah, 2004).

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 (AEFLA) provided some source of funding for adult basic, secondary education, and English literacy programs. Prior to legislation in 1998, states were mandated to spend no less than 10% of state funded grants on education at state institutions, including prisons. The law now mandates that no more than 10% of state grant funding be allocated to educational programming. Presently, AEFLA only contributes roughly 0.4% of total AEFLA dollars to correctional education programs (DOE, 2009, 2011a).

The reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 created funding constraints similar to AEFLA. The Perkins program provided a source of funding specifically for vocational education and training. Prior to 1998 legislation, states were mandated to spend no less than 1% of federal funds on vocational education and training at state institutions, including prisons. Now, the law mandates that no more than 1% of federal funding be allocated to programs such as correctional education (DOE, 2009, 2011a).

The Incarcerated Youth Offender (IYO) grant was created in 2002 and served as an appropriated funding source for postsecondary correctional education. The grant was created to provide postsecondary educational opportunities for youth in prison, ages 25 or younger, with fewer than five years to release. Modifications were made to the grant with the Higher Education Act of 2008; the age limit for eligibility was increased from 25

to 35. In addition, the annual expenditure cap was raised from $1,500 to $3,000 per incarcerated person (DOE, 2009). The IYO grant was eliminated in 2012.

The Second Chance Act of 2007 (SCA) was enacted as an amendment to the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968. The program was designed to improve reentry preparation and post-release support for formerly incarcerated individuals. The SCA recommended a removal of the sanction on federal student funding for incarcerated persons convicted of drug-related offenses. SCA suggested the indefinite suspension of eligibility sanction be replaced with a period of suspension of eligibility for individuals with drug-related convictions. The SCA program was first funded in fiscal year 2009. Since then, over $475 million has been appropriated for grants, training, and technical assistance to state, local, tribal, and community organizations and institutions. It is important to note that the SCA does not provide support for correctional education programs during incarceration. However, the program offers support to people after release from prison (BJS, 2017, DOE, 2009).

In 2008, a program similar to the IYO grant program was created. The Grants to States for Workplace and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Individuals program (also known as the Incarcerated Individuals program) was established by the Higher Education Opportunity Act. The program was designed to provide grant funding for state correctional education institutions. The aim of the program was to offer postsecondary education programs for incarcerated youth. Only correctional education institutions designated by state governors were eligible to receive funding. Incarcerated individuals had to meet certain criteria to be eligible for funding under this program: 1) must be 35 years old or younger, 2) must be incarcerated in a state prison facility, 3) must

be eligible for release or parole within 7 years, and 4) must not have been convicted of certain crimes (i.e. criminal offense against a minor or a sexually violent offense). Funding for the program ended in 2011. No grants have been made to the states since 2010 when the last appropriation for funding under this program was approximately $17.1 million (DOE, 2011b). The elimination of such funding has led to further reductions in correctional education programs. In addition, such budget reductions indirectly contribute to the recidivism rates in the United States (Ubah, 2004).

Funding for correctional education has been an ongoing issue since the economic recession in 2008. Between 2009 and 2012, the correctional education budget for states decreased by 6% (Davis et al., 2013). More recently, legislation was introduced that would reinstate Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated college students. It is expected that a waiver will be issued as a part of a limited experiment to allow people in state and federal prisons at a small number of institutions to become Pell Grant eligible (Fain, 2015).

The cost to maintain a prison is expensive; an expense oftentimes paid by taxpayers. The total corrections budget for the state of Louisiana is approximately $687 million which is based on 105,731 incarcerated people on average (Edwards & LeBlanc, 2017). The total cost per incarcerated adult per day is $51.62 which indicates the annual cost per incarcerated adult is roughly $18,841. There are approximately 18,727 adults housed in state institutions in Louisiana. The implication is that approximately $353 million is spent annually on the adult incarcerated population in Louisiana. With almost half of the adult corrections population returning to prison, a need for more research on this population is reflected. Research indicates that higher levels of educational

attainment reduce crime (Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Machin, Marie, &Vujić, 2011). People who enroll in correctional education programs are 43% less likely to recidivate than those who do not participate in such programs (Davis et al., 2013).

The Obama Administration proclaimed that America's economic strength depends upon the education and skills of its workers (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, [White House], 2009). The expectation set forth by the Obama Administration was for America to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020 (White House, 2009). Correctional education programs contribute to this initiative by providing resources for a population that would otherwise be excluded from educational opportunities. As a part of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative, the federal government allocated over $100 million to communities for the purpose of training and development for formerly incarcerated persons (DOE, 2009). In addition, former President Obama set a national goal which asked every United States citizen to pledge to complete at least one year or more of postsecondary education or career training (White House, 2009). Educating people in prison would assist in achieving this goal.

Funding for correctional education programs has been a hot topic over the last decade. Researchers have examined spending on prisons versus colleges. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts (2010), between 1987 and 2007 the United States increased expenditures on prisons by 127% while higher education only increased expenditures by 21%. Research indicates that despite the overwhelming increase in spending on corrections, there is still no effective change in the performance of the prison system. Total state expenditures on corrections in the United States are approximately $52 billion,

with the majority of the budget spent on prisons. Over the past two decades, state

expenditures for corrections have quadrupled which makes it the second fastest growing

expenditure of state budgets, second to Medicaid (Pew, 2011). The most notable

example of recent discussions on this topic is regarding expenditures in the state of

California.

A report by a non-partisan non-profit think-tank examined California's

expenditures on corrections and higher education between 1981 and 2011 (Anand, 2012).

The findings from the study indicated that during this time period higher education

expenditures were cut by 13% in inflation adjusted dollars while prisons in the state of

California increased spending by 436%. It is important to note that spending on

corrections is for the entire penal system and not just for correctional education. The

economic recession of 2008 caused an overall 6% decrease in states' correctional

education budgets between 2009 and 2012. States such as Louisiana and California with

larger prison populations were impacted the greatest with close to 20% decrease in

funding for correctional education (Davis et al., 2013). Collaboration between

correctional institutions and higher education institutions can help offset some costs in

these strained financial times. If higher education budgets are decreasing overall and

prison budgets are increasing overall, correctional education seems like a win-win

situation.

As noted, the United States has the largest prison population in the world (Chang,

2012a). Approximately $52 billion is spent on prisons annually (Cullen & Wilcox,

2013). The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics reports 1.5 million people were

incarcerated at the end of 2013, an increase of 4,300 people overall from the previous

year (The United States Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2014).

For three consecutive years, the state prison population in United States experienced a

decrease. However, in 2013, the decline ended. As of December 31, 2013, the state

prison population increased by 6,300 people (BJS, 2014). Incarcerations in state and

federal prisons with sentences of a year or more increased by 5,400 people (BJS, 2014).

Between 2012 and 2013, the number of people admitted to state or federal prison

increased by 4% (BJS, 2014).

According to the Federal Register, the average cost to house an incarcerated

person in an American federal prison is close to $29,000 per year. The average cost to

house a person in a Community Corrections Center is approximately $26,000 per year

(The United States Office of Federal Register. Prisons Bureau.[FedReg], 2013). Studies

show that correctional education programs are cost effective. The cost to provide

postsecondary education for an incarcerated person is around $1,400 to $1,744 per

person, with re-incarceration costs reduced by $8,700 to $9,700 per person (Bidwell,

2013; Davis et al., 2013). For every dollar spent on correctional education programs,

incarceration costs are reduced by four to five dollars for the first three years after prison

release, the period in which people are at high risk for re-incarceration (Bidwell, 2013;

Davis et al., 2013). Bazos and Hausman (2004) found that for every one million dollars

spent on prison education, roughly 600 crimes are prevented. The same dollar amount

invested solely in incarceration only prevents 350 crimes. Therefore, correctional

education programs have almost twice as much impact as incarceration alone and are

more cost effective.

Funding for correctional education programs varies depending on the type of education program offered by institutions. Program services include adult basic education, secondary education, career and technical education, and postsecondary education. Generally, funding sources are from federal funding, state funding, or funding for incarcerated persons. In some cases, funding can come from a combination of all three sources. The availability of funding has a major impact on the reliability of correctional education programs. According to a study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), state funding is vital to incarcerated students' access to college education. The IHEP study found that 92% of incarcerated students earning a degree or certificate in the 2003-2004 academic year had the following in common: 1) they were housed in correctional facilities with large populations, 2) correctional education programs were geared more towards short term achievement such as vocational, and certificate programs, and 3) state funding for correctional education was a tremendous and reliable source (DOE, 2009).

The wavering financial support for correctional education would lead one to question the value, importance, and successfulness of correctional education programs. Even with proven ability to lower overall prison costs by reducing recidivism, correctional education is typically one of the first programs to get cut during belt tightening at prisons. It is important to keep in mind that there are also other factors outside of the education program that drive budget cuts. The same is true with any budget cut to education at any institution. The research indicates that when supported, correctional education programs have been highly successful. However, the success of correctional education programs is not solely hinged upon what happens inside the

classroom. Much of the program success or failure is attributed to factors outside the academic environment such as administrative, fiscal, and legislative support. As elected officials and prison policy leaders change, so does support of correctional education programs.

Recidivism and Correctional Education

The ever-changing economy in the United States has shrunk state budgets, forcing state institutions to do more with less. Evaluating correctional education programs and recidivism is a key element in reducing state fiscal problems. Recidivism is the tendency of a formerly incarcerated individual to relapse into criminal activity and return to prison post-release. According the National Institute of Justice, "recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in re-arrest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release" (The United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs. National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2014, para. 1).

Recidivism rates are alarmingly high. Approximately 700,000 people in state prisons are released every year, many of them under prepared for the challenges of reentry to society. It is estimated that over two-thirds of the people released are arrested within three years of release from prison and more than half are re-incarcerated due to lack of preparation for reentry such as education and job skills (DOE, 2009; NIJ, 2014). Depending on the method of survey, recidivism rates over time can vary. However, recidivism rates have consistently remained high in the United States (Pew, 2011). The Bureau of Justice Statistics has conducted several studies indicating high recidivism rates for formerly incarcerated persons. For example, a study by the Bureau of Justice

Statistics indicates that 45.4% of people released from prison in 1999 were re-incarcerated within three years of release. Similarly, 43.3% of people released from prison in 2004 were re-incarcerated within three years of release from prison (Pew, 2011). Another example is a five-year longitudinal study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics tracking 404,638 formerly incarcerated people in 30 states post-release from prison in 2005. The study reported that 67.8% of people released from prison during this time were re-incarcerated within three years of release. Moreover, 76.6% of people released in 2005 were re-incarcerated within five years of release. The study also reported that 56.7% of people released were arrested within the first year of prison release (Durose, Cooper and Snyder, 2014; NIJ, 2014).

The state of Louisiana has historically had low educational attainment rates and correspondingly high incarceration rates. During the 2013-2014 academic year, the high school graduation rate in Louisiana was 75%. This compares to a national high school graduation average of 82% in 2013-2014. Only about 2% of the incarcerated population in Louisiana is enrolled in postsecondary correctional education (Edwards & Le Blanc, 2017; LDPSC, n.d.).

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections has a goal to decrease the state's high per capita incarceration rate, which currently is the highest per capita incarceration rate in the nation. The adult prison population in Louisiana is approximately 36,377 with an additional 72,176 on probation or parole. Research indicates that 1 in 26 adults in Louisiana are incarcerated. By comparison, the national average for incarceration is 1 in 31 adults. Per capita, 816 out of every 100,000 residents in Louisiana are incarcerated. Comparatively, the national average for incarceration per

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capita is 471 per 100,000 residents. The incarceration rate for Louisiana rises if only adults, ages 18 or older, are counted; the rate increases to 1072 per 100,000 residents. While the national rate for adult incarceration is 612 per 100,000 residents (Edwards & Le Blanc, 2017; LDPSC, n.d.).

A briefing report by the state of Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections indicates high recidivism rates for adults released from prison. The report specifies a 42.2% five-year recidivism rate for the Louisiana total prison population released in 2010. The recidivism rate for state facilities was reported as 43.6% for the same group. Similarly, local facilities in Louisiana had a five-year recidivism rate of 44.3% for those people released in 2010. It should be noted recidivism rates have remained fairly constant for people released in the state of Louisiana between 2010 and 2014. Roughly, 18,000 people are released from state prisons and local jails in Louisiana. Faced with the challenges of successfully reintegrating back into society, nearly 43% of those released are expected to return to prison within five years of release (Edwards & Le Blanc, 2017; LDPSC, n.d.).

As a whole, the prison system in the United States has focused more on sentencing and punishment rather than rehabilitation. This has resulted in the growth of the number of people in the American prison system over the past three decades, even though research indicates crime rates have decreased (Pew Center, 2011; Steurer & Smith, 2003). More than four out of ten incarcerated adults are re-incarcerated within three years of prison release (Pew Center, 2011). The implication is that there is a serious problem with the criminal justice system in the United States. Formerly incarcerated people reenter society with the negative stigma associated with incarceration and are

ineligible for employment at most companies because of their criminal record. There are very few avenues that support the transition of formerly incarcerated people back into society.

Rising costs of incarceration, high recidivism rates, prison overcrowding, and limited sources for funding are all indicators of a growing need for correctional education programs. Correctional education offers prisons a method to reduce crime, lower prison costs, and improve communities. Research findings that demonstrate rehabilitation of incarcerated people through education and training are extremely valuable to society. The research demonstrates that prisons, as suggested by Thomas Mott Osborne, can be a place of hope and healing where people transform into more productive citizens (Edge, 2009). Correctional education programs are designed to help with the transition back to communities and break the cycle of recidivism by offering people who are incarcerated an opportunity to attain the education and skills needed to be more successful in the job market and society. Several studies have generally found a positive correlation between participation in correctional education programs during imprisonment and recidivism (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2006; MacKenzie, 2006; Steurer & Smith, 2003, Wilson et al., 2000).

The RAND Corporation provides research and analysis to support global policy. A study by the RAND Corporation found that participation in correctional education programs decreased the chances of recidivating for formerly incarcerated persons by 43%. The same study also demonstrated that employment after release was 13% higher for formerly incarcerated students who participated in correctional education and training (Davis et al., 2013).

In 1988, the Arizona Probation Department in Pima County developed a correctional education program titled LEARN (literacy, education, and reading network). The program was designed to integrate correctional education into adult probation (Siegel, 1993). The Arizona Adult Probation Department in Pima County was the first probation department in the state to require individuals to complete literacy or GED programs as a condition of probation (Siegel, 1993). A five-year follow-up research study conducted by the Arizona Department of Adult Probation found that people on probation who obtained a GED during imprisonment had higher probation completion rates and higher job retention upon release than non-completers (Basta & Siegel, 1997). The study found that the educational program had a more positive impact on people on probation who were 18-25 years old than any other group. People on probation who received literacy training prior to release had a 35% rearrest rate while people without literacy training had a rearrest rate of 46% (Basta & Siegel, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). Moreover, people on probation with an earned GED had a rearrest rate that was 22% less than those without a GED. In addition, the study found that the rearrest rate for people with at least two years of college education was 36% less than the rearrest rate for people with no college education (Basta & Siegel, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002).

In a study of 120 correctional education program completers who were released from prison in 1990-1991, researchers found that there was a positive, significant benefit of correctional education for incarcerated students at various levels when compared to those who did not complete an educational program (Center on Crime, Community, and Culture [CCCC], 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002, p. 98). The researchers found that the higher the level of educational attainment during incarceration, the greater chances for

post-release employment. Of the study participants, 77% of the incarcerated students who completed correctional education programs were employed (Hull, Forrester, Brown, Jobe, & McCullen, 2000; Jenkins, et al., 1995). Program completers were reported as being employed in jobs paying above minimum wage.

According to a report by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the recidivism rate for people released between September 1990 and August 1991 was 15% for those who earned a degree. By comparison, the general recidivism rate was 60% for people without a degree. The report found that the higher the level of degree attainment, the lower the level of recidivism. Incarcerated people with earned associate's degrees had a recidivism rate of 5.6% while people with earned master's degrees had a recidivism rate of zero (CCCC, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002).

A report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research noted that mass incarceration in 2008 weakened the United States economy by having 1.5 to 1.7 million fewer people in the labor market. This resulted in a decrease in the overall employment rate of approximately 0.8 to 0.9 percentage points. By best estimate, 12 to 14 million formerly incarcerated people were of working age in 2008. Yet, due to their criminal record, their job outlook decreased in the job market. More than 90% of the people released from prison in 2008 were male, so the impact was much greater on male employment rates. It is estimated that with such a high formerly incarcerated population, the male employment rate in 2008 was decreased by 1.5 to 1.7 percentage points. In the same year, 1 in 33 adults of working age were formerly incarcerated. People who are formerly incarcerated are typically less educated and less skilled than the general workforce so their work performance has an increased probability of yielding low

productivity. However, even with somewhat low productivity rates, the loss to the

United States economy is estimated between $57 billion and $65 billion by not having

these individuals in the labor market (Schmitt & Warner, 2010).

Correctional education can help to simultaneously save money and reduce crime.

Studies show that people who receive education and vocational training in prison are less

likely to be re-incarcerated and are more likely to find jobs post-release than other

formerly incarcerated people; therefore, the number of overall incarcerated persons is

reduced. Numerous variables contribute to recidivism rates, and research shows that

education is a key variable. Postsecondary education programs, in particular, serve an

important role in corrections. For example, an analysis of 15 different studies completed

in the 1990s revealed that 14 of the studies demonstrated shrinking recidivism for

formerly incarcerated individuals who enrolled in postsecondary education courses. On

average, the recidivism rate was 46% less than individuals who did not take

postsecondary education courses (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). By providing education

and training programs, society at large benefits. Very few incarcerated people are

afforded the opportunity to attend college prior to incarceration. In today's society,

having a college level education is increasingly important to obtaining gainful

employment. Transitioning back to society and the job market has proven to be difficult

for most people released from prison due to lack of education and marketable job skills as

well as the poor reputation for having an incarceration record; consequently, many people

revert to criminal behaviors. College level correctional education programs can help

people overcome barriers by leveling the playing field with regard to higher education

access. Postsecondary correctional education has the propensity to yield positive results

including improved interactions between people in prison and corrections staff, positive

peer mentorship for incarcerated students, and reduced behavioral problems. For

example, a study at a prison in Indiana indicated that people who enrolled in

postsecondary courses had 75% less violations than the average incarcerated person. One

study of a maximum security women's prison in New York found that offering college

level courses helped to improve disciplinary issues, increase self-esteem, and enhanced

students' abilities to effectively communicate. Enrolling in college courses can give

people in prison a sense of success, particularly upon completion. Research indicates that

completing college courses has the ability to improve attitudes, provide students with a

feeling of accomplishment, encourage a sense of responsibility and inspire continued

academic success. Earning a college degree while incarcerated can help offset obstacles

to reintegration. Studies indicate that college educated citizens are more employable in

America than those with just a high school diploma. Moreover, people with college level

education are more likely to earn higher wages. On average, people with a bachelor's

degree earn 93% more in income than people with only a high school diploma (Davis et

al., 2013; Erisman & Contardo, 2005).

Overall, the current research literature highlights that one of the common benefits

of correctional education programs is a reduction in recidivism rates. Research studies

indicate that correctional education has a positive, significant impact on post-release

employment for formerly incarcerated students. As students become more educated and

skilled, they become more productive citizens. More productive citizens contribute to the

economy and the community. Therefore, correctional education programs not only

benefit the individual but the programs also indirectly benefit society as a whole.

The Correctional Population

  Imprisonment rates. At the end of 2015, an estimated 1,526,800 people were incarcerated at state and federal correctional institutions in the United States. The majority, approximately 1.2 million, of people were incarcerated in state institutions. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 97% of people who are incarcerated are serving a sentence longer than one year. According to the most recent data available, at the end of 2014, approximately 53% of people incarcerated in state correctional facilities were serving sentences for violent crimes. Almost half of the people in federal prisons were serving sentences for drug offenses in 2015. The imprisonment rate for adult women was 82 per 100,000, while the imprisonment rate for adult men was 1,131 per 100,000 people. The highest imprisonment rate by race was among Blacks at 1,745 per 100,000 citizens. The second highest rate was among Hispanics at 820 per 100,000. By comparison, the imprisonment rate for Whites was 312 per 100,000 (Carson and Anderson, 2016). Works such as Ava DuVernay's 13th and Michelle Alexander's The New Jim Crow highlight issues of mass incarceration and it's direct impact on people of color, primarily young Black males (Alexander, 2011; DuVernay, 2016). Given these statistics, there is a huge imbalance in the correctional population with regard to age, race, and gender.

  Educational attainment. The correctional population typically has less educational attainment than the general population. Correctional populations include people incarcerated at state, federal, and local facilities as well as those individuals on probation. According to the most recent data available, approximately 68% of people in prison did not complete high school. In comparison, 18% of the general population did not complete high school. Roughly 26% of incarcerated persons finished a GED during

sentencing at a state correctional institution. By estimation, 11% of people in state prisons and 24% of people in federal prisons have previously taken some college level courses. In comparison, 48% of the general population has attended some college or other postsecondary institution. Incarcerated White, Black, and Hispanic males between the ages of 20 and 39 have significantly less educational attainment than their general population counterparts (Harlow, 2003).

Lower levels of education place incarcerated people at an extreme disadvantage. Coupled with the negative association of incarceration, having less education could make it harder to be successful after release. When incarcerated people are released from prison, they compete in the same job market as everyone else. The only difference is that most formerly incarcerated people start out behind in the race, competing with individuals who are more educated, have a higher skills set, and more work experience. Correctional education provides an opportunity for people to increase their chances for post-release success.

Socioeconomic status. In general, people who are incarcerated are economically disadvantaged prior to entering prison. A study by the Bureau of Justice reported that approximately 38% of incarcerated persons who did not complete high school were also unemployed prior to incarceration (Harlow, 2003). Approximately 32% of people with an earned GED were unemployed before entering prison. The study found that the more education a person had prior to incarceration, the more likely the person was to be employed. Approximately 76% of people in the study with some college level education prior to incarceration were employed before incarceration. In comparison, only 56% of incarcerated people with less than a high school diploma were employed before

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incarceration. Incarcerated individuals without a high school education were more likely to receive income from family, friends, or government assistance before incarceration. Prior to incarceration, 63.3% of people with less than a high school diploma earned less than $1,000 per month, while 32.7% of people with some college education prior to incarceration earned less than $1,000 monthly (Harlow, 2003). The Prison Policy Initiative is a non-profit initiative that provides research and advocates for prison reform. According to a report by the Prison Policy Initiative, people who were incarcerated in 2014 earned 41% less than their general population counterparts prior to incarceration (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015).

Correctional education increases the opportunity for formerly incarcerated persons to earn higher wages after release. Having the appropriate education and job skills increase the marketability in the workforce for people who are formerly incarcerated. This translates into an opportunity for formerly incarcerated people to contribute to household income and to the overall economy. It also means that people who have been released from prison spend more time in work environments as opposed to socially deviant environments that influenced incarceration in the first place. Improved socioeconomic status signifies a better quality of life for individuals and their families.

Louisiana corrections population. Louisiana has the highest per capita imprisonment rate in the nation. For persons of all ages, the rate was 776 per 100,000 people. For adults, the imprisonment rate was 1,019 per 100,000 people ages 18 or older (Carson & Anderson, 2016). As of mid-year 2016, there were 36,280 adults in prison in the state of Louisiana. Of those, 18,612 people are housed in state facilities, 16,646 are

in local jails, and 1,022 are in non-contract transitional work programs. Projections

indicate that this number will increase to 38,061 total adults by December 2018.

Facilities in the state are expected to add 1,781 beds by the end of the year 2018. The

overwhelming majority of people in prison in Louisiana are Black and male. Black

people account for 67.5% of the total corrections population in the state, while White

people account for 32.5%. Males account for 94.4% of the total prison population in

Louisiana. Based on the most serious crimes committed, the configuration of the

population is 44.8% for violent crimes, 22.1% for drug crimes, 16.9% for property

crimes, and 16.2% for all other crimes. The average time served is 5.73 years which

means many of these people will be eligible to reenter society at or before year end 2019

(Edwards & Le Blanc, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The following theories will be discussed in this section as they explore how

correctional education programs relate to adult learning processes, incarcerated student

motivation, learning, and persistence.

Social learning theory. According to Edwin Sutherland (1939), social learning

theory proposes that learning occurs through interaction with others. The theory suggests

that behavior and the environment affect one another. Albert Bandura (1995) explains

that social learning occurs through ongoing reciprocated interaction between

environmental, social, and intellectual stimuli. Differential association theory is an

expansion of social learning theory which explains how criminal behavior is learned.

Differential association implies that the more a person associates with criminal-minded

people or people who commit criminal acts, the more likely the person is to commit a

crime. People learn from observing the behavior of others and demonstrate behavior that is reflective of their environment and peers. Therefore, people who live in high crime environments are more likely to participate in criminal activity (Bandura, 1995). It is important to note that contact by itself is not a predictor of criminal behavior. Instead, the theory suggests that over exposure to criminal ideas and criminal behavior cause individuals to adopt similar ideas and behaviors. For example, court judges are in frequent contact with people who commit crimes but their chances of committing a crime does not increase significantly. Although judges have frequent dealings with people who commit criminal acts, they have more personal and social contact with law abiding citizens. Thus, social learning for judges is more influenced by prosocial, normal behavior.

Social learning can have a negative influence in certain situations (Bandura, 1995; Allred, Harrison, & O'Connell, 2013). Prison is an extreme example of the negative influence social learning can create. The prison environment can have negative influences on people because of the associated criminal activity. Based on social learning theory, people are more prone to imitating the observed behaviors in prison (Bandura, 1995). Upon release from prison, many people return to the same environment that previously influenced criminal behavior. Having close and frequent interactions with the same environment is likely to lead to a continuous cycle of recidivism (Bandura, 1995).

The prison environment also has the ability to encourage positive social learning (Bandura, 1995; Allred, Harrison, & O'Connell, 2013). When incorporated as a component of correctional education, social learning theory can have a positive influence on incarcerated students and help to reduce recidivism. In an effort to prepare

incarcerated individuals for successful reentry to society, correctional education programs that promote prosocial behavior give students an enhanced understanding of the significance and consequences of their actions (Listwan, Cullen, and Latessa, 2006). By exposing people who are incarcerated to more socially acceptable influences, social learning theory suggests that people will be more likely to adopt positive behaviors. Incorporating components of positive social learning is a significant element in reducing recidivism.

Transformative learning. Similar to reframing, transformative learning is a process that changes frames of reference and how people make meaning of self, social interactions, or life events (Mezirow, 1997). Adult learners have unique experiences that frame the way in which they define their worldview. These experiences include beliefs, values, assumptions, and feelings (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow's theory defines frames of references as "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). Once frames of reference are set, actions and behaviors are based on those assumptions. A frame of reference includes cognitive, conative, and emotional components (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning involves critical reflection. Mezirow (1991) defines reflection as the process of assessing the content, process, and premise of experiences in order to give meaning to the experiences. Content reflection involves a reflection of the content or description of the actual experience. Process reflection evaluates how the experience is handled or problem solved. Premise reflection involves making meaning of the experiences by examines assumptions, beliefs, and values.

Transformative learning is a profound experience which can sometimes be uncomfortable, painful, or emotional for adult learners. Mezirow (1997) refers to this early phase of the learning process as a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma serves as the catalyst for transformation and typically stems from a major life occurrence or transition. For many people in prison, the disorienting dilemma is incarceration itself. A disorienting dilemma can trigger self-reflection, self-awareness, and critical thinking. Through correctional education programs, incarcerated students can become aware of the gap in their knowledge and knowledge needed to become a more productive citizen. Participation in correctional education programs offers individuals in prison a new identity and an alternative environment. Participants are given the opportunity to embrace the student identity as opposed to negative inmate identity.

Critical reflection is an essential component of correctional education. Critical reflexivity challenges students to make meaning of their experiences by using past experiences to make better decisions in the future. Students are able to actively engage in their learning experiences as well as track their own growth and development. Frames of reference for students can be positively changed as new ways of thinking are developed. When learners have limited psychosocial and emotional support due to persecution, financial hardship, or incarceration, new varieties of understanding the lived experience may be essential for transformative learning to take place (West, 2014).

Correctional education programs that are designed to raise student awareness about their identities and social constructs can be very successful. Morrow (2008) conducted a study examining the effectiveness of incarcerated student-reflective practices on learning by using games to cultivate positive change in social interaction. The study

found that incarcerated student-reflective practices were extremely strong. Morrow (2008) indicates that students in the study transformed to more critical thinkers with their own set of life meanings to contribute to class discussion. Similarly, a prison-based research study used a mean-making exercise with a lemon to demonstrate the value of correctional education (Page, 2009). The researcher explains how a demonstration with a lemon encouraged critical reflection for an incarcerated student. The lemon scent triggered a memory of life outside prison walls. The person had not smelled a lemon in several years, so the scent brought back memories of freedom before incarceration. The lemon represented a disorienting dilemma for the person which in turn encouraged critical reflection.

Student integration and persistence. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) integration model provides a conceptual foundation for student persistence. Tinto suggests that student involvement is key to persistence. The more academically and socially involved students are, the more likely they are to persist to degree completion. Additionally, the more individuals view their academic and social interactions as positive, the more integrated they become with the institution and therefore more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993). Social integration includes both peer relationships and extracurricular activities. Academic integration includes classroom participation, tutoring, and other academic events. Tinto (1975, 1987) notes that high levels of academic and social integration yield greater institutional commitment from the student. According to Tinto (1993), "Generally, the more satisfying those experiences are felt to be, the more likely are individuals to persist until degree completion" (p. 50).

Tinto (1999) identifies five conditions that best encourage student retention: 1) expectation, 2) advice, 3) support, 4) involvement, and 5) learning. First, student persistence is more likely if students are in an educational setting with high expectations of academic excellence. The basic premise is that high expectations yield high academic performance. According to Tinto (1999), underserved students are affected by the institutional climate and by their own perceptions of faculty expectations for academic performance. Second, student persistence to completion is more likely when the educational setting is clear and consistent with academic requirements. In addition, students are more likely to graduate with effective advising and career planning. Third, academic, social, and personal support also promotes student success. Support can be provided in both structured and unstructured forms. Structured support such as tutoring, mentorship or student clubs influence persistence. Unstructured support such as peer relationships can also impact persistence. Fourth, student involvement serves as a predictor of persistence. It is important to note that involvement matters regardless of the institution type or student type. Lastly, student success and persistence necessitate an environment that fosters learning. Students are more likely to remain in educational programs where they are successfully learning (Tinto, 1999).

Based on Tinto's (1975) theoretical foundations, Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a model of non-traditional student attrition. The researchers studied various students attending community colleges and found several variables that influence non-traditional student persistence or departure. First, low performing students are expected to drop out at higher rates than those who achieve high academic success. Past academic performance serves as a predictor of future academic performance. Second,

psychological outcomes and academic variables influence students' intent to leave or stay in school. The researchers noted that psychological outcomes have the primary influence on student intent to leave. Third, background and defining variables such as previous academic success and academic goals are expected to affect persistence. Lastly, environmental variables have a considerable influence on student drop out decisions (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Bean and Metzner (1985) found that the main difference between traditional and non-traditional student persistence was that non-traditional students were more impacted by environmental variables than social integration. The researchers indicated that environmental variables such as financial status, employment, and family obligations were more important to non-traditional students than academic variables. The model suggests that students are more likely to persist when academic and environmental variables are good. Moreover, students are more likely to drop out if academic variables are good and environmental variables are poor. In addition, non-traditional students are more likely to persist if environmental variables are good, but academic variables are poor. For instance, a high performing student is more likely to drop out if work (financial) obligations conflict with school attendance. Conversely, a low performing student is more likely to remain enrolled if their job allows time off for classes or provides tuition assistance (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Bean and Metzner (1985) also suggested that academic and environmental variables influence psychological outcomes such as satisfaction and goal commitment. Psychological outcomes were found to have more influence on persistence than academic outcomes. The researchers indicated that students were more likely to persist if academic

and psychological outcomes were both high. However, a high performing student is more likely to drop out if psychological outcomes are low. Students are more likely to remain in school if psychological outcomes are positive even if academic performance is low (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory suggests that humans are motivated by activities that meet autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The theory implies that people have a need to have freedom in decision making. People want to have freedom of choice. Moreover, self-determination theory indicates that people have a need to be skilled at certain tasks. Finally, the theory suggests that individuals need to have a sense of belonging. Relatedness not only refers to the individual need to belong, but also involves making others feel important. Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) note that in order for individuals to feel motivated and yield positive results, all three of the above mentioned psychological needs must be met.

Deci & Ryan (2000) describe two types of motivation associated with self-determination theory: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is motivation that is not dependent on external factors. People who are intrinsically motivated perform certain tasks or activities because it presents an interest to them or they find it enjoyable. Conversely, extrinsic motivation is related the performance of activities that produce a desired outcome with regard to rewards and evasion of punishments. The researchers also suggest that people can move along a continuum of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. It is possible that extrinsic motivation could lead to intrinsic motivation as well (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, an incarcerated student may initially be motivated to take classes as a means of

circumventing trouble in prison (extrinsic motivation). However, if the student finds value in the learning process while enrolled, then motivation is shifted from extrinsic to intrinsic.

Connecting Theory to the Correctional Education Experience

The review of literature and theoretical framework provide a basis for the research questions and methodology in this study. The study examined perspectives of incarcerated students in correctional education programs in Louisiana. This population is of particular importance to the study because Louisiana has the highest corrections population per capita in the world (Chang, 2012a).

Correctional education programs have a long standing history in the United States, a history that demonstrates the significance of educational training in prisons. Yet, correctional education programs struggle to maintain funding. Rising costs of incarceration, high recidivism rates, prison overcrowding, and limited sources for funding are all indicators of a growing need for correctional education programs (Edge, 2009). According to the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections "providing standardized, evidence based programming will improve public safety, reduce recidivism, decrease victimization, and reduce the financial burden of the correctional system (LDPSC, n.d.). The long-term benefits of correctional education are well documented in the literature over the last two decades. Several studies have shown that rehabilitation programs such as correctional education have a significant impact on not only developing the incarcerated student but also positively impacting society by producing more productive citizens, rather than hindrances. A review of the literature has identified a number of external benefits of correctional education programs including lowered crime

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rates, improvements in behavior of incarcerated persons, decreases in recidivism rates, lowered overall prison costs and post-release success (Adams and Benneth, 1994; Eisenberg, 1991; Flanagan, et al, 1994; Gainous, 1992; Jenkins, Steurer, & Pendry, 1995; Karpowitz & Kenner, 2003; Little, Robinson, & Burnette, 1991; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004; Menon, Blakley, Carmichael, & Silver, L., 1992; Porporino, & Robinson, 1992; Saylor & Gaes, 1991; Smith & Silverman, 1994; Vacca, 2004; Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2000).

Social learning theory implies that the more people associate with those who commit crimes, the more likely they are to continue criminal behavior. Similarly, the more people associate with individuals who exhibit socially normal behavior, the more likely they are to behave in ways that are considered socially normal. This is why education on the inside of prison is especially important. The prison environment is a place that traditionally encourages deviant behavior. Education programs provide people in prison with an environment that represents some sort of normalcy. Social learning theory implies that the more people are exposed to social norms like education, the more likely they are to demonstrate socially normal behavior and remain out of prison. Correctional education programs play a critical role in bringing socially normal behavior to the prison environment.

For most people, prison represents a place that is uncomfortable; a disorienting dilemma. Transformative learning suggests that experiencing this dilemma prompts self-reflection. Questions about how and why one ended up in prison start to arise. This sort of self-reflection is helpful in the learning process. Incarcerated individuals can make

sense of their decisions and the consequences of their actions. Using that self-awareness to make better decisions in the future is a major part of correctional education training.

Studies show that correctional education programs have the proven ability to reduce recidivism (Davis et al., 2013; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). In order for those programs to maximize performance, students must successfully complete academic programs. An examination of predictors of student persistence is important to student success. More specifically, knowing and understanding what happens in a student's life outside the classroom is important to student persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975). Incarcerated students face a lot of challenges including previous experience and the current state of incarceration. Since correctional education staff have limited control over the external environment, it is highly critical that staff remain aware of external barriers to student success.

The nature of prison poses a threat to incarcerated students' psychological well-being. It is important for instructors and correctional education program administrators to consider learning opportunities that not only meet academic needs, but also meet students' basic psychological needs. When psychological needs are met, students are likely to perform better in class and post-release.

The current literature cites numerous external themes in correctional education programs. However, there is a need to focus more on the intrinsic impact of correctional education programs. Fewer studies address issues related to the personal perspectives of incarcerated students on their educational experiences.

Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) conducted a study of incarcerated student perspectives of correctional education at a medium security prison. The study found that

the most prevalent motivational factor for attending class was to boost students' self-esteem. With regard to the limitations of the study, the researchers noted that there is a need for further research on the topic. In order to help generalize the study results, research is needed at other institutions of different sizes and different regions.

Hall and Killacky (2008) conducted a study of incarcerated student perspectives of correctional education at a large, maximum security prison and found three major themes: success, regret, and rethinking the correctional education experience. The researchers indicated that a student stated no one actually comes to speak with people housed in general population in prison. The student was appreciative that someone actually wanted to hear about his experiences and perceptions. Moreover, the researchers noted that future research is needed that focuses on interviewing incarcerated students about their correctional education experience.

This research study aimed to help fill the research gap by interviewing incarcerated students about their correctional education experience. By examining current student perspectives, feedback was collected while the ideas and experiences were still fresh. The study also aimed to discover the extent to which correctional education provides intrinsic benefits for incarcerated students and ascertain any other connections to the literature. The study revealed intangible benefits to students such as motivation, personal goals, a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Summary

Correctional education programs have a long standing history in American culture. Over the years support for correctional education has wavered tremendously. The research literature overall provides clear evidence that there is a need for correctional

education and that correctional education programs help to reduce recidivism. While

several studies indicate the effectiveness of correctional education, very few studies

demonstrate the effectiveness of such programs from the viewpoint of the student, the

primary constituent. A case study was believed to be appropriate for this research study.

The next chapter outlines the methodology of the study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology that was used to address the research questions in this study. The chapter outlines the overall research design and rationale employed in the research study. Included in this section is a discussion of the research design, research questions, setting, participants, data collection, validity and reliability issues, data analysis, and ethical considerations. A qualitative research methodology was selected for the study to explore and understand different incarcerated student perspectives on their correctional education experiences. Research methods that focus on incarcerated student perceptions of correctional education programs are often underutilized in prison research and development. This research study sought to gain a better understanding of the correctional educational experience that goes beyond common sense awareness and which will hopefully lead to more informed correctional education decision making.

Research Design

Qualitative paradigm. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 36). Creswell (2009) provided several characteristics of qualitative research including but not limited to having a natural setting, the researcher serves as the primary data collector, and the focus is on participant subjective perspectives. Qualitative research is the best method to focus on meaning and experiences from the viewpoint of the research subjects in the environment in which the action occurs. Therefore, qualitative research was the most appropriate choice for the study.

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This study used qualitative interviews as a means to "hear silenced voices" and "empower individuals to share their stories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Fisher (1987) noted that humans use storytelling to make meaning of their experiences. The implication is that mean making is a narrative process. Narrative andragogy occurs when individuals reflect on and examine their narratives in the learning process (Goodson and Gill, 2014). Narrative andragogy can lead to significant change and development for people who are incarcerated. Personal narratives are at the core of an individual's map of learning and understanding of their fit in society (Goodson et al., 2010).

The research questions in this study primarily focused on analyzing the lived experiences of incarcerated students and their often unheard feelings, attitudes, and perceptions pertaining to their academic experiences. To understand how correctional education programs are perceived by incarcerated students, it was vital for this research to be collected in the natural context of the prison education community. Allowing participants to give accounts of their individual experiences first hand allowed for richer data.

Quantitative and mixed method approaches were both considered for this study. A quantitative method was rejected for this study because incarcerated student perceptions cannot be easily reduced to numbers. Incarcerated student perspectives are not measurable by category or on a continuum. By using a qualitative research method, the researcher was able to examine various incarcerated student perceptions and attach meaning to the data collected. This type of research would not be appropriate for a quantitative, objective analysis (Yin, 2009). Incarcerated student perceptions take into account personal experience, original thoughts, specific memories, attitudes, and outlook.

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Evaluation of student perceptions towards correctional education programs does not fit a quantifiable research approach. Quantitative research uses methods such as surveys, closed-ended questions, and predetermined approaches (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research uses open-ended questions and allows study participants to add personal value to the study (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). A qualitative research method allowed for focus on multiple aspects such as experience and meaning. A mixed method approach was not selected for the study. Utilizing a mixed methods approach would involve a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Creswell, 2009). Individual interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. Interviews in the study used open-ended questions and aimed specifically at examining participant perceptions of correctional education programs. Although other data was collected, the primary data source for this study was participant perceptions. Other data collected in the study was used to check and establish validity.

Case study. Case study has various interpretations based on discipline. The commonality amongst all case studies is that all are considered to be "a bounded integrated system with working parts" (Glesne, 2011). Creswell (2009) notes that case studies are bounded by time and activity. A case study research design is used as an exploratory analysis. The case study method is used to conduct research on a particular problem based on the responses of participants with shared characteristics. Researchers use cases studies when there is a need to gain a better understanding of a particular phenomenon through specific data collection (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) suggests that researchers use case studies when there is a need to tell a story. To best comprehend the entire story, the story must be broken down and examined in parts (Yin, 2009). Since

this study emphasized real-life context of people in prison and used multiple sources of data as evidence of incarcerated student perceptions, the study can be considered a case study.

A single qualitative case study method was selected for this study. The case study approach was selected because the study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p.18). The selected method allowed the researcher to examine the perceptions of students in a Louisiana correctional education program. The case study method also provided an opportunity for the researcher to gain insight and meaning that expanded the researcher's understanding of the prison education experience. The researcher was able to better understand the intricacy of the prison education experience from the viewpoint of the incarcerated person by utilizing a single case study method.

This qualitative study used a purposeful sampling procedure. Utilizing a purposeful sampling strategy allowed for selection of incarcerated students who were able to share their perceptions of the correctional education experience. Interviews were the primary means of data collection. Correctional education staff members were also selected using a purposeful sampling procedure. Correctional staff members were able to provide background knowledge and information about the correctional education program. They also provided observational insight from classroom/social interactions and shared their perspectives of the correctional education program. Staff participants were included in the study to provide data that was information rich, to allow for triangulation, and to support a better understanding of the data.

Research Questions

  As mentioned previously, the focus of the study was to address the following

research question: How do incarcerated students perceive their correctional education

experience? Secondary research questions were as follows:

2. What are incarcerated students' career/employment expectations after release?
3. What motivates students to take classes?
4. How does previous education or work experience impact the correctional
   education experience?
5. Which aspects of the program do students perceive as successful?
6. Are there any distinguishable similarities in incarcerated student perceptions and
   staff perceptions of the correctional education program?

The questions in this study place emphasis on the lived experiences of people in prison

and how their experiences impact educational decisions. Student perceptions about

course offerings, classroom environments, and instructors were all taken into account.

Lastly, the research questions aimed to gauge student perceptions on how correctional

education program experiences translate to post-release success.

  Several studies indicate a significant, positive relationship between correctional

education programs and recidivism (Adams & Benneth, 1994; Eisenberg, 1991;

Flanagan, et al, 1994; Gainous, 1992; Jenkins, et al., 1995; Karpowitz & Kenner, 2003;

Little, Robinson, & Burnette, 1991; Menon, Blakley, Carmichael, & Silver, L., 1992;

Porporino, & Robinson, 1992; Saylor & Gaes, 1991; Smith & Silverman, 1994; Vacca,

2004; Wilson et al., 2000). Correctional education programs have proven ability to

change behavior and outlook which can lead to successful experiences after release from

prison. Therefore, research questions were developed to draw perceptions on

correctional education program experience with a focus on the impact of success after

release from prison. Research questions were used to better understand the impact of

prison culture on student learning. The impact of educational and work experience prior to incarceration was also considered in the research inquiry. Research questions were designed to better understand the educational and career goals of the incarcerated student.

Research Setting

The study is defined by and intimately linked to the prison setting. Since the research in this study was site-specific, a brief section describing the detail of the site is included. This section describes the characteristics of the facility and the geographic location. As the operations of the correctional education institution are vastly different from those of traditional educational institutions, it is important to provide a detailed account of the setting. A detailed description of the environment helps to provide a better understanding of the uniqueness of the institution. In this study, the students' experience of correctional education was studied in the context in which action occurs, the correctional facility.

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center (RLCC), formerly Avoyelles Correctional Center, opened in 1989 and is one of seven correctional centers in the State of Louisiana. The correctional center is located just outside the city limits of Cottonport, Louisiana. Cottonport is geographically located at the center of the state, approximately 86 miles Northwest of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. According to the 2010 census demographic profile, the total population is approximately 2,000 people (The United States Census Bureau, 2013). Approximately 1,400 adult residents live in Cottonport. Situated less than a mile from commercial and residential areas, the facility sits a few acres back from the street. The correctional center is also located approximately one mile from a

women's correctional center. RLCC is at the very end of a one-way street. There is a visitors' parking lot just outside of the facility gates.

RLCC sits on 1,187 acres of land and the housing units are enclosed by a double perimeter fence. The center was originally designed to house 610 incarcerated persons. The facility now has an operational capacity of 1,808 people. RLCC has 332 employees and has an operating budget of approximately $28 million. Educational programs offered at the institution include literacy, adult basic education (ABE), GED, HiSET, special education, vocational, and college courses. (Edwards & LeBlanc, 2017; RLCC, 2017; The United States Census Bureau [Census], 2013).

Although RLCC is generally considered to be a medium security institution, the prison houses at minimum, medium, and maximum security levels. The facility houses incarcerated males sentenced to the custody of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. RLCC has four general population dormitory style housing units (minimum and medium custody) and one maximum custody housing unit. Each of the four general population housing units are divided into eight tiers with the following capacities: Unit 1 (448 people), Unit 2 (440 people), Unit 3 (352 people), and Unit 4 (364 people). The maximum custody housing unit is also divided into eight distinctive tiers. Each tier has 13 two-person cells. The maximum custody unit has the capacity to house a total of 208 people. Four of the eight tiers house a cellblock workforce. People housed in the cellblock workforce are classified as maximum custody and are required to work as a part of sentencing. Two tiers in the maximum custody housing unit are considered Administrative Segregation tiers. These two tiers are designed as a temporary holding area for people who pose a threat to property, self, staff, other incarcerated individuals,

the orderly operation of the institution, or who are currently under investigation. People

who are awaiting transfer to another facility or pending assignment may also be housed in

Administrative Segregation. The remaining tier in the maximum custody unit houses

people on lockdown for an extended period of time. This segregated tier is used

primarily after a disciplinary hearing for a person found guilty of violating one or more

serious regulations. The extended lockdown tier also houses people who are a danger to

themselves or others, people who are a serious escape risk, or anyone who poses a clear

threat to the security of the institution. (RLCC, 2017).

Population

The target population for the study was adult males incarcerated in the state of

Louisiana who had enrolled in at least one correctional education course. Correctional

education programs can range from adult literacy programs to college programs. Of the

total corrections population in Louisiana, it is estimated that 68.3% are Black, 31.3% are

White and 0.4% are Other. Males account for 94% of the total incarcerated population in

Louisiana. The average age of incarcerated persons in Louisiana prisons is 35 years old.

People are incarcerated for a number of major offense types including violent crimes,

drug crimes, property crimes and all other offenses (Edwards & LeBlanc, 2017; LDPSC,

n.d.). Since the students in this study were incarcerated, they were considered a

vulnerable population. Certain safeguards were included in the study to protect study

participants. Those safeguards are addressed throughout the methodology.

Participants

Patton (2003) notes that there is no rule for sample size when using qualitative

research. Due to the extensive details collected and the amount of time for the interview

process, a sample size of seven incarcerated students under the custody of the Louisiana

Department of Public Safety and Corrections was deemed suitable for this qualitative

research study. The original sample size was 10. However, three students withdrew

from participating in the study. Individuals who had successfully enrolled in at least one

correctional education course were asked to participate in the study. The primary

participants were enrolled in GED, HiSET, and special education programs. One of the

students in the study was a HiSET graduate. Another student completed a vocational

certificate. Male students were selected for this study as most incarcerated persons in

Louisiana are male. In addition, all the incarcerated student participants in this study

were male as RLCC is an all-male facility. In comparison to the household population,

"the incarcerated population is disproportionately male" (The United States Department

of Education National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014, para. 3). An

administrator and an instructor were also invited to participate in the study. It should be

noted that women were not totally excluded from this study as the administrator

interviewed for the study was female. Two staff members (administrator and instructor)

from the Correctional Education Division were interviewed during the study. Data was

also gathered from informal conversations with other staff members. Study participants

were not compensated. The criterion for participating in the study was intended to obtain

research participants with successful higher or adult education experiences during

incarceration. The inclusion criteria for incarcerated student participants were as follows:

- Incarcerated males at RLCC
- Participants must have enrolled in one or more courses through the correctional education program at RLCC
- Participants must be able to read at a 6th grade level or higher
- Participants must be 18 years or older
- At least 50% of the sample must have the possibility of parole

- Participants must be willing to openly share their education experiences

Inclusion criteria for staff participants were as follows:

- Must currently work as an administrator or instructor with the correctional education program at RLCC
- Participants must be willing to openly share their experience with the correctional education program

Data Collection

Merriam (1998) noted that collecting data from a variety of sources helps to better understand and interpret a selected case. Primary and secondary sources were used to collect data in order to answer the research questions for the study. The primary source of data collection in this study was interviews. In addition, data was also collected through questionnaires, observations, and informal conversations. A separate questionnaire was given to incarcerated students and correctional staff to identify profile information such as race, age, and level of education. Data collection occurred over a three week period.

According to Glesne (2011), most research studies are too massive to interview everyone, so a reasonable selection strategy must be used to select participants, times, and events. The participants in this study were selected through purposeful homogenous sampling. Glense (2011) defines homogeneous sampling as a sampling strategy that "selects all similar cases in order to describe some subgroup in depth…" (p. 45). Only those participants who best met the purpose of the study were selected. The Assistant Warden was asked to identify students that meet the pre-dertermined criteria for inclusion in the study. The Assistant Warden was also asked to note any cognitive or behavioral conditions that would preclude individuals from answering the interview questions or participating in two 30-75 minute interviews.

The study focused on participant overall experience, searching for meaning rather than measurments. Since the study solicited data that was personal and lengthy, face-to-face interviews was the best approach for collecting data on student perspectives. The study attempted to understand the world from the students' perspective; therefore, interviews were the most useful approach (Kvale, 1996). Correctional education is aimed at individual outcomes, so direct conversations with people helped to explore individual experiences. Though incarcerated student perspectives were the primary focus, data was also collected by interviewing correctional education staff.

All staff who participated in the study were asked the same questions related to their teaching/leadership experience in correctional education. Similarly, all students were asked the same set of questions regarding their learning experiences. This study used open-ended, semi-structured interviews to gather perceptions of participants related to the purpose of the study. Open-ended questions are appropriate for collecting data on individual education experiences (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011). These types of questions are able to draw out a wide range of experiences among participants in the sample. A brief questionnaire was used to collect profile data of each participant. A set of guiding interview questions were developed for the study. In addition, the researcher asked follow-up questions to the guiding interview questions based on participant responses. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

In accordance with research requirements for studies with human subjects, an application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Memphis. The researcher also requested permission from the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DOC) to conduct the study. Initial contact with the prison

was through the Warden's Office. A letter was written to the Warden at RLCC

requesting permission to conduct the study. The study was approved by both the prison

and the state headquarters. Once the approval letter to conduct the study was received, a

copy of the letter was submitted with other application materials to the IRB at the

University of Memphis. Upon IRB approval, the researcher began working with the

Assistant Warden who served as the primary point of contact at the prison for the entire

study. The researcher continued communications with the Assistant Warden via email,

telephone, and in person until the completion of the study. The Assistant Warden helped

to run a background check on the researcher for security clearance to enter the prison.

For this procedure the researcher had to submit a photo copy of driver's license

information. The background check was completed within 24 hours. Once the

background check cleared, the researcher began working with the Assistant Warden on

the recruitment of participants. All consent forms, participant profile questionnaires,

interview questions, and protocol were shared with the Assistant Warden.

  Materials. Data collection for student participants consisted of a brief profile

questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire contained six questions

about students' race/ethnicity, age, level of education, employment history, incarceration

history, and correctional education experience. The first interview consisted of 18 open-

ended questions related to students' motivation to attend, educational goals, perspectives

of the program, and expectations after release. The second interview was for follow-up

and reflection purposes. Field notes were used to document any observations or non-

verbal gestures during all interviews.

Data collection for staff participants consisted of a brief profile questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The staff questionnaire contained five questions about race/ethnicity, age, job title/role, years of service in the correctional education program, and other education or corrections experience. The first staff interview consisted of eight open ended questions related to their role at the prison, observations, correctional education experience, and future expectations for incarcerated students upon release. The second interview was for follow-up and reflection purposes. Field notes were also used to document non-verbal communication during staff interviews.

     Recruitment. Student participants were recruited using flyers. Through the Assistant Warden's Office, the flyers were distributed to students who were currently enrolled in the correctional education program at RLCC. To avoid coercion during recruiting, participants were not offered advantages for participation that would be greater than the standard limited-choice environment of the prison. It was explained that students would not receive preferential treatment, better living conditions, or opportunities outside of what is normally provided at the prison.

     Students were recruited to provide a representative sample that would include students with experience in various programs at the institution. Due to the nature of the prison setting, the researcher did not have full control over the recruitment and selection of participants. With the help of the educational administrator, students were recruited, given an overview of the study, and provided consent forms. From the available pool, student participants were selected by the educational administrator based on the inclusion criteria for the study. In addition, students were prioritized based on the number of courses taken previously (those with more correctional education experience) for richer

data. The Assistant Warden notified the researcher of those students who were interested in participating in the study. The Assistant Warden's Office provided information regarding the number of classes participants had taken. The first group meeting with students was scheduled through the Assistant Warden's Office.

Similarly, correctional staff participants were recruited using flyers. Through the Assistant Warden, the flyers were distributed to staff. Staff participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria. The Assistant Warden's Office provided contact information for those interested in participating in the study. Staff participants were contacted by email to set up meeting times.

The researcher met with each participant twice over a three-week period: 1) Informational Meeting/Informed Consent/Initial Interview and 2) Follow-Up Interview. Initial interview times and room location at RLCC were scheduled. Initial interviews with students were all conducted on the same day the first week. On average, each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The first meeting was to discuss the study, answer any questions about the study and conduct initial interviews. Once volunteers for the study were identified, the next step was to meet with students to form introductions, discuss participant involvement in the study, explain the purpose of the study, explain participant rights, discuss privacy and confidentiality, describe the participation process, and get participant consent. Immediately following the informational meeting was the first set of interviews.

Students. For student participants, a group meeting was arranged through the Assistant Warden's Office to make introductions. The meeting occurred in a classroom at RLCC and lasted approximately 30 minutes. During this time, the researcher verbally

explained the risks and benefits of the study, the study procedures, and what involvement in the study would consist of for participants. The researcher answered any questions related to the study and addressed any concerns and gave participants the opportunity to provide informed consent. Verbal and written consent were obtained for study participation. Once signed consent forms were received from study participants, student interviews began. A correctional officer was outside the classroom during each interview for safety measures.

At the beginning of each interview, the purpose of the study was re-stated. An overview was also explained on how the interview session would proceed. First, student participants were asked to answer a brief profile questionnaire. Next, participants were asked a set of 18 open-ended questions related to students' motivation to attend, educational goals, perspectives of the program, and expectations after release. Follow up questions were asked if clarification was needed on something the participant shared. Some participants were extremely loquacious while others were more reserved. Due to scheduling conflicts and the time needed to transcribe interviews, follow up interviews were spread out over the following two weeks. The transcribing process lasted approximately two and a half hours per transcript. Follow up interviews were used to go over the transcripts with respective participants, correct any mistakes on the transcript, and to get further clarification on certain questions.

The second and final meeting with student participants was for follow-up and reflection purposes. The format was different from the initial interview. At the beginning of the meeting, student participants were asked to review the typed transcript as the researcher read it aloud for accuracy and to point out any errors. Since participants

had time to reflect on the first interview, they were asked to share any thoughts that may have come to them about their experiences after the initial interview. This meeting was used to follow up on questions that there might not have been enough time to address during the first interview. Lastly, follow up questions were asked related to individual responses that probed a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Staff. The researcher scheduled individual interview times with each participant directly. For staff volunteers, the first meeting occurred in the administrator's office suite. The researcher met with each staff member individually. At this time, the researcher verbally explained the risks and benefits of the study, the study procedures, answered any questions related to the study, and addressed issues of privacy and confidentiality. The researcher asked for verbal and written consent for staff participation in the study at the beginning of the actual first interview.

Immediately following the overview of the study and collection of consent forms, initial interviews were conducted. An overview on how the interview session would proceed was explained. First, staff participants were asked to answer a brief profile questionnaire. Next, participants were asked a set of 8 open-ended questions related to their personal observations and experience with correctional education. Follow up questions were asked if clarification was needed regarding responses. Interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes each and were audio recorded for transcription purposes. Responses from interviews were transcribed. Once transcriptions were completed, follow-up interviews were scheduled with individual staff members.

At the beginning of the second meeting with each staff member, the purpose of the study was verbally re-stated. The second and final meeting was for follow-up and

reflection purposes. The format was different from the initial interview. At the

beginning of the meeting, staff participants were asked to review the typed transcript for

accuracy and to point out any errors. Since participants had time to reflect on the first

interview, they were asked to share any thoughts that may have come to them about their

experiences after the initial interview. This meeting was used to follow up on questions

that may not have been addressed in the first interview due to time constraints. Lastly,

follow up questions were asked related to individual responses that provided a deeper

understanding of their experiences.

Subjectivity Statement

Glesne (2011) suggested that subjectivity allows for a more trustworthy study.

Tracking one's self creates an awareness of the researcher's perspective and

interpretations within the research setting. Certain researcher characteristics had the

potential to influence subjective data collection. According to Glense (1999), it is

important for qualitative researchers to recognize their subjectivities and monitor the

influences on data collection and analysis. Glesne (1999) stated that "awareness of your

subjectivities can guide you to strategies to monitor those perspectives that might, as you

analyze and write up your data, shape, skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue what you

make of what you see and hear" (p. 109).

According to Patton (2002), since the researcher serves as the instrument in

qualitative research, a qualitative study should include information about the researcher.

As a qualitative researcher, it is essential that I acknowledge my own subjectivities within

this study. I appreciate the experiences and self-awareness that adult learners bring to the

learning experience. As an educator, I am an advocate for correctional education

programs. I support rehabilitative programs and feel that education has the propensity to

significantly decrease recidivism. I believe in second chances for people who are

incarcerated. I also believe that there are certain issues in society and policy making

which favor certain individuals over others. I think that the prison population is often

overlooked, disregarded, and written off. As a minority female researcher, I am drawn to

the field of study concerning disproportionate incarceration rates and lower levels of

educational attainment for minority males. As a family member of a person who was

formerly incarcerated and has successfully rehabilitated, I have a personal connection to

the study. My role as an educator, an advocate for correctional education, and a family

member all potentially influenced the analysis of incarcerated student perspectives.

Taking this into consideration, I acknowledge the bias of choice related to interviews

with participants.

Validity and Reliability

In Creswell (2009), qualitative validity indicates that the researcher in some way

checks the accuracy of results by using established procedures. Reliability in qualitative

inquiry implies that the approach of the researcher is consistent across various researchers

and studies (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers can check the validity and

reliability of their approaches by documenting as many of the steps in the case study

procedure as possible (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). Multiple methods were used to

increase validity and reliability in the study including: transcript checks, member checks,

triangulation, and self-disclosure of beliefs, assumptions, and biases (Creswell & Miller,

2000; Merriam, 1998). Research design, data analysis, participant feedback, and

researcher bias were all considered throughout the entire study.

Interview transcriptions were checked for mistakes as a reliability procedure. Each interview was audio recorded with a handheld digital recording device to capture participant responses verbatim. The recorder that was used was an Olympus WS-853. The researcher also took hand written notes during the interview to indicate nonverbal communication such as facial expressions or body movement. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher for each interview. Transcribed interviews were placed in each participant file and stored in a safe accessible by only the researcher.

Creswell and Miller (2000) noted that member checks add to the validity of the researcher's interpretation and are crucial in the establishment of credibility in a research study. After all initial interviews were conducted, the member checking process was completed. The member check process involved sharing data and interpretations with the study participants to solicit feedback concerning the credibility and accuracy of the information and narrative descriptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). An interview transcript was provided to each participant during member checking. Participants were asked to notify the researcher of any necessary corrections.

Another validity strategy used in the study was triangulation. Triangulation was used to cross verify data by using multiple sources. Data collected in the study came from the review of literature, interviews, non-verbal observations, questionnaires, prison documents, and informal conversations. By using multiple data sources, the researcher was able to establish themes based on the convergence of sources; therefore, adding validity to the study.

The researcher addressed biases in the study. A summary of researcher subjectivities is provided for the study. This sort of self-awareness helps to create

openness and honesty with readers. A core characteristic of qualitative studies is when

researchers reflect about how their biases, attitudes, and beliefs shape interpretations.

Sharing this information helps to shape a good qualitative research study and adds

validity to the study findings (Creswell, 2009).

Data Analysis

For case studies, there is a unique set of elements which impact the way in which

data is analyzed. Evaluating a case study is expansive and involves collecting data from

multiple sources related to the case. The data must then be categorized for analysis

(Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). A description of the data analysis for this study is

described below.

Data analysis is a systematic procedure for finding meaning in qualitative

research (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 1998). The general approach for data

analysis involves organizing and examining data, categorizing, and making sense of the

larger meaning of data (Creswell, 2009). According to researchers, both the data

collection and data analysis processes occur simultaneously (Baxter & Jack, 2008;

Willig, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the researcher adhered to Creswell's (2009)

interpretation of data analysis. Creswell (2009) provides a framework for general steps in

data analysis for all qualitative studies:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis
2. Read through all the data
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative
6. A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of data

It is important to note that the various steps in data analysis are not always followed in the order presented above. The analysis is more interactive since the steps outlined are interrelated.

After each interview, questionnaire responses were added to a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel. Using audio recordings, interview responses for each participant were transcribed in Microsoft Word. An initial was used on each transcript to represent a pseudonym. Member checking was used to add validity to the study. The member check process involved sharing the transcript of each interview with respective participants and requesting feedback concerning the accuracy of the each transcript. After member checking, pseudonyms were added to each individual file. Interview transcripts were grouped by participant type and examined separately (i.e. student, administrator, and instructor). This was done to distinguish student perceptions from administrative and instructional perceptions. Each participant had an electronic file and a paper file containing data collected during each interview. Once all interviews were completed and transcripts were verified and corrected, the data was sorted through in its entirety looking for meaning. Transcripts and field notes were reviewed in search of patterns or themes.

After getting an overall sense of the data, open coding was used to code the data. Abbreviated notations were used in the margins of each document to identify patterns or any overlapping themes that emerged from the data. Marginal notations that were identified as alike were grouped together to construct meaning of the data. The researcher looked for meaning that stood out in participant responses and also looked for themes that addressed the research questions. Based on key concepts found in the literature review, a list was made of all major themes that emerged from the data. After

major themes were identified, the researcher read through the data again to see if any themes could be combined or broken down into sub-themes. The researcher also looked for relationships between categories and themes.

Categories and themes were represented in the study based on emerging data. This chapter is followed by a discussion and interpretation of the emerging themes. Themes were separated into separate categories based on context. A description of the participants and the setting was addressed. Any overlapping themes were categorized as well.

Audio recordings from all interviews were transcribed. The digital recordings from the interviews were stored in files which were password protected. Field notes, transcripts, and participant profile data were locked in a safe. Field notes were taken to provide contextual support of themes in the data and to detail the research setting. Interview transcripts were divided by participant type with the purpose of distinguishing incarcerated student perceptions from administrative and instructional perceptions so that areas of overlap could be identified when themes emerged. Based on key concepts found in the review of literature, interview transcriptions were then separated into sections.

Glense (2011) notes that qualitative coding involves dividing data into like categories to differentiate emerging themes, patterns, and processes. Interview transcriptions, and field notes were all coded. Open coding was used to analyze the data by examining transcripts and notes carefully as well as making abbreviated marginal notations of themes related to the research questions. Marginal notations that were identified as alike were be grouped together to construct meaning of the data.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Participation in this study was voluntary. Privacy and confidentiality was maintained within the limits allowed by the law. Privacy and confidentiality was addressed in writing in the consent forms. In addition, the researcher also addressed privacy and confidentiality verbally during the first meeting with participants.

The study was not totally private due to the fact that the primary participants were incarcerated. This removed some of the privacy participants would normally have. Since students were unable to leave the prison, privacy was limited. Prison and state administrators were aware of participant involvement as they had to give approval for the study. Study results were shared with the Warden's Office. In addition, a correctional officer was present outside the classroom during each interview. Prior to all interviews, the Assistant Warden and the researcher met with all staff who were present during interviews to discuss privacy and confidentiality. The researcher explained the importance of privacy and confidentiality with regards to the academic study. The Assistant Warden addressed privacy and confidentiality from an employee policy standpoint. In addition, correctional officers present during the study signed a privacy and confidentiality agreement to protect the privacy rights of incarcerated participants within the limits of the law. Also, any materials (audio recordings, transcripts, etc.) that were transported in and out of the prison were subject to review by a corrections officer. Every effort was made to keep participant identities safe outside the prison. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym known only to the researcher. Quotations used in the study were anonymous. Any published study results did not include any personally

identifiable information of participants. In accordance with the Louisiana Department of

Public Safety and Corrections regulations, the following regulations were adhered to:

1. Research conducted at the prison complies with professional and scientific ethics and with applicable state and federal guidelines for the use and dissemination of research findings.
2. The risks involved in participating in the research study are no greater than the risks that would be accepted by non-incarcerated volunteers.
3. The research study consists of no more than interviews and/or written questionnaires and procedures which do not manipulate bodily conditions.
4. Operational personnel may assist research personnel in carrying out research and evaluation.
5. Any direct incarcerated student participation is voluntary.
6. Names or any other personally identifiable information will be held in confidence.
7. The published study results will be shared with the prison and/or the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections.
8. The research activities shall not interfere with normal operations of the prison.
9. The person(s) conducting the research study are qualified to do so.
10. The research study will be at no cost to the Raymond Laborde Correctional Center or Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections.

Data Storage and Security

All audio recordings and paper documents were kept in a locked safe in the

researcher's private office. The safe was only by accessible by the researcher. Each

participant had a file folder containing consent forms, transcripts, field notes, and any

other paper documents related to the study. The file folders were kept in the locked safe.

Paper documents such as consent forms and field notes were scanned electronically from

a personal scanner in the researcher's office. All electronic records were password

protected and stored on the researcher's personal computer in a private office. All audio

recordings, paper documents, and electronic files were permanently deleted upon

completion of the study and dissertation approval.

Ethical Considerations

As with all qualitative studies, there are ethical considerations related to protecting study participants. This is especially true when researching vulnerable populations. People who are incarcerated fall into the vulnerable population category. Incarcerated persons are involuntarily confined in a penal institution. Since people who are incarcerated are under constraints that may impact their ability to make voluntary decisions about participation in the study, this population is vulnerable. The prison environment can be very stressful and those with vulnerabilities in coping with the prison experience may experience greater challenges that typically would not impact the average student. Additional safeguards were included in the study to protect participants from harm or exploitation. Given the personal connection to information collected during interviews, the researcher followed procedures to protect the privacy of study participants.

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) provides clarity and ethical guidance regarding the protection of participant rights in research studies. OHRP describes three basic ethical principles for evaluating human subjects: 1) respect for persons, 2) beneficence, and 3) justice (United States, 1978). Respect for persons involves giving participants the opportunity to consent. The principle of beneficence involves protecting participants from risk or harm; beneficence also indicates that the benefits for participants should outweigh any risks. Lastly, justice refers to fair procedures and outcomes in participant selection. Justice is applicable to participant selection on two levels: individual and social. On the individual level, the study should not offer any type of benefit or favor to one participant that is not offered to other

participants. Social justice is relevant to the distinction of classes of participants included in the study.

Each principle was addressed in the study. With regard to respect for persons, all study participants were given the opportunity to consent in both verbal and written format. Each participant willfully agreed to participate in the study. Since people in prison, overall, have lower literacy levels than average, consent forms were written in a way that could easily be understood by a general audience. Any participants with cognitive or behavioral limitations were excluded from the study. The principle of beneficence was addressed in the study by having minimal risks and numerous indirect benefits to all study participants. All participants were treated the same across the board. The same interview procedures were adhered to for each participant to ensure individual justice. In this study, the pre-determined participant criteria was considered to be socially just since the research only applies to certain conditions (i.e. incarcerated persons).

Since the nature of being imprisoned is involuntary, the researcher explicitly informed study participants that participation in the study is completely voluntary. Participants were informed that any decision to withdraw from the study would not have negative consequences. Withdrawal from the study was possible at any time during the research. Participants were reassured that their personally identifiable information would be kept confidential and stored in a safe only accessible by the researcher.

All study participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and alternatives to participation. The purpose of the study was verbally explained to participants in the initial meeting prior to interviews. Consent forms also addressed the purpose of the

study, participant rights, and confidentiality. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study prior to giving consent.

Risks and Benefits

    Risks. Risks to participants in the study were minimal. Since the research setting was in a prison, there were potential risks that were considered. Since the interview questions were related to personal experiences, there may have been some psychological risks. Both the researcher and the interviewees could have experienced some initial nervousness, anxiety, embarrassment or discomfort during the interview process. Participants may have felt some anxiety about discussing their education experiences with a stranger. If signs of severe discomfort or uneasiness would have been indicated by any participant or noticed by the researcher, the researcher would have discontinued the interview and the participant would have immediately been withdrawn from the study.

    There was also a social risk involved in the study. Since students were in the correctional facility involuntarily, they may have felt compelled in some way to participate in the study for fear that non-participation could have negative consequences in the prison environment. Participants were assured that participation in the study was voluntary and that not participating in the study would not have had any impact on parole.

    Conducting a study inside a prison can be risky due to the nature of the prison environment. There was a risk of physical harm to the researcher. However, the RLCC is tightly regulated and closely monitored. The researcher followed all protocol for visiting incarcerated people as outlined by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and

Corrections. In addition, a correctional officer was present during all interactions with incarcerated students.

Benefits. There was no known direct benefit to study participants. However, this research allowed participants to express their thoughts on correctional education programs and share their experiences. There are several potential benefits to society. With high imprisonment and recidivism rates, it is evident that correctional education programs are needed to help rehabilitate incarcerated persons. Having fewer people incarcerated translates to fewer taxpayer dollars for prisons, restoration in families, lower crime rates, lower overall prison costs, increased employment rates, more educated and skilled workers, etc. The results of this study could potentially help the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and corrections evaluate the type of programs offered to incarcerated students. It is anticipated that the perceptions revealed in this study will provide feedback in a way that is meaningful to future program planning. The results from this study add to the current literature in the field and increase support for correctional education. This study may also serve as a motivator for other incarcerated people to enroll in correctional education programs. Lastly, and most importantly, the study results present a better understanding of the impact of correctional education programs on incarcerated persons.

Differential Evaluation of Risks and Benefits. Since the risks to participants were no greater than risks that would be accepted by non-incarcerated participants within the context of the study, the benefits of the study outweigh the risks. Feelings of nervousness or anxiety about sharing personal experiences could have occurred with any participant being interviewed (e.g. job interview). Similarly, feeling compelled to

participate could have also occurred with any participant. For example, if similar

interviews were conducted with traditional students and recruitment flyers were

distributed during class or emailed/posted within the department, students might feel

compelled to participate to boost their grade or relationship with professors. The reach of

the potential benefits to society are far greater than the risks presented to study

participants.

Summary

This chapter outlined the overall research method and rationale for the study. A

qualitative case study was the most appropriate method to examine incarcerated student

perspectives and answer the research questions. This section includes a discussion of

data collection and analysis. Issues of validity, reliability, and ethical considerations are

addressed in this chapter. The next two chapters of the study will outline research

findings, conclusions, discussion, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine incarcerated student perceptions as they relate to correctional education program participation. The study was guided by the primary research question: How do incarcerated students perceive their correctional education experience? Secondary research questions were as follows:

2. What are incarcerated students' career/employment expectations after release?
3. What motivates people in prison to take classes?
4. How does previous education or work experience impact the correctional education experience?
5. Which aspects of the program do students perceive as successful?
6. Are there any distinguishable similarities in student perceptions and staff perceptions of the correctional education program?

This chapter reports the findings from data gathered using in-depth individual interviews of incarcerated students, observations of students in their natural setting, and interviews with an administrator and an instructor in the education program at Raymond Laborde Correctional Center (RLCC). Data collected in the study which reflects viewpoints from incarcerated students and correctional education staff in their own words is presented.

To better present the findings, a reflection on visits to the facility is included in this section. In addition, an overview of the educational programs at RLCC will be included. Next, this chapter includes demographic data of the study participants. Immediately following, themes which have emerged from data collection are also included in this section. Student themes are comprised as follows: barriers to education, motivation, and self-reflection. Staff themes presented in the data are as follows: people first, moral character, and supportive administration. Program themes include the

following: peer relationships, student-teacher interactions, and service learning. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings.

A Moment of Truth: Entering a Correctional Facility

Driving up to the facility, it was easy to discern that this was a prison or otherwise secured area. The entire prison area was secured by double fencing. A Department of Corrections Credit Union was located approximately 300 feet outside the main prison entrance. This branch provides financial services to several staff members at RLCC. Next door to the credit union was a visitors parking lot. Adjacent to the parking lot was a small visitors center with posted signs regarding restricted items such as cellular phones and magazines. This area served as the initial checkpoint for family, friends, and other visitors arriving to see incarcerated persons. Since security clearance from the Warden was received in advance, the researcher was allowed to bypass the initial checkpoint, entering the grounds at the main security booth (employee entrance). To enter the grounds at RLCC, the researcher had to drive up to the security booth in front of the fenced area. The researcher showed a state issued driver's license to the officer at the booth. The officer compared the identification to a typed list of approved visitors for each day (prior approval was obtained from the Warden) and secured a verbal confirmation over the telephone from the Warden's Office. The researcher was asked to roll down the front and back windows of the vehicle. The officer performed a thorough security check of the vehicle before lifting the anti-ram gate to allow entry. A very similar process was followed on the way out of the facility each visit.

From the gate, there was a long driveway leading up to the parking lot near the administrative building where the Warden's Office was located. The grounds were well

manicured. The researcher was allowed to park in the Warden's guest parking area

immediately outside the administrative building. Upon entry into the administrative

building, there were staff offices sectioned off by department to the left and right of the

entry way. Just in front of the entry way was another fully enclosed security booth with

glass windows. Three officers were present in the booth. Outside the booth, there was a

metal detector and another correctional officer present. A trustee was also present near

the security area. A trustee is an incarcerated person who has exhibited good behavior

and can be trusted with tasks that present a level of security risk such as guarding the

security entrance. No cellular phones were allowed in the building. The researcher

carried all notes, interview materials, writing pads, and a digital recorder in a clear plastic

tote bag similar to those used for stadium entry, retail workers, warehouse personnel,

airports, etc. Prior approval was issued by the Warden to allow the digital recorder for

transcription purposes. The clear tote was placed on a wooden table to the side of the

metal detector. The researcher then walked through the metal detector. Items inside the

clear tote were inspected for security purposes. Once cleared, the researcher signed in on

a visitors log and was escorted through a double gate made with strong steel bars which

required security card access by personnel. Immediately on the other side of the steel

doors was the inside of the prison, the area where incarcerated persons were present.

Once inside the prison, a long sidewalk surrounded by double fencing connected

to each of the buildings within the prison. Several incarcerated people walked past the

researcher on their way to various works assignments. Except for the double fencing, the

experience was very similar to passing strangers on the street. Some people said hello,

others went about their day as usual. The education building was located approximately

200 feet from the point of entry into the prison. Security card access was required to enter the building. A correctional officer and a trustee were present near the entryway of the education building. A short hallway lead to the classroom where interviews were conducted. Similar to most schools, some students were socializing with one another in the hallway. All student participants in the study were seated in a classroom just down the hall from the room where interviews were conducted.

Greeted in the hallway by the educational administrator, the researcher was given a tour of the education building which included areas such as administrative offices, classrooms, staff restrooms, security offices, and the nurse's office. The researcher was taken to the classroom where student participants were gathered and then introduced to the students who were grouped in one classroom together. Participants had been recruited, briefed on the study, and given consent forms by the educational administrator two weeks prior to the study. Participants were selected by the educational administrator to provide a representative sample of the academic school that would include students with various correctional education experiences (e.g. GED, HiSET, vocational, etc.). While all students were gathered in one classroom, the researcher verbally explained her role as a student researcher, the purpose of the study, privacy and confidentiality issues specific to incarcerated persons, and answered any participant questions. Consent forms were collected at this time. After meeting with the group, the researcher moved to the interview classroom down the hall. Participants were called into the classroom one-by-one. While waiting for their interview session to begin, students used this time for reading and studying. Initial interviews were conducted on a study (non-class) day. This was intentional so that interviews could occur with the least amount of interruptions.

Due to the lengthy security procedures required when students leave and return to housing units and various student class schedules, it was deemed best to have the students in a general location on a non-class day.

The incarcerated community. RLCC is a community within itself. RLCC is governed by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. RLCC offers services typically found in the community or on campus at a traditional school. Faith-based, mental health, recreation, medical, security, and classification (services that identify and classify incarcerated persons according to their security, medical, educational, work, and housing needs) services are all available at the prison. Each service is broken down into a department and/or division. The organizational structure at the correctional center is similar to that of most organizations.

As with most prisons, the facility is governed by a bureaucratic organizational structure. Decision making and policy implementation for the prison is performed at the top level of the organizational structure. The Warden is the top administrator at the correctional center and reports to the Chief of Operations for Corrections in the state. The Chief of Operations reports to the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety of Corrections who in turn reports to the Governor of Louisiana. This study was approved by the Warden at RLCC and the Chief of Operations. For the purposes of this study, the organizational structure explained in this section begins with the most senior level position at the correctional center visited in the study. The Warden is the highest-ranking administrator at the prison and is responsible for the supervision of all incarcerated persons and all operations and regulations at the facility. The Warden has two direct reports, Deputy Wardens. Assistant Wardens in turn report to the Deputy

Wardens. Department Heads report to Assistant Wardens. Within each department,

there are staff members that report to the Department Heads. In many ways, the

organizational structure at the facility is similar to traditional educational institutions

which follow a similar pyramid-like institutional governance. For example, colleges and

universities typically have a governing board of directors, a president or chancellor, vice-

presidents, academic deans, department chairs, faculty, and staff.   Figure 1 is an

illustration of the organizational structure as it relates to the education program at the

prison.
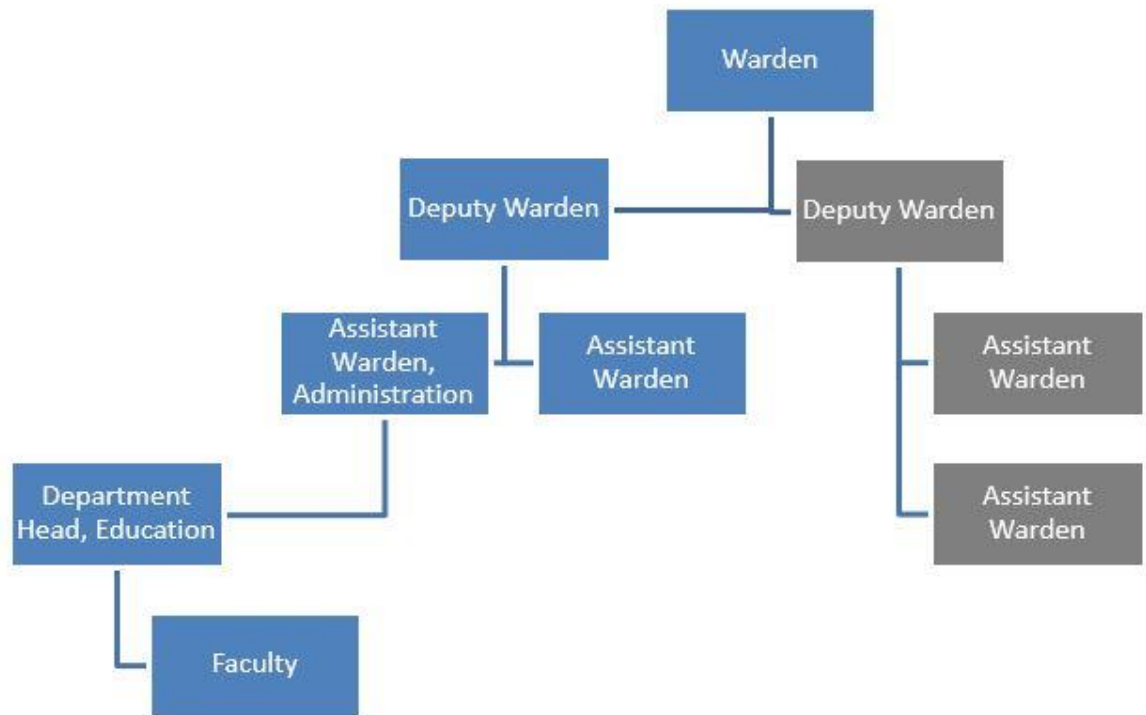
Figure 1

Organizational Structure

RLCC sits on a very large piece of cultivated land. The acreage not only serves to

house incarcerated persons but it is also farmland. The land includes but is not limited to

cattle, horses, and a crawfish pond. The incarcerated population at RLCC cultivate the

land. Although agriculture is not offered as part of the education program at RLCC, those who have work assignments on the farm receive on-the-job training on how to grow crops and rear animals. The resources produced on the farm are used in the prison. For example, incarcerated individuals catch crawfish from the pond for the annual Crawfish Boil at the prison. All administrators, staff, and eligible incarcerated persons are invited to the event.

Communication amongst staff at the prison is primarily conducted through two-way radios. Staff also have government issued email addresses and office telephones. However, due to the hectic day-to-day operations of the facility, two-way radios are more efficient overall. Due to the nature of the prison setting, communication with students is not as fluid as in a traditional school. This can create challenges when attempting to get information to students in housing units, schedule group meetings, or track turnover.

The education building. The education program has approximately 11 classrooms. All of the classrooms are located in the same building as the educational administrators' offices. Most students were dressed in blue chambray shirts with blue jeans. Unlike traditional schools, students do not change classes during the day. Rather than switching classes, students remain in the same class for various subjects. For example, reading, language, and math may all be taught in the same classroom by the same instructor on the same day. Most of the classrooms have the standard structural design with rows of student desks facing a whiteboard near the instructor at the front of the classroom. Some classes where equipped with resource books, audiovisuals, whiteboard materials, hands-on teaching materials, and other educational support resources. There is a tutoring classroom where students can receive supplemental

instruction. The education building houses a law library offering a collection of law books and legal resources. There is a room designated for viewing educational videos on VHS and DVD. RLCC also provides an avenue for student journalism. The school newspaper staff office is also in the education building.

The facility has a virtual learning center where students review tutorials, practice for exams, work on assignments, and complete testing. The learning center has 20 computer work stations that operate on pre-installed programs. Although most of the information on the computers is downloaded from open sources (vetted by security) on the Internet, the computers do not have direct access to the Internet for security purposes. The educational technology used to support learning in the training center is ATLO Software. ATLO is a Louisiana-based company that provides educational training labs for correctional facilities in Louisiana. The name ATLO was derived from a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) term used for the building stage of rockets: assemble, test, launch, and operate. The company is named ATLO based on the notion that they build and implement education and training technology that is innovative. Students use the software for various learning activities. For example, students can review math tutorials and take practice exams for the HiSET and GED.

The hallways were decorated with traditional bulletin boards. Several of the bulletin boards highlighted student achievement. For example, student photos were posted for HiSET Scholar (highest test scores of the month), Student of the Quarter, Most Improved, etc. In addition, articles written by the school newspaper staff were also posted in the hallway. Much like traditional school newspapers, the articles highlighted student achievement, current events, and other school related news.

Due to the nature of the prison environment, there are certain security restrictions on instructional materials. Instructors have to be extremely creative with the type of instructional materials used in class. Materials such as rainbow tiles and fraction magnets are used as visual, hands-on aids for teaching fractions. Items such as three-ring binders, scissors, glue, book bags or markers with a strong odor are banned from the prison. The correctional education administrator interviewed during this study noted: "For example, we can't use dice to teach probability." So, instructors must be very creative when developing ways to make learning interesting and still follow security restrictions. The correctional center emphasizes safety first; the safety and security of all staff and students is priority.

The reflections on the site visits set the context for the learning environment. When considering themes which emerged from the data, it is imperative to take into account the unique characteristics of the prison setting. The unique setting adds to the importance of the findings in this study and illustrates contextual variables in the research setting.

Educational Programs at RLCC

The findings in this section were gathered from conversations with administration, a guided tour of the facility, observations, and documentation provided by the correctional center. RLCC offers various informal and formal learning opportunities. Most of the formal education programs at the prison are geared towards adult education and focus primarily on earning a high school credential. In addition, the prison also offers college level courses which primarily concentrate on vocational programming. RLCC also offers several learning opportunities that are not official components of the

education program. Informal learning opportunities are available for incarcerated

persons both affiliated and unaffiliated with the education program. This section

provides an overview of the formal academic programs offered at RLCC such as GED

and adult basic education. An overview of informal learning such as service learning,

faith-based learning, and career training is also provided in this section.

Academic learning. Since the correctional center opened in 1989, RLCC has

offered some form of correctional education. Currently, all incarcerated persons at

RLCC are eligible to participate in the education program. Due to capacity restrictions

on how many students can participate in educational programs at one time, educational

services are provided to roughly 30% of the RLCC incarcerated population at a time.

Classroom and computer based learning ranges from literacy to post-secondary

education. Post-secondary education consists of job-life-skill courses and vocational

programs. The services are provided at zero cost to the students. Students may take

college level correspondence courses based on the Warden's approval. Course

scheduling at the facility is similar to traditional scheduling. Education is provided on a

voluntary basis. Students must request to enroll in available courses. Wait listing is used

to manage classroom space. HiSET courses are offered during the day and at night to

accommodate students who work full time at the prison. The primary academic programs

at RLCC are as follows: literacy, adult basic education (ABE), general education diploma

preparation (GED), high school equivalency exam preparation (HiSET), and special

school district programs (SSD). For the purposes of this study, it should be noted that

GED and HiSET courses are interchangeable. While there are differences in the

curriculum, both programs are geared toward students earning a high school credential.

The difference between programs is based on curriculum preference much like common core standards versus the previous educational standards or the ACT versus the SAT. The programs are distinguished in the study results to indicate students' preferred pathway.

A study by The Literacy Project Foundation (2017) found that three in five incarcerated persons are illiterate. Two of the students in this study admitted that when they first arrived at RLCC, they struggled with basic reading. The literacy program is aimed to provide students with basic reading, verbal, and math skills needed to function in their daily lives. The test for adult basic education (TABE) is a diagnostic exam used to determine individual skill and aptitude. TABE tests are often used in adult education programs (e.g. GED and HiSET) to guide placement in reading, math, and english. Students with a TABE grade equivalent score below 5.0 (5th grade in reading) are placed in the literacy program at RLCC.

The ABE program is intended to prepare students for HiSET or vocational courses. Basic education programs such as K-12 are intended to prepare students to live and work in society. However, not all students complete basic education as adolescents. The students in this study left school early. ABE courses at RLCC aid in building foundational reading, writing, and numeracy skills that incarcerated students would have otherwise received as youths. ABE courses emphasize academic and social skills needed to function in society. Students who place into ABE classes score below an 8.0 (8th grade) but above a 5.0 on the TABE test. To begin vocational courses, students must score an 8.0 or higher on the TABE test and have an earned high school diploma or GED.

Students eligible for release within 90 days can also enroll in the ABE program as a refresher course.

The HiSET program assists students with obtaining their high school equivalency diploma. The HiSET is a newer program and the curriculum is more aligned with common core standards. Although, the prison still offers the GED pathway as well. HiSET courses focus on improving student potential for successful reentry and therefore, decreasing recidivism. A TABE grade equivalent score of at least 5.0 is required for placement into the HiSET program. RLCC has recently seen a significant improvement in student HiSET test scores. One of the study participants is a HiSET graduate and another student was enrolled in the program. Three student participants were enrolled in the GED program.

SSD is an education program which functions between the Louisiana Department of Education and the local education agencies. The program provides education services to people with special education needs who are enrolled at state operated institutions. Students must be under the age of 25 and have a documented history of previous special services. SSD is geared towards all levels of functioning including literacy, ABE, and GED. In addition, SSD includes workplace ethics and transition in the curriculum. Students in SSD must have an Individual Evaluation (IE) and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IE is an evaluation conducted by a group of educational and medical professionals to determine whether or not a student has a learning disability. An IEP is a legal document identifying the student's learning needs, educational support that will be provided by the institution and measurement tools for academic progress. Two of the study participants are part of the SSD program.

Central Louisiana Technical Community College also offers vocational programming at RLCC. Vocational courses offer students classroom instruction and hands-on learning. This program offers students an opportunity to earn a certificate or diploma that is valid throughout the state of Louisiana. Eligibility criteria for the vocational program are set by a memorandum of understanding between the Education Division of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections and the Louisiana Technical College system. Vocational certifications offered to students at RLCC include auto collision repair, automotive technology, masonry, welding, and building technology specialist. One of the students in this study has earned a vocational certificate.

Service learning. Community engagement helps student to combine learning goals and community service in a way that benefits student growth and the community. RLCC has various service learning projects throughout the year. Much like student organizations on a traditional campus, the prison has clubs which function like student organizations. Each club represents a particular area of community outreach and is made up of incarcerated volunteers. Clubs are guided by correctional staff advisors who oversee activities. Even people who are not enrolled in academic programs are allowed to participate in service learning activities. As long as club participants have demonstrated good behavior and hold a current work assignment at the prison, they are allowed to participate in service clubs. In order to participate in service learning activities, incarcerated persons must be active members of a service club at the prison. Over 200 people are active members of clubs at the prison. Clubs span a variety of interests such as youth development, the arts, health and wellness, and religion. Two of the study participants were active members in clubs at the prison. One student was

involved in a club geared towards youth development. Another student was actively involved in a Christian outreach ministry.

For the Thanksgiving holiday, various service clubs at the prison raised money to feed disadvantaged families. The clubs had an initial goal of feeding 15 families. Surprisingly, they raised enough money to feed an additional six families for Christmas. All of the meals were fully sponsored by incarcerated individuals.

The researcher was able to observe the phenomenal Toys for Tots event at the prison. Each year, clubs at RLCC sponsor a program where toys are given to underprivileged children for Christmas. The event is 100% funded by incarcerated individuals. The money used for the event was raised from work assignment earnings, fundraising initiatives, and family/friend contributions. The incarcerated volunteers at RLCC raised funds to purchase a helmet, scooter, and coat for each child attending the event. In addition, each child received a bonus prize from Santa (the incarcerated individuals sponsoring the event) who was present at the event. There were approximately 100 elementary aged children attending the event. Incarcerated volunteers hosted the program which included a visit from Santa, a live band (made up of corrections staff and people incarcerated at the prison), lunch, candy, toy giveaways, and a host of games including musical chairs, hockey, and party piñatas.

Observing the service learning project was a profound experience for the researcher. The perspective of people who are incarcerated volunteering to serve the community was insightful. Many people would consider people who are incarcerated as underprivileged. To witness the outcome of incarcerated individuals raising funds from their own personal accounts to help underprivileged children was extraordinary. The

hard work and efforts given by each person at the event did not go unnoticed. The Toys

for Tots events was a prime example of the importance of service learning.

Events such as Toys for Tots help to reduce stereotypes, increase understanding,

and improve social responsibility. Dewey (1916) suggested that a primary responsibility

of higher education should be to reaffirm and fortify student commitment to civic

engagement. Service learning engages students by involving them in their own learning;

it places learning in the lived experiences of students (McKewen, 1996). The

transformational learning experience helps make meaning through service and reflection.

In addition, service learning is potentially a form of transformative learning (Bamber &

Hankin, 2011). Transformative learning involves learning experiences that change the

way students view and interpret the world (Mezirow, 1997).   Mezirow's (1997)

transformative learning model presents a practical theoretical framework for service

learning activities because it emphasizes how individuals make meaning of their

experiences, more specifically how learning can result from the way individuals make

sense of life events. Activities such as Toys for Tots have the potential to foster

transformative learning through direct experience that is meaningful to individuals.

Service interactions can prompt individual reflection and impact the way people make

meaning of the experience.

Faith-based learning. Religious education has played a major role in prisons

since the early stages of correctional education (Gehring, 1995; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995;

Schmalleger, 2007). Faith-based programs continue to make an impact on the corrections

population. One of the students in this study is involved in a church outreach program

which conducts activities related to both service learning and faith-based learning.

RLCC has a chapel at the facility which offers various faith-based studies to include Buddhism, Catholicism, Institute of Divine Metaphysical Research, Islamic, Jehovah's Witness, Judaism, Native American, Seventh Day Adventist and Protestant religions. Over 100 volunteers minister at the prison on a regular basis. Chapel services are held every night of the week by the Chaplain, the ministerial staff, and volunteers. Approximately 100 people attend Sunday service at the Chapel. Various studies are offered at the Chapel including studies for beginners and studies geared toward the more advanced student. Studies at the Chapel emphasize teaching and daily application of religious values. In addition, the Chaplain's Office also offers marriage counseling and bereavement counseling for people who are incarcerated.

Career and distance learning. RLCC requires that all incarcerated persons, who are physically able, to participate in work and/or school assignments full-time. On certain days, a small number of incarcerated individuals may be on no-duty status because of a medical condition. However, on average, 99.7% of the incarcerated population at RLCC is on a full-time work and/or school assignment. Some individuals are classified as "inside" status which means they are restricted from field work. Those individuals are required to participate in distance learning by watching televised programming through the Corrections Learning Network (CLN). The CLN is a satellite broadcast that provides interactive instructional programming for correctional facilities. The network is supported by a United States Department of Education grant. Individuals at RLCC are typically placed in field work assignments during the first 90 days of arriving at the institution. After the 90-day period, individuals become eligible for reassignment to another job if their work and conduct is deemed satisfactory. Other work

assignments include but are not limited to: facility/grounds maintenance, kitchen duty, horse caregivers, warehouse and housing unit orderlies, etc.

Participant Background

The study addresses as much as possible the experiences of the incarcerated students in this study and how their experiences have shaped their outlook on education. In order to protect the privacy of the study participants, pseudonyms are used in the findings. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the students who participated in the study. Immediately following the descriptive statistics table is a discussion of the characteristics of the sample and each participant.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Student Demographic Variables

Student	Race	Age Range	Louisiana Resident	Highest Grade	Employed Prior to Incarceration	Previously Incarcerated	Correctional Education Program
Ace	Black	18-25	Yes	8th	No	Yes	GED
Bob	White	26-49	Yes	10th	No	No	HiSET (graduate)
Don	Black	18-25	Yes	11th	No	No	SSD
Jim	Black	26-49	Yes	9th	No	Yes	HiSET
Ken	Black	18-25	Yes	9th	No	Yes	SSD
Lou	Black	50-65	Yes	8th	No	Yes	GED
Pat	Black	26-49	Yes	11th	No	Yes	GED

The target population included 200 incarcerated students at RLCC. The initial sample size selected for the study was 10 students. Interviews were conducted with seven incarcerated students. Originally, there were 10 volunteers for the study; three participants withdrew from participation. All students in the study were male as the institution is an all-male facility. Six of the student participants identified as

Black/African-American and one student identified as White/Caucasian. Of the study

participants, three were between the ages of 18-25, three were between the ages of 26-49,

and one person fell between 50-65 years old. Six of the seven students in the study were

enrolled in the education program in the 2017-2018 academic year. One of the

participants is a HiSET graduate and also serves as a tutor in the program. All

participants were parole eligible. Every participant in the study was a resident of

Louisiana prior to incarceration. Six of the participants were living in South Louisiana

prior to incarceration. None of the participants completed high school prior to

incarceration. Three participants were studying for the GED. One participant was

studying for the HiSET. Two of the study participants were in the SSD program. All of

the study participants reported being unemployed just prior to incarceration. Of the study

participants, five had been previously incarcerated prior to serving the current sentence.

All seven study participants answered demographic profile questions and interview

questions completely. The researcher spoke to participants prior to the interview to

explain the purpose of the study and to answer any questions about the study. All student

interview sessions were held in a classroom in the education building. Individual

interviews took place at a desk with the interviewer on one side of the desk and the study

participant on the other. For security purposes, a correctional officer was outside the

door of the classroom during interviews. The same officer was present for all interviews.

The officer was a corrections staff member with no direct affiliation to the correctional

education program.

Ace is a student in the GED program. He identified his race as Black and was

between 18-25 years old. Ace was not employed at the time of incarceration. He noted

that he lost his job in the fast food industry prior to being arrested. Ace had also previously been incarcerated on a sentence less than six months. Ace had an 8th grade education prior to incarceration. He recalled signing up for the GED program during his intake process at the prison. When asked why he decided to take classes, Ace noted: "I am trying to better myself. You can't be a failure all your life." After he obtains his GED, Ace wants to attend college and study business. Ace also noted that he is interested in a nursing career. He would like to one day own a retail clothing business.

Bob successfully completed the HiSET while incarcerated. He now works as a tutor and peer mentor in the education program. Bob is 40 years old and identifies his race as White. Prior to incarceration, his highest level of education was 10th grade. He was not employed at the time of arrest. This is the first time he has been incarcerated. Bob plans to attend college upon release and he wants to major in business management. He hopes to work in the entertainment industry.

Don is a student in the SSD program. As a member of a service club at the prison, he also serves as a facilitator for an incarcerated youth intervention program. Don is Black and between the ages of 18-25. His highest level of education prior to incarceration was 11th grade. Don has not been incarcerated prior to the current sentence. He was unemployed at the time of incarceration. Prior to incarceration, he made money by selling drugs. Don was studying for the HiSET. Based on his previous test scores, he was deficient in science, language, and mathematics. Upon successful completion of the HiSET, Don would like to attend college and study business management. After release, he would like to work as a tour promoter.

Jim is enrolled in the HiSET program. He identifies his race as Black and is between 26-49 years of age. Jim has a 9th grade education. This is his second time being incarcerated. He was not employed prior to incarceration. Jim works as a painter at RLCC. While serving his current sentence, he has earned his Brick Masonry certificate. After completing the HiSET, he plans to attend college for architecture. Prior to incarceration, he had work experience in framing houses. He also hopes to get his real estate and auto dealer licenses. Jim anticipates he will be released in one year.

Ken is a SSD student. He is between the ages of 18-25 and identifies as Black. The highest level of education Ken has is 9th grade. He was not working at the time of incarceration and has previously been incarcerated. One of Ken's immediate goals is to successfully complete the HiSET. He would also like to take welding classes and attend college for business. Ken hopes to one day own his on retail clothing business.

Lou is a student in the GED program. He is 53 years old and identifies his race as Black. This is Lou's seventh time being incarcerated. He has been incarcerated previously for selling drugs and this time for possession of an illegal firearm. Lou has an 8th grade education. At the time of incarceration, he was not employed. Lou has experience in roofing and building houses. As a member of a service club at the prison, he has taught new convert bible study at the prison. After release, he would like to open a residential support center for homeless people on drugs.

Pat is enrolled in the GED program. He is 47 years old and identifies his race as Black. His highest level of education is the eleventh grade. He has previously been incarcerated. Pat was not employed at the time of arrest. He works as an orderly at the prison. Pat hopes to find a job upon release.

Overview of Participants

The participants in this study reflect some of the trends found in the research literature. Louisiana is known for its extremely high incarceration rates with one in 86 adults incarcerated (Chang, 2012a; LDPSC, 2014). Each of the participants in this study resided in the state of Louisiana prior to incarceration. There is a disproportion of people of color in prison, specifically Black males (NCES, 2014). Since Black people account for 67.5% of the total corrections population in Louisiana, it was not surprising that six of the seven participants were Black (Edwards & LeBlanc, 2017). Studies indicate that the incarcerated population has low high school completion rates prior to incarceration (Greenberg et al., 2007; Harlow, 2003; NCES, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2013). The students in this study demonstrate a similar trend; none of the student participants completed high school prior to incarceration. Of the study participants, the highest level of education completed prior to incarceration was the 11th grade; the lowest grade of completion was 8th grade. Only one of the study participants completed high school during incarceration. All other participants were currently enrolled in programs geared towards achieving a high school credential. According to a study conducted by the Bureau of Justice, 38% of the incarcerated population without a high school diploma was also unemployed just before arrest (Harlow, 2003). The students in this study all reported being unemployed at the time of incarceration. Almost half of the adults incarcerated in the State of Louisiana are expected to return to prison within five years of release (LDPSC, 2014). Five of the students in the study were previously incarcerated in Louisiana prior to serving the current sentence. Overall, study participants were

primarily Black with low levels of educational attainment, unemployed prior to incarceration, and previously incarcerated in the State of Louisiana.

Staff information. Two staff members were interviewed for the study. One was an instructor and the other was an administrator. Interviews were conducted in the educational administrator's office suite. Aside from the formal interviews, the researcher also spoke with other staff at the prison. During the study, the researcher had the opportunity to have some informal conversations with several other staff members who are involved in the education program during the visit including the Deputy Warden, the Assistant Warden, correctional officers, other instructors, and support staff for the education program. Having 360 degree discussions about the educational program provided the researcher with a more complete picture of the program as a whole. Table 2 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics of the staff who were interviewed during the study. Immediately after the descriptive statistics table is a brief narrative on the profiles of each staff participant.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Staff Demographic Variables

Staff	Race	Age Range	Length of Correctional Education Experience	Role	Other Positions Held in Education or Corrections
Anna	White	26-49	1 year	Administrator	Elem. and High School Teacher
Dave	Black	26-49	7.5 years	Instructor	Jr. High and High School Teacher

Anna is the correctional education administrator and has been with the program for one year. Anna is a White female who is between the ages of 26-49. She has

previously taught as an elementary and high school teacher. She taught high school for nine years. Anna is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day activities in the program. In the year that Anna has been with the institution, the HiSET test scores have improved significantly. RLCC went from being ranked number 33 in the state to being ranked number one. Anna attributes the success of the program to the support by the team around her which includes administration, instructors, support staff, and the students themselves. As a newcomer to the correctional education experience, Anna admitted she had some apprehension in the beginning. After getting to know the students, her perspective of incarcerated persons changed. She explained: "Everything here has exceeded my expectations and changed my whole outlook on incarceration…changed my whole outlook on criminals, changed my whole outlook on people that are in jail."

Dave is a HiSET instructor who has been with the correctional education program for a total of seven and a half years. Dave taught at the facility for a few years and then relocated to another state. When he relocated back to Louisiana, he returned to teaching at RLCC. Dave is a Black male between 26-49 years old. Dave has experience as a junior high and high school teacher. Dave primarily teaches mathematics in the program. He emphasized that teaching extends beyond the classroom. Dave feels that both education and moral standards are needed to be successful in society. He teaches students life skills that will prepare them for reentry after they are released from prison. Dave noted that teaching in the prison has been a very rewarding experience for him. He gives insight on how his role is rewarding:

> For example, they (students) may say thank you for believing in me. There was a time where I wanted to give up but you continued to believe in me. Sometimes

the guys (formerly incarcerated people) will write a letter telling us that they

found employment. That's even greater. It shows that their life really changed.

Observing students recognize their own success is rewarding for Dave. In regard to one

of the rewards in his role, Dave stated: "One of the rewards is not only seeing an

individual obtain a HiSET diploma, but the moment when the individual has that I got it

moment."

Introduction of Themes

A comparative method of analysis was used to identify common experiences and

meanings shared between participants were revealed. A total of nine themes resulted

from data analysis. Themes found in the study are addressed immediately following this

section and are divided into three major categories: student themes, staff themes, and

program themes. Student themes focus on student experiences including previous

educational experiences, motivation to attend classes, and student thoughts and feelings.

Staff themes provide a fuller picture of the correctional education climate beyond the

classroom and are based on discussions with staff. Program themes are related to those

facets of the overall education program which are considered important to students.

The three student themes discussed in this chapter describe the past and current

educational experiences for students. In addition, student themes also address future

educational and career goals. In one of the themes, "Barriers to education", the

incarcerated students shared their school experiences prior to incarceration. Many of

them expressed reasons why they did not complete high school including both internal

and external influences. In discussing the second theme, "Motivation", students

expressed why they decided to enroll in courses while in prison. Students were self-

motivated to attend classes. In addition, students shared how family, friends, and correctional education staff influenced their decision to attend classes. In the third student theme, "Self-reflection", students discuss intrinsic rewards, life lessons, and plans for the future. Students make personal reflections on their learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Staff themes provide insight on instructor and administrator observations, student development beyond the classroom, and administrative perspectives of correctional education. The staff theme, "People first", demonstrates how staff recognize the importance of viewing the incarcerated population as human beings with basic needs for development. Staff express compassion for those who have made mistakes in life and want to help students to get back on track. In the next theme, "Moral character", staff emphasize the importance of not only educating students in the classroom, but also teaching good morals. Staff expressed a genuine interest in ensuring students are both academically and socially ready for the return to society. The final staff theme, "Supportive administration", reveals one of the key components of a successful correctional education experience. Staff discussed how top-down decision making and support have a huge impact on the overall program success.

Program themes address the successful characteristics of the program according to student perceptions. Students discussed what they liked most about being in the education program. The "Peer relationships" theme provides insight on how students interact with each other. More specifically, students addressed how friendships have impacted their experience in the program. In the next program theme, "Student-teacher interactions", students share their experiences with instructors in the education program.

Lastly, the theme of "Service learning" discusses student participation in community service activities.

Student Themes

This section will address important themes that derived primarily from student interviews. Student themes are related to individual experiences of the students based on their personal perceptions of educational experiences. In their own words, students gave specific accounts of their educational involvement and how participating in correctional education has shaped their outlook. Through one-on-one interviews, students shared their thoughts and opinions regarding past and present educational experiences. After sifting through the data, open coding was used to code the data and identify any patterns or themes. As a result, a total of three student themes were found in the data. After an analysis of transcripts, questionnaires, and researcher notes, the following themes emerged from the data: barriers to education, motivation, and self-reflection. The first theme, "Barriers to education", focuses on issues that hindered students from completing school. Students described various obstacles which lead to school dropout. They described internal and external influences which prevented educational attainment. The second theme, "Motivation", refers to factors that influenced students to join the correctional education program. In addition, students also shared motivational factors that encouraged them to persist in the education program. Factors such as internal motivation and family served as encouragement to attend correctional education courses. The third theme, "Self-reflection", is based on students' thoughts and feelings about their educational experiences. Students critically reflected on their learning experiences from the past, their current experience, and future expectations. Each of the student themes

addresses how students make meaning of their correctional education experience. Table 3 summarizes the student thematic findings in the study. The table illustrates how the data was categorized in the study. The table includes each of the three themes, theme meanings, sub-themes, and evidence from the data to support each theme. Immediately following Table 3 is a discussion of student thematic findings from the study which includes students' thoughts and experiences in their own words.

Table 3

Student Thematic Findings

Theme	Meaning	Sub-themes	Evidence from the data
1. Barriers to Education	Factors that prevent educational attainment	Internal influences	Pride, shame
		External influences	Drugs, friends, teachers, responsibility
2. Motivation	Reasons for enrolling in correctional education; encouragement	Self-motivation	Attitudes, confidence
		Family	Mothers, grandchildren
		Peers	Tutors, mentors
		Staff impact	Instructors, Administration
3. Self-reflection	Thought given to individual feelings and behavior	Maturity	Acknowledging mistakes
		Self-esteem	Proud of accomplishments
		Goals	Graduation, college

Theme 1: Barriers to education. The theme "Barriers to education" refers to those challenges that prevented students from educational attainment. The research literature indicates that people who are incarcerated, on average, tend to have lower

levels of educational attainment (DOE, 2009; Edwards & Le Blanc, 2017; Harlow, 2003; LDPSC, n.d.; NCES, 2014). Many people enter prison without the basic education needed to be successful in today's society. None of the incarcerated students in this study completed high school prior to incarceration. Conversations with participants indicated that they all recognize the educational disparity and therefore, are working towards their educational goals while incarcerated. For example, Jim discussed how he should have completed school a long time ago and how he can earn higher wages with his diploma than he can without it. Correctional education programs such as those at RLCC are helping incarcerated students achieve their academic goals. As adult learners, the students in this study reflected on their previous educational experiences as adolescents. They discussed their past mistakes and stumbling blocks toward educational achievement.

Internal influences. Dispositional barriers are those obstacles that are related to the attitudes and self-perceptions of the individual student (Cross, 1981). Five student participants in this study discussed dispositional barriers to their educational success. Self-efficacy is a component of social learning theory (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy refers to one's personal belief in his or her ability to overcome obstacles or achieve intended results. This means that incarcerated student perceptions of education can be influenced by their own mental, personal, emotional, or physical state. The most common internal influences found in this study were pride and lack of effort. Some of the participants noted that their own thinking, in many ways, held them back.

Some of the assignments in the education program at RLCC are self-directed. Jim stated: "Sometimes they don't teach you things. You have to learn for yourself." Jim

remembers struggling with asking for help in the beginning. He would let his pride get in the way of his learning experience: "Now that I am taking math, I have to really study for it. I have to ask them to help me with it. If I don't apply myself, I'm not going to get it." Knowles (1975) postulated that since adult learners tend to be self-directed, instructors should allow adult students to discover knowledge on their own without being dependent on other people. When Jim was in school previously, he had a lot of personalized help. Jim stated that once he realized that the correctional education instructors were not using the "hand-holding" approach to learning, he had to take more initiative. Rather than expecting his teachers to explain every single detail, he started studying and attempting to solve problems on his own without direct assistance from anyone else. Jim learned that he was capable of learning some things on his own.

Adult learners bring certain doubts and fears to the learning process (Knowles, 1980). Students' self-doubt and anxiety can interfere with the learning process and academic performance. Lou and Pat both experienced some apprehension about taking classes as adults. They each mentioned feeling uneasy about returning to school because of their age. Lou recalled his first thoughts when starting the program: "I'm not going to be able to keep up. They gone be writing fast and I'm gone be writing slow." Pat also explained that at first he was nervous because he had been out of school for so long, he was unsure whether or not he would be able to grasp the material if he returned to school:

> I was thinking about all the years I stopped going to school and I don't know where I'm going to start at…It's been so long since I've been out of school. I didn't know if I would remember it.

Both Lou and Pat said that their teachers and other students in their classroom helped

them to feel more comfortable in class by sharing encouraging words or providing

additional help with certain subjects. For example, Lou recalls struggling with

multiplication. His instructor encouraged him to keep practicing and gave him a

multiplication table handout to study with in his cell. In addition, Lou and Pat both

realized that they actually remembered more of the class material than expected. This

helped to boost their self-esteem. According to Tinto (1975), this sort of academic and

social integration has the ability to influence student persistence.

While Don was motivated to complete school, he was not motivated to learn.

Don recalls being so eager to get a certificate or some other accolade that he was not

actually retaining the course material. He wanted the reward, but without doing the

work. Don noted: "Now that I take classes, I try to get something out of it." An

important part of transformational learning is when students change their frames of

reference by reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and developing new ways of

thinking (Mezirow, 1997). Don assumed that if he participated in class, he would have

the knowledge base needed to pass the HiSET examination. After taking several practice

exams, Don realized he was not prepared. He failed in several subject areas of the exam.

Although Don participated in class activities and discussions, he was not retaining the

material being covered. When he saw certain questions on the exam, he would vaguely

remember going over certain subjects but he was unable to process the details needed to

answer questions on his own. Now, he understands that participation during class is not

enough. He recognizes that he needs to study the material so that when he sees it on the

exam he can comprehend and answer questions correctly. Self-determination theory

posits that Don's motivation shifted on a continuum from extrinsic motivation (rewards) to less controlled intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Similarly, Ace had a transformational learning experience in which his frame of reference was transformed and he also shifted from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Mezirow, 1997). Ace pointed out that when he was previously in school, he simply did not put forth effort. He did not feel school was a priority. He did not study for quizzes or exams. He admits: "Sometimes when I was in school, I wouldn't even study at all…Now, I do it (study) over and over until when I see it on the test I know straight what to do." Ace stated that his grades were "okay before" when he was not studying. However, he now realizes the importance of studying made a significant improvement in his grades: "Before I was making like C's, but since I've been studying now I'm making A's and B's."

Similarly, Bob did not view school as a priority. He did not realize the importance of an education until later in life. When he was younger, his focus was on other things. So, he put little to no effort into his school work. Bob says when he should have been focusing on school, he was: "…worrying about being a bad boy or chasing girls." Bob explained that after he was incarcerated, he had a shift in perspective. He mentioned that he was always a "knuckle head" getting in trouble at school, but it was not until he was sent to prison that he realized he needed to get serious about his life direction. So, his decision to attend classes was based on his desire to "improve his situation". In this example, the disorienting dilemma of incarceration prompted critical reflection. Bob began to reflect on his old ways of thinking which resulted in a transformative learning shift (Mezirow, 1997).

External influences. Situational barriers are those obstacles that arise from an individual's situation or environment at any given time. Social learning theory suggests that environmental factors can influence individual behavior by creating situational barriers (Bandura, 1995; Cross, 1981). For incarcerated students, environmental factors can influence educational decisions. Four of the students in this study described how the external environment was a hindrance to their educational attainment. It is important to note that certain outside factors can make it difficult for students to go to class or concentrate on academic studies. It should also be noted that all the students in this study resided and attended school in Louisiana prior to incarceration. The state of Louisiana is very unique; the state has a certain ruggedness blended with a ton of culture. Louisiana as a whole has historically had high crime rates, extreme poverty (including child poverty), racial disparity, and low education rates in comparison to its United States counterparts. Participants noted various outside influences that made learning difficult.

According to social learning theory, people learn from other people in their environment (Bandura, 1995). As it relates to crime, the theory suggests that individuals engage in criminal activity based on their association with other people who also engage in criminal activity. For example, Don was incarcerated for selling drugs. Don said that his friends from the past were into the "drug life" and influenced him to sell drugs. He was making easy money from selling drugs so school became less of a priority. Don also noted that he had almost no support from his teachers. Institutional barriers are those practices and procedures that ostracize or discourage students from engaging in learning activities. Don was challenged with institutional barriers at his high school. He said that his teachers were very negative and talked down to him. Don recalled struggling

academically and not receiving support from his teachers. Instead of support, Don stated his teachers would speak negatively to him. He recalled interactions with his teachers: "They (teachers) wasn't doing nothing…telling me I ain't gone be nothing." Bean and Metzner (1985) address the influence of previous academic performance and environmental factors on student integration and persistence. The researchers suggest that Don's past experiences in school can impact his decision to attend correctional education classes.

Social learning theory is applicable to Ken's experience with his friends as well. Ken's friends were a distraction from his education. This group of friends created a bad influence on Ken. He talked about how his friends would prevent him from giving his full attention to his studies. Ken fell in with the wrong crowd and shortly after started getting in trouble. He would get in trouble with teachers in class. While in prison, Ken began to reflect on his previous educational experiences. He came to realize that while his friends were distracting him from his goals, they were still accomplishing their own goals. In this case, transformative learning is demonstrated. Through critical reflection, Ken challenged his beliefs about this friends (Mezirow, 1997).

Unlike Don and Ken, Jim had people in his environment who were very supportive of his education. Having support from friends is great but in some cases too much support can make learning difficult for students. Jim remembers being very popular in school. Jim was on the A/B honor roll in school. He had a lot of friends who actually supported his education. However, Jim noted that this support from friends was in many ways a hindrance to his learning: "When I was younger, I was a popular kid in school so I guess that kind of hurt me because I really didn't have to do no work. People

just helped me and stuff." Although Jim made good grades in school, he did not learn much because most of his academic work was completed with the help of others. Jim's way of learning was in response to the environmental stimuli and the behavior that was being modeled (Bandura, 1995; Bean & Metzner, 1985). Allowing other people to do his school work was a learned behavior based on Jim's environment.

Growing up, Lou was what is now commonly referred to as a latch-key kid. He and his little brother, who is two years younger than Lou, were at home without adult supervision quite a bit. Lou's mother was a single parent and worked long hours to provide for their household. While his mother was at work, Lou would have to take on responsibilities at home. He would go to the store for groceries, complete house chores, and take care of his little brother. Lou recalled going to junior high school and being so tired from housework that he would fall asleep in class. He also mentioned that he had vision problems but his mother could not afford to buy eyeglasses. After several class periods of Lou either falling asleep, losing focus, and struggling to read the chalkboard in class, his teacher accused him of being on drugs and alcohol. Soon after, Lou was kicked out of school. When Lou was kicked out of school, he started socializing with drug dealers and later began selling marijuana as a means of income. Social learning theory highlights the role of observational behavior in child development (Bandura, 1995). According to Bandura (1995), children slowly become more discerning of behavior they choose to imitate. Children begin to develop behavioral standards and a feeling of self-efficacy. These perceptions guide responses to environmental stimuli. Lou described how his friends who were selling drugs were making fast money and that was enticing to him. He also stated that those same friends discouraged him from going back to school.

His friends said school was "a waste of time" and a "gimmick". Differential association theory suggests that occurrences in the person-situation interaction at the time of criminal activity are unable to be separated from previous life experience (Sutherland, 1993). Sutherland (1993) explains that crime occurs when the situation is suitable for it, as defined by the individual present. Lou's prior life experience of living in poverty, being kicked out of school, and having adult responsibilities as a child all played a role in influencing his choice to sell drugs. According to differential association theory, the experiences in Lou's life cannot be separated from his criminal activity (Sutherland, 1993).

Theme 2: Motivation. The theme "Motivation" refers to the factors that inspire students to participate in the education program. When asked what motivated them to enroll in classes while incarcerated, students noted several motivating factors. Some factors were related to students' self-motivation to learn and other factors were related to outside support. It should be noted that participation in correctional education programs is voluntary at RLCC. Attending classes was not a requirement of sentencing for any of the students in this study. Therefore, motivation stemmed from non-mandatory factors. While evaluating motivators for enrollment, three sub- themes arose from the data. These themes include support from the following: self-motivation, family, peers, and correctional education staff.

Self-motivation. Knowles (1980) states that as people mature their self-concept transitions from being dependent toward being self-directed. Knowles (1975) describes self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals,

identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). In addition, Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000) suggest that autonomous motivation is more likely to produce positive results as opposed to extrinsic motivation. For the students in this study, self-motivation to attend school was a sub-theme.

All the student participants indicated that they were motivated to participate in education because of a need to improve their current situation. Ace spoke on why he chose to enroll in classes: "I'm trying to better myself. You can't be a [sic] offender all your life." This speaks to Ace's intrinsic motivation to attend school as a means of bettering his life (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci & Ryan (2000) note that intrinsic motivation results in greater performance because the motivation is not controlled by external factors. Knowles (1980) points out that adult learners are interested in learning subject material that has immediate relevance to their careers or personal life. Similarly, Jim described his thoughts on why he enrolled in classes: "While I'm in here incarcerated, I'm just saying to myself I'm going to go ahead and get it (diploma)…I want to have this accomplishment. It (school) keeps me out of trouble." The sentiments of Ace and Jim echoed the sentiments of all other students in this study. In this statement, Bob notes that in order for a person to truly get the most out of the education program, they have to be self-motivated: "You have to want this for yourself. Ain't nobody gone do it for you." Since attending class was not part of a mandatory sentencing for the students in this study, self-motivation played an important role. Self-determination theory suggests that Bob is more likely to be successful because he is autonomously motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although the students were not required

to attend classes as a part of sentencing, they were motivated to attend because it has immediate relevance to their personal lives (Knowles, 1980).

Family. Family ties have a profound impact on decision making for students in this study. This includes educational choices. To better understand the persistence of adult learners, it is imperative to understand interactions in their environment such as family support (Astin, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kasworm, 2002). Research indicates that in general, family support helps to improve student achievement (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Garcia & Thornton, 2014; Tinto, 1975). Students with families who support their education are more likely to make better grades, possess better social skills, and improve behavior (Garcia & Thornton, 2014). As an administrator in the education program, Anna noted: "They have families. They have wives. They have parents who are expecting them to come home before they (parents) die." Four of the students from this study indicated family as a motivating factor for enrolling in classes. For three of those students, the matriarchs in the family were the biggest influences.

Ace described why he is taking classes and will not fall into the trap of reincarceration: "My momma getting too old. I'll break her heart if I did that again." Likewise, Bob talked about his delinquent past and disappointing his mother: "I've been a mess-up all my life. My mom, she's getting older and I messed up really big this time, so I want to give her something to be proud of." Lou's mother passed away while he was incarcerated. He reflected on a conversation he had with his mother before she passed:

> I buried my mother two years ago…Before my mother died, she said baby, you
> know what you need to do while you in that place (prison)? I said what momma?
> You need to try to get your GED, go back to school. At that time, I said momma,

I'm not going back to school. After my mother passed, a bell went off in my

head. Man, this is the perfect time for you to go back to school.

According to the Institute for Family Studies, the educational level of a mother has

significant impact on her child's academic achievement (Sutherland, 2015). Individual

factors such as grades, educational attainment, and cognitive ability are closely related to

parental education levels (Sutherland, 2015; Tinto, 1975). Lou's mother did not get her

GED until her mid-thirties. Lou also shared that his grandmother never knew how to

count. He explained how she used coding to indicate how many dollars she had: "All she

could do was make X's."

Participants also noted other family members who encouraged them to go back to

school. When asked about his future educational goals, Ace responded: "I would

consider going to college because I have never had the experience. I have family

members who tell me that it's a nice experience." Pat stated that his cousin and uncle

encouraged him to enroll in classes when they visited him at the prison. Pat also

mentioned that he wanted his grandchildren to be proud of him: "I want to show them

what I accomplished while I was in jail." Like Pat, Lou also has grandchildren. Lou

discussed his initial embarrassment to tell his grandchildren that he did not have a high

school diploma: "My grandkids come to me and say Paw-Paw, help me with my

homework and I'm brushing them off…because I'm ashamed. You know, that pride. I

don't want to let them know Paw-Paw can't read." In addition to being functionally

illiterate, Lou also admitted he was also technologically illiterate as a result of being

incarcerated for several years. Lou chuckled as he narrated a lighthearted story about his

grandchildren:

One time my grandson asked me, Paw-Paw, you'll buy me a tablet? Let me show

you how messed up I was with this education (technology). I said yeah, I'll buy

you and your sister a tablet…We get in the truck and go to the grocery store and I

tell the man (grocery store clerk) give me two tablets. They (grandchildren) were

like what is that? The tablet they wanted, I have to take them to Radio Shack to

get but I didn't know that. The man (grocery store clerk) had to explain it to me.

After realizing he could not avoid the truth forever, Lou finally got the courage to be

honest with his grandchildren about his struggle with literacy. He told his grandchildren

that he was taking classes in prison to finish the education he started several years ago.

One of his grandchildren responded: "That's good Paw-Paw. You gone graduate when I

graduate." He explained why he decided to be honest with his grandchildren: "I don't

want them (grandchildren) to go through what I went through in my life." Lou was also

encouraged by his brother who is two years younger. His brother did not get his GED

until his early forties. Lou is motivated by his fiancé during visitation. She told him that

if he does not complete the GED program prior to his release, she has a friend who

teaches GED courses at a high school where he can finish. Lou comments on how

incarceration can diminish family relationships and the free world being much more

disarrayed than prison: "I want you to know, we alright in here (prison). It's our people

and our children, they ain't alright out there. That world out there is messed up."

It is important to note that the theme of family motivation is specific to the

participants mentioned in this study. While most of the students in this study indicate

family members as motivators for attending school, not everyone has family support. As

an administrator, Anna is in contact with all the students on a regular basis. She stated:

"Some of these people here (prison), their whole family has died while they're here and they have nothing to go home to but they still want to go home because they just want to make better for themselves."

Peers. Marques and Luna (2005) stated "adult learners seek a peer relationship of encouragement and care, good advice and –most of all– decent and devoted representation in handling their academic issues…" (p.6). Peer support was a sub-theme found in the data in this study. More specifically, peer mentorship is an important component in the correctional education program at RLCC. Four of the students in this study describe their experiences with peer support. According to Maslow (1943), humans have a social need to belong to a particular group or develop interpersonal relationships. Moreover, Deci & Ryan (2000) note that humans have a need for a sense of belonging. A considerable amount of evidence has suggested that peer interactions impact learning outcomes (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Pace, and Vesper, 1997; Palinscar, Stevens, & Gavelek, 1989; Tinto, 1995). Researchers noted that peer-led instruction can improve student motivation and increase self-esteem (Devilly, et al., 2005). Anna articulated how supplemental instruction in groups is an essential part of the program:

> If I see we have a large group of math deficient students and it's holding them up, I'll do a Math Blitz. I put them in a classroom with the math tutor for a month or however long it takes, just doing math in a group.

Another staff member at the center added: "Their bonding over learning." Most of the tutors in the program are incarcerated student tutors. Learners have a social need to develop friendships (Maslow, 1943; Tinto, 1975). Collaborative learning experiences can positively influence students' ability to work effectively in groups. One study found

that academic achievement through small group activity was greater than students who worked individually (Springer, Stanne, and Donovan, 1999).

Bob is a HiSET graduate from the correctional education program at RLCC. He also serves a tutor and peer mentor in the education program. Bob encourages other incarcerated individuals to join the education program:

> Every single day of the week, I encourage them to come to school. These days the way things is, I mean when I was coming up I ain't going to say it was okay but in my mind it was basically okay to run the streets and you could go and get you a job in the oil field at that time or shrimp factory, Louisiana work. But today in this era it's getting to the point where if you don't have an education you are s*** (expletive) out of luck. I encourage anybody to get this education.

Ken credits peer support for keeping him on track in school. He addresses the peer support from incarcerated tutors in the program:

> My tutors, they incarcerated just like me. So if I do get distracted, they gone really tell me man, you messing up right now. When they tell you that you messing up, they know how to make it to where you can really understand.

Likewise, Pat explains the rapport students have with each other: "The guys in the class, we all get along good. We keep each other laughing and help out." Lou shared his experiences with peer support, both as a recipient and a supporter. He described how his cellmate encouraged him to sign up for classes: "My cellie (cellmate), he the one that motivate me. He told me go (to class) tomorrow. If you fall down, get up and look up and dust yourself off. Don't let that pride be the cause of you losing everything." Lou discussed how the encouragement from a classmate on the first day of class made him

feel "real good". Lou was struggling when the instructor called on him to answer a question. Since he was older than all the other students, he felt ashamed. He described a classmate's encouraging words: "Man, that's alright. Man, you doing good for your age, brother. A lot of dudes don't come to school, brother." Lou now encourages others to enroll in school. He explains one of the reasons he volunteered for this study: "My story can help somebody else. I need to tell somebody about this to help them come out that darkness into the light because we all need an education." Lou serves as a part of the church outreach program. In his role, he has recruited 25 people to the correctional education program just by sparking up a conversation on the yard. Lou never thought he would be someone to recruit other people to school. He was visibly emotional when discussing the recruitment process, surprised that he was able to positively influence people to get their education. Lou continues to motivate other incarcerated individuals to join the education program regardless of their age or background: "It's never too late. If God give [sic] you the breath and strength and wake you up every morning, you can go get it (education)."

    Staff impact. Staff impact refers to the influence correctional education faculty, staff, and administrators have on student involvement and success in the education program. Correctional education staff play a huge role in the rehabilitation process. Astin (1993) noted that one of the most influential types of student involvement is student-faculty relationships. Interactions with faculty affect academic success (Tinto, 1995). Respect, appreciation, and admiration for faculty and administration in the correctional education program at RLCC was evident amongst student participants. This is a direct result of staff interactions with students in the program.

Self-determination theory states that humans have the need to be competent (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People want to feel that they are capable of mastering certain tasks. In this example, Dave demonstrates how he and his colleagues addresses students' need for competence. Dave likes to encourage his students and help them feel comfortable:

Sometimes when we're (instructors) walking around and they're working (on a math problem) and we see that an individual has gotten the correct response, we'll specifically make sure to ask that individual to give that answer to that particular problem…That kind of breaks the ice.

Likewise, Anna likes to highlight student achievement. She will give verbal praise to recognize accomplishments. She supports her students through one-on-one counseling and supplemental instruction. She even highlights student accomplishments on the bulletin boards in the hallways of the education building. Data walls are used to illustrate student progress in academic subjects. Anna will sometimes highlight student academic achievement in the school newspaper. Academic, social, and personal support helps to encourage student success and retention (Tinto, 1995). Support may be provided in both structured and unstructured forms. Under the assumption of self-determination theory and Tinto's student integration model, support such as mentorship, supplemental instruction, highlighting student accomplishments and verbal praise all promote student retention and success (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tinto, 1975). Moreover, Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy suggests that humans have certain social and esteem needs. Learners need to have a sense of belonging as well as self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1943). Instructors and administrators have the opportunity to reinforce positive student behavior and self-esteem.

When asked how they felt about their instructors, overall responses were favorable. Although, Ace recalls being a little skeptical about the instructors at first: "At first I thought they were trying to fail us and treat us like children. But now I like my teachers." In this statement, Ace refers to the communication between him and an instructor when he first started the program. He discusses how one instructor spoke to him in a condescending tone. In addition, the instructor made assumptions about what academic material Ace and his classmates did or did not know without getting to know them first. Without assessing academic abilities, the instructor just assumed that because students had not completed high school that it was due to limited academic ability.

Bob says that his instructors were "awesome". As a HiSET graduate, he provided feedback on administration, instructors, and the overall program: "As far as the way they running this place (the education program), they do a great job." He specifically recalled an instructor who understood the state of incarceration:

> He's (instructor) really in tune with the reality of prison and how we live in here.
> He basically knows how the whole system runs inside and outside. He's a really
> good person. He's really genuinely concerned about these guys getting their
> education.

Don described his positive rapport with his instructors: "I like my teachers. Everybody loves me." Don also discussed how his instructors encourage him: "They motivate me. They pressure me into doing better." Ken explains that his instructors provide supplemental instruction when he is challenged by a subject: "They give me a lot of help, one-on-one help." Lou described a time when he was struggling to read and his instructor motivated him:

He (instructor) said man, you can read them books. He threw a whole stack right

there and he said now pick any of them. He said just take your time and stop

rushing it. Just listen to the syllables…They got me doing a lot of things you

know and I feel real comfortable in [sic] today.

Pat noted that the instructors are very knowledgeable and students in the program can

learn a lot from their teaching: "If we (students) can sit there (in class) and learn from

them, we can learn what they already know. They can teach us what they already know."

Based on student responses, the staff in the correctional education program are

very supportive of students' academic goals. Tinto (1999) explains that student success

and retention require an environment that fosters learning. Involved students spend more

time on academic success and therefore are more likely to persist and graduate. The

program at RLCC fosters an environment that is very supportive of student learning

needs. Senge (2006) discusses the self-fulfilling prophecy (also known as the Pygmalion

effect) which demonstrates the power of expectations over behavior. The implication is

that higher expectations for students lead to an increase in academic performance. Tinto

(1999) states that students are more likely to persist in educational environments with

high academic expectations. Teachers are charged with increasing expectations of

students and drawing out their best qualities. Through supplemental instruction, one-on-

one support, recognition for accomplishment, encouragement, and overall student-teacher

interactions, the staff at RLCC have made a positive impact on the students in this study.

In fact, Bob and Lou both noted that their relationship with their instructor and the

education administrator was one of the reasons they wanted to take part in this study.

Theme 3: Self-reflection. The self-reflection theme is related to students'
assessment of their own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and goals. Transformative
learning theory involves learning in a way that changes how individuals make meaning of
their learning experiences (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning theory suggests that
critical reflection can be utilized to challenge students' beliefs and assumptions.
Individuals have a shift of consciousness that in turn changes behavior. A major
component of transformative learning is the disorienting dilemma, a life occurrence or
series of occurrences that spark a change in perception. For some students in this study,
incarceration was the disorienting dilemma that caused them to get serious about their
educational goals. For example, Anna described students' reactions to their academic
accomplishments and the disorienting dilemma of incarceration: "I've done all these
great things for myself. This was the best thing for me." In addition, certain life
experiences have prompted individual reflection of choices and experiences.

Maturity. Life experience, especially incarceration, has shaped the way the
students in this study view their education. They make their educational decisions now
based on personal growth and maturity. In this statement, Anna gives insight from an
administrative standpoint: "Students recognize that they have done something wrong.
There are not a lot of people claiming to be innocent. They recognize that they did
something wrong and they're paying their dues." Regret is not uncommon among adult
learners especially incarcerated students (Hall, 2006; Hill and Killacky, 2008; Visher,
LaVigne, & Travis, 2004). Like many people who return to school as adults, the students
in this study regret some of the choices they made earlier in life. The students discussed
regret, life lessons, and how they have matured.

According to Mezirow (1997), transformative learning "involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contesting beliefs through discourse, taking action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it" (p. 11). Mezirow (1997) suggests critical reflection is a stage of perspective transformation which can lead to transformative learning. Transformative learning implies that individuals want to make meaning of their life experiences. Students have a desire to make their own interpretations as they become more critical thinkers through self-actualization. Maslow (1943) describes self-actualization as the process of realizing one's potential. Self-actualization is an indicator of a need for personal growth and discovery. Ace discussed how through the process of self-actualization, he realized just how far he had come along in the program. In this statement, Ace remarks on how he surprised himself by how much he has learned in the education program at RLCC: "I just really be surprised by how much stuff I really knew [sic] if I just sit down and do it." Bob has learned that if he wants to be successful he has to put in the time and effort. In his statement, Bob explains that he had difficulty in school previously due to lack of commitment: "When I was in school back then, I couldn't understand hardly. I didn't take the time to learn. Now that I am here I have nothing but time." Since he has started the program, Don has matured as a student. Initially, he just wanted the end result which is the diploma. Now he is more focused and actually retains what he learns in class lectures and assignments. In reference to classroom instruction, he said: "Whatever they (instructors) got to give, I'm gone get." In response to how he has grown, Don said: "I can read now. I'm not selling drugs and I'm going to school." Don discussed how at first he was a slow reader. This presented issues for him during timed reading

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assignments. He improved his reading skills by reading during his spare time for approximately two hours per day. Jim explained that prior to incarceration he used to perform manual labor that required him to work in extreme weather conditions and for long hours. The older he gets, the more he has realized that he does not want to perform that kind of work. Jim says that getting his education is important to him because he does not want to go back to doing that type of work when he is released. As adult learners grow and mature, they hold an enormous set of experiences which serve as the foundation for learning (Knowles, 1980). Jim's work experience with manual labor serves as a resource for learning in this case. Adult learners are more receptive to learning when they are experiencing a transition regarding their social roles. For example, Jim was experiencing two important transitions in his social role: 1) He wanted to transition from being incarcerated to returning to free society and 2) He wanted to transition in his work life from being a manual laborer to obtaining a career that provides more income and less physical work. In reference to earning his HiSET diploma, he stated:

> It's a goal that I should have been accomplished. And I just want to get it now...I understand the importance. I don't want to work hard all of my life. I know that I am going to need it. You can make more money with it than without it…While I am in this negative situation I am still doing some positive things. It's my choice that I'm doing this. I could be getting into all type [sic] of negative things. There is a lot of negative things going on here (prison) too. I just choose to do positive things.

Adult learners have a need to understand the value of learning (Knowles, 1980). Jim describes how he understands the importance of education and the return on investment for learning. Knowles (1980) stated that adult learners are independent and make their own decisions regarding learning. Although Jim is involuntarily confined to prison, he points out the fact that school is not a part of his mandatory sentencing. He has made a conscious effort to attend school on his own. Ken discussed how his perspective on completing school has changed: "See, I know that in here I see things differently and I got a mission to complete. I know I really need it (education)." In this statement, he explains that he has grown and is more focused on school: "I have really matured a lot and I can't let nobody distract me." Lou is serving his seventh sentence in prison. He admits that he has been incarcerated previously for possession of marijuana with the intent to sell. Lou sold marijuana because he could earn money quickly to help support his family. He speaks to the problem of poverty as he shares a childhood story:

> Now as I'm growing up and taking care of you momma, you getting these bad
> colds, I gotta sat at home, I can't go to school no more. You ain't got no money,
> you understand? You ain't working no more so we waiting on the little welfare
> check, you understand? And I'm sitting at home and I want to go to school.
> Dudes was coming to get me to go play football. I got a football game. I can't go
> do none of this here because my mom was sick, she need me at home. I got to
> walk from here (downtown) to way over there (uptown) to grandmama's. Go get
> a little grocery. Probably about 4-5 cans of pork and beans, a little fat meat or
> whatever she give me. I gotta go walk and get this here and walk back.

This statement underscores the issue of poverty, more specifically, child poverty. Lou's comments demonstrate the notion that background variables such as family obligations play an important part in students' decisions to persist in school (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975). When Lou was in junior high school, his mother became very ill. As the oldest son, Lou was responsible for taking care of his mother and his little brother. He could not buy groceries until they received a welfare check in the mail which typically came around the first of the month. In the interim, if they needed food, Lou would have to walk several miles to his grandmother's house to get food for his family. Having this responsibility at such a young age made it difficult for Lou to attend school, stay alert in class, or even play sports with his friends. Lou gives insight on why he turned to selling drugs and how dropping out of school impacted his work life:

> As I went to getting older and getting up in age and learning about money. I'm thinking money is everything. Which money was not everything. I needed these books. I needed to learn about this world that I live in. I needed to learn, you know, how to get around. I needed to know how to fill out a [sic] application…I need to go fill out a real application in a real, say hotel or big restaurant like the (large sports and exhibition arena) or something. I did not know how to spell it. I didn't know how to spell. I was thinking money was everything.

After a critical reflection of his life experiences, Lou's frame of reference changed. He shared that when he was growing up, money was always important and became a major priority as he needed to help support his family. However, chasing money lead Lou to criminal activity which in turn led to his incarceration. In addition, Lou describes how not having an education impacted his life as he grew older. Lou's issues with literacy

impacted his ability to read and complete job applications. After several years of being in and out of prison, Lou realizes the importance of the role education plays in everyday life. He acknowledged that he needs to complete his GED to have a "fighting chance" of survival in today's society.

     Self-esteem. Self-esteem is a major component in learning outcomes (Lawrence, 2000). Lawrence (2000) suggested that there is a positive correlation between perceived self-value and academic achievement. Moreover, Lawrence (2000) noted that adult learners with high levels of self-esteem believe in their capacity to change. Participating in the correctional education program has increased the self-esteem level for participants. As an instructor, Dave noted that for many students in the program, having the student identity association as opposed to the criminal identity association helps to boost individual self-esteem. Each student indicated feeling apprehensive about taking classes in the beginning. Most were worried about failure. They were unsure if they would be able to keep up with the classwork. Each participant is now glad they enrolled in classes. They have found the experience to be rewarding. Many of them surprised themselves by their own academic achievement. One of the characteristics of adult learners is that as they mature, motivation to learn is based on internal factors such as esteem, values, beliefs, and opinions (Knowles, 1980). Moreover, Maslow (1943) states that humans have a need for self-esteem, achievement, and recognition. In addition, self-determination theory suggests that humans have a need to feel competent in their abilities. Dave said that it is rewarding to see a boost in students' self-esteem. Once students see their own academic accomplishments, it increases their level of confidence. He articulated how self-esteem is improved through academic success: "After they obtain

a HiSET diploma, you can tell their entire confidence changes. Their character changes, even their psyche. "

Ace was astonished to learn how much of the course material he remembered from when he was in school previously. The correctional education experience has caused him to learn more about himself. He's interested in areas of academic study that he never thought he would be interested in before.

Bob shared that if it were not for the correctional education program at RLCC, he may have never completed his HiSET diploma. Bob struggled with mathematics in the beginning. He stated: "I love math. It was my hardest subject in school, but I love math." In fact, Bob now serves as a peer mentor and tutors other students in mathematics. Although he has earned his diploma, he is an active student leader in the educational program.

Self-doubt was something that Don struggled with when he first started taking classes. He was unsure if he would be able to successfully complete his school assignments. Don has went from being functionally illiterate to reading every day. Don is now a mentor in a program that is geared towards outreach for young adults.

As adult learners mature, they become more self-directed learners. Self-directed learning was a struggle for Jim initially. He was used to more direct guidance. He noted that he is getting better at studying on his own. He also mentioned that he is more comfortable with asking questions when he gets stuck on a subject or assignment.

Based on the orientation to learning assumption of adult learners, students' time perspective changes and real-life situations must be tied to learning (Knowles, 1980). Initially, Lou had his reservations about participating in the correctional education

program. In reference to college, he recalls telling a friend in the past: "Man, that school ain't nothing but a get over man. All they try to do is get money from you." Lou now recognizes the value of education. He went from not wanting to come to school at all to recruiting several people into the education program. Lou mentioned that he has "a stack of certificates" under his bed in his cell. He had a shift in perspective based on his real life experiences including not being able to secure employment, incarceration and family influences. Self-determination theory implies that Lou's motivation shifted on the continuum from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Lou was initially motivated to go back to school based on external happenings in his life such as losing his job and being incarcerated. After taking several classes, he expressed how he now understands the value of having an education. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), intrinsic motivation is most likely to yield greater performance and engagement because outside factors are not controlling motivation. Self-determination theory and social learning theory suggest that Lou's self-esteem and self-efficacy will not only help him to achieve his desired outcome to complete school, but it will also increase his performance level (Bandura, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

Goals. Studies show that participating in correctional education programs increases chances for employment, higher wages, and lower recidivism post-release (CCCC, 1997; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Hull et al., 2000; Jenkins, et al., 1995). Post-release expectations varied among participants. However, all participants in this study were looking forward to being released from prison and rejoining their families. Every participant also anticipated not ever returning to prison again.

Senge (2006) emphasized personal mastery as "the discipline of personal growth and learning" (p. 131). Personal mastery is a collection of ideologies and practices that empower individuals to learn, create a personal vision, and view society in an objective way. Individuals with high levels of personal mastery are persistently developing their aptitude to produce intended results. People with high levels of personal mastery are able to create a personal vision and assess their existing reality in regard to that vision. The divide between personal vision and existing reality drives the individual forward. In this study, students shared their personal visions for post-release success and how they plan to accomplish goals.

As self-directed learners, adult students are able to formulate learning goals (Knowles, 1980). In the transformative learning process, one of the phases of development is planning a course of action (Mezirow, 1997). Furthermore, students' goals and expectations have a significant bearing on persistence (Tinto, 1999). Participants in this study gave indications that they had planned a course of action. Students shared their future educational and career goals. Immediate goals for all participants included completing their current educational program and being released from prison, but not necessarily in that order. Jim and Lou expected to be paroled within a year from the time the study was conducted. Both students indicated that if they do not complete their education during incarceration, they will sign up for GED/HiSET programs at schools in their respective hometowns.   In this statement, Lou describes how he likes school, has become comfortable with learning, and plans to continue school: "If I don't get my GED here, I'm not gone stop because I got used to getting to going in here." Five of the study participants indicated that once they complete their current educational

program, they were interested in attending college. Four of the five were interested in studying business. More specifically, management and real estate were of interest to participants. Other areas of academic interests included film, architecture, and nursing. Two students were interested in attending vocational school. Welding and brick masonry were the vocational interests.

Several students indicated they wanted to become entrepreneurs. Participants were interested primarily in starting the following businesses: retail clothing, nightclub, and residential support center. Other professions of interest were as follows: nurse, concert promoter, auto salesman, and motivational speaker.

Student participants were asked to give their thoughts on whether or not they felt their correctional education experience would help them to stay out of prison. Overall, most agreed that having an education would help them find employment which would keep them out of prison. Ace commented regarding his release from prison: "I'm not coming back…I am going to get a job and do better." He added that his correctional education experience will also aid in his parole review: "It will show the judge that I am doing something better." Similarly, Jim mentioned that attending classes will help increase his chances of getting parole: "I'm going up for parole this year...so anything for me to better my situation to go home." When asked if he thought his correctional education experience would help him post-release, Bob responded: "Of course". In addition, he shared that post-release success is contingent upon the individual: "It only helps if you want it to. You can take all the classes and all the programs and at the end of the day if you don't want to do better, it's not going to help." Don's thoughts echoed the sentiments of Ace and Bob. Don felt that while taking correctional education classes will

have a positive impact on his life upon release from prison, ultimately it is up to him to stay out of prison: "I'm going to keep me out of prison." Similarly, Jim felt his correctional education experience would positively impact his post-release success. He responded:

> The only thing that is going to keep me out of here is me, but it's going to have a positive input (impact) on it because what I have been hearing is that you need a GED or HiSET for everything.

Don, Bob, and Jim's comments illustrate self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (2000) insist that in order for individuals to yield the greatest results, they must be autonomously motivated. The implication is that Don, Bob, and Jim are all more likely to successfully reenter society because they have intrinsic motivation.

Staff Themes

Staff themes are based primarily on data collected from interviews with correctional education staff. Themes in this section address the correctional education experience from an administrative standpoint. Staff provide insight that is valuable to the experience of the student. Staff themes relate to experiences beyond the classroom. The term staff in this study refers to correctional education faculty and administrators. This includes people who work with incarcerated students at RLCC on a daily basis. Their daily observations provide an insightful perspective of the correctional education experience.

The "People first" theme applies to the notion of treating incarcerated students as human beings. In the "Moral character" theme, correctional staff discuss the importance of teaching moral and ethical standards in addition to academic instruction. Lastly,

"Supportive administration" is related to upper administration decision making for the correctional education program. Table 4 describes the staff thematic findings in the study. Immediately following Table 4 is a discussion on the staff themes found in the study.

Table 4

Staff Thematic Findings

Theme	Meaning	Evidence from the data
4. People first	Acknowledging people regardless of their background	The way in which staff view their roles
5. Moral character	Attributes that are upstanding social norms	Interactions with students
6. Supportive administration	Providing assistance for program success	Administrative decision making

Theme 4: People first. The "People first" theme refers to the notion that those who are incarcerated are people above all else and should be treated as human beings. Adult learners are self-directed human beings and should be treated as such (Knowles, 1975). Oftentimes when people are incarcerated, society tends to dehumanize these individuals. There is an overall negative perception of the incarcerated population. The educational staff at RLCC interact with incarcerated students daily. Bolman and Deal (2008) note that administrators who approach change from a human resource frame put people first. The human resource frame values individuals and focuses on the needs of people. Through the human resource frame, people are supported, empowered, and developed.

Dave, a former junior high and high school instructor, compared the differences between teaching in a high school to teaching in a prison. He stated: "One of the differences is whenever I am going over a lesson, the students' prior knowledge and experience play a part. I am able to relate more to students. They are primarily older students and have more life experiences." In this statement, Dave explains that adult students are more relatable to him because they bring more real-world experience to the classroom. According to Knowles (1980), adult learners use life experiences as a resource for learning. As adults mature and gain life experience, this experience is used as a basis for learning activities. For example, a math lesson on counting money would be more familiar to an adult who worked as a cashier versus a younger person with no job experience.

When Anna first started working in the education program, she had no previous correctional education experience. She acknowledged her own pre-conceived notions about what working in a prison would be like. After working with the program for a little over a year, she stated: "After getting to know them (students), I realized a lot of them made a mistake. A lot of them were on the streets and just had to survive." Anna articulated why she encourages the educational well-being and success of people who are incarcerated:

> I've gotten to know a lot of these people. I understand that they are people too. I
> knew my objective going into this was to help people, to help people to try to turn
> their lives around and to try to cut down on recidivism.

To clarify, the faculty and administration in the education program are in no way naive. They are very much aware that they work in a prison. Each staff member is familiar with

the background of the incarcerated students. Anna recognizes that not all students are in

the program for the right reasons, but most are: "On the whole, I think a lot of these guys

are trying to better themselves." The educational staff support rehabilitation for people

who are incarcerated. The staff at RLCC are doing their part to help reduce recidivism

by preparing people for post-release success. According to self-determination theory,

humans have a need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People want to be cared about

by other people. By treating incarcerated students like people, staff help to satisfy the

need for relatedness.

Theme 5: Moral character. In addition to providing academic instruction, the

staff in the educational program indicated that building moral character is just as

important as basic education. Each of the staff participants in the study recognize the

importance of the work they do with students. As they prepare incarcerated individuals

for release, they aim to equip them with both academic preparation and life skills.

Possessing moral character helps individuals become more marketable in the workforce

and more successful in society (Ubah & Robinson, 2003). In his statement, Dave

described his role at the center: "My role is to provide quality instruction and also help

them develop some type of moral character. Today's society needs individuals that are

not just educated but also have moral standards." This statement provides an example of

how Dave and his colleagues help students build life skills:

> Some of the guys may have a HiSET diploma but they may not know how to
>
> interview, or they need certain skills…They need to know how to communicate
>
> with other individuals…If we help them practice, then it becomes a part of their
>
> habit.

Another staff member's comments echo Dave's thoughts about building moral character:

> It's changing them socially. We want to change their attitudes. It does no good to have an education if they're just going to go out and commit another crime. If we can change the way they look at life and look at each other, that's a great thing.

In the above statements, correctional education staff address how they provide advice to students in areas such as interviewing tips or communication skills. Helping students build moral character demonstrates staff support for students. According to Tinto (1999), advice and support are conditions which best encourage student persistence. It should be noted that unstructured support such as helping students build moral character is just as important in encouraging persistence as academic support (Tinto, 1999).

Anna recounted an interaction with a student who was upset about the way an issue was handled by one of his teachers. The student came into Anna's office yelling. At this point, Anna could have easily had a correctional officer escort the student out of the school and removed him from the educational program. Instead, she used that instance as a teaching moment. She said to the student:

> You're handling this the wrong way and if you don't change the way you handle things, then you're not going to make it in society… If you're displeased with something, then you need to communicate it in a proper way.

The student immediately recognized he had done something wrong and calmed down. He apologized to Anna and then addressed his issue in a more peaceful manner. Anna shared: "If I can teach them life lessons, that's just as good to me." Building moral character is just as important as coaching academic success to the staff in the education program. Social learning theory suggests that people learn by observing others in their

environment (Bandura, 1995). In Anna's example, she demonstrated positive conflict

resolution. Social learning theory implies that the more exposure students have to

socially normal behavior such as positive conflict resolution, the more likely they are to

adopt socially normal behavior.

      Theme 6: Supportive administration. Support at the level of senior

administration can make or break any academic program. The difference between

success and failure of the program lies with the support from top-level administrators.

Path-goal theory is related to the way in which leaders motivate organizational members

to achieved desired goals (Bess & Dee, 2012). Supportive leadership is a type of

leadership behavior in path-goal theory. Leaders who adopt the supportive leadership

style are typically friendly and approachable. In addition, supportive leaders are

considerate of the needs of organizational members, are concerned with the well-being of

staff, and concerned with creating an overall pleasant environment. Supportive

leadership also places value on healthy interpersonal relationships (Bess & Dee, 2012).

A high degree of support for the education program at RLCC is evident. The researcher

can attest to the level of support demonstrated by administration. Top-down support was

obvious in the approval of this research study. The administration demonstrated support

in numerous ways including but not limited to: obtaining approval at the state level for

the study, approving the study at the prison level, security clearance processing,

providing a tour of the facility, answering questions, setting up interviews, and providing

observational opportunities for the researcher. During the researcher's visits to the

prison, administrators were visible, helpful, informative, and very supportive.

Dave stated: "Administration is very supportive. We could not do this without their support." Anna also stated that administration is highly supportive of the educational program. This includes providing financial resources needed to support the program. Anna noted that she likes to experiment with various learning modalities to see what works best. This can be anything from instructional materials to computer learning software. She has the autonomy to restructure the academic program in ways that best fit the needs of the students. Anna attributed program success to the support of administration: "The support here is amazing." Anna commented that administrative decision making is definitely in support of the academic program and the success of its students.

Program Themes

Program themes describe aspects of the overall correctional educational program. Themes in this section address the elements of the educational program that are considered most successful based primarily on student perceptions. The "Peer relationships" theme addresses how social integration is helpful in promoting student success. The theme of "Student-teacher interactions" discusses student connections with people in positions of influence. Finally, the "service learning" theme discusses student perceptions of community service involvement. Table 5 summarizes the program thematic findings in the study. Immediately following Table 5 is a discussion of the program themes found in the study.

Table 5

Program Thematic Findings

Theme	Meaning	Evidence from the data
7. Peer relationships	Friendships and peer bonding among students	Academic and social support
8. Student-teacher interactions	Student rapport with instructors	Student perceptions of teachers
9. Service learning	Community service activities conducted by students	Student participation and enjoyment

Theme 7: Peer relationships. Through conversations and observations, it was evident that students in the study had healthy relationships with their peers. Research confirms the importance of healthy peer relationships in the development of students (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Pace, and Vesper, 1997; Palinscar, Stevens, & Gavelek, 1989; Tinto, 1995). Tinto (1975) found a significant, positive link between peer interactions and student persistence. Positive peer interactions have been proven to significantly influence student outcomes such as grades, self-esteem, and interpersonal communication (Astin, 1993). Peer interactions are especially important in the prison setting. The incarceration experience can negatively affect students' mental health (Jordan, 2011). Having healthy, positive relationships increases students' chances of completing their education and achieving academic success (Tinto, 1995). Peer relationships was an overlapping theme in the data collected for this study.

In observing students in their natural environment, the researcher noted positive interactions between students. Tinto (1995) mentioned that unstructured support for

students is just as effective in promoting persistence as structured support. There was

significant evidence of unstructured peer support in the program. In the education

building, students were in the hallway swapping stories and jokes with one another. Pat

mentioned how he and his fellow classmates get along well. Pat stated that they use

humor to keep each other encouraged. In one classroom, students were laughing out loud

at a film they were watching. In another classroom, students were gathered in small

circles working on group projects. In the school newspaper room, students were working

together on new ideas for the upcoming issue of the school paper. At the Toys for Tots

event, students were working harmoniously together to set up/clean up for the event,

serve food, and assemble toys. In addition, some students at the Toys for Tots event also

played in a musical band together. Lou shared a story about how he was motivated by

his cellmate, another incarcerated student, to attend classes. Based on conversations with

the participants in this study, it was also evident that they knew each other personally.

Students shared information about each other's personalities, families, and backgrounds.

Structured peer support was also evident in the education program. Peer

mentorship was identified as a successful aspect of the education program in this study.

Bob served as a math tutor in the education program at RLCC. Bob discussed how he

enjoys tutoring his peers. Ken shared that he feels more connected with his peer tutors

because of the shared incarceration experience. Peer tutors are viewed as more

trustworthy sources of learning because they share relatable experiences. As a result of

the shared incarceration experience, students are able to better understand one another.

Peers have the ability to provide everyday support for students and demonstrate positive

role modeling (Devilly, Sorbello, Eccleston, & Ward, 2005). Social learning theory

implies that peer role modeling is likely to influence student behavior; students are likely to mimic observed behaviors (Bandura, 1995). Research indicates that peer-led instruction yields increased student knowledge as well as increased motivation and self-confidence (Devilly, et al., 2005). In addition, peer-led instruction also enhances interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and self-worth (Devilly, et al., 2005). Moreover, peer leaders gain a sense of empowerment by helping others achieve their academic goals (Devilly, et al., 2005).

Theme 8: Student-teacher interactions. Student-teacher interactions was another overlapping theme in the data. Overall responses were favorable when students were asked how they felt about their instructors. Tinto (1975, 1993) notes that the quality of student-teacher interactions can positively impact students' personal and academic outcomes. Bob appreciated that one of his teachers was knowledgeable about the overall prison industry and environment. Bob stated that his teacher's background knowledge of the happenings inside and outside of prison helps him to better connect with students. In addition, Bob noted that his teacher was a good person and that he is honest and really wants to see students succeed in the program.

According to Deci & Ryan (2000), people need to feel competent in certain tasks. In addition, people want to feel important and like they belong. Don demonstrated a sense of pride as he shared how his teachers love him. In comparison to teachers that he had in the past, Don noted that his teachers now encourage him to do better in his studies. This type of positive reinforcement made Don "feel good" and more confident in his academic abilities. Don described how his teachers in the past would also speak

negatively towards him. He appreciates the positive encouragement from the instructors in the correctional education program. Similarly, Ken shared that he loves his teachers. Tinto (1999) noted that academic success and student persistence require an environment that promotes student development and learning. Lou discussed how he was inspired by his teacher to continue practicing his reading skills. Lou was frustrated because he struggled with reading, but after continuous verbal motivation and supplemental instruction from his teacher, Lou became a better reader. When asked about how he felt about his teachers, Lou responded: "I love them. They 100. I can't say nothing bad about them." Lou's sentiments are congruent with other participants' perceptions regarding student-teacher interactions.

When asked what contributed most to his learning in a particular class, Bob shared: "The great attitude and hype the teachers showed us. They never made me feel less as a student just for the sake of my being incarcerated. I felt equal to the free world students." In this statement, Bob addresses the way in which his teachers made him feel as a student. He felt as if he was on the same playing field as a traditional student. Based on self-determination theory, Bob's comments indicate that his basic human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were met through interactions with his teachers (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000). The implication is that Bob is likely to yield greater academic performance because those needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). In addition, because Bob feels socially and academically integrated in the education program, he is more likely to persist. In fact, Bob completed his HiSET certification, tutors other students in math, and is planning to enroll in college courses the upcoming semester.

Theme 9: Service learning. Service learning was an overlapping theme in the

data. Students found this aspect of the program to be enjoyable and rewarding. Some of

the students in the study belonged to service learning clubs at the prison while others

participated in service learning activities on occasion. All of the participants in this study

participated in the Toys for Tots event. Tinto (1993) noted that social and academic

integration can also occur outside the classroom during extracurricular activities or other

academic events. Moreover, student involvement in service learning activities can lead to

increased persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Don is a member of a service club that focuses on juvenile awareness. The club

offers deterrence programs for at-risk youth and minors who have committed delinquent

acts. The main goal of the service organization is to deter youth from committing crimes.

Don shared how he enjoys helping with prison tours and talking to young people. Don

said he wants: "to help other people…stop them from making the same mistakes I made."

Lou is involved in a Christian outreach service club at the prison. The club

focuses on rehabilitation through ministry. Lou really enjoys his experience with the

service club and stated that ministry is his first passion. He teaches bible study classes.

He has used his influence in the ministry to also recruit students to the education

program.

Service learning activities such as Toys for Tots, youth deterrence programs, and

outreach ministries help to socially integrate students. Tinto (1999) noted that student

involvement regardless of the type of institution serves as a predictor of student

persistence. The more engaged learners are, the more likely they are to successfully

complete school. In addition, service learning activities help to satisfy the need for

relatedness. As a component of self-determination theory, relatedness not only refers to individual sense of belonging, but also involves caring for others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Lastly, service learning activities can lead to transformative learning experiences for students (Mezirow, 1997).

Summary of Findings

  Summary of student themes. Theme 1: "Barriers to education" addresses obstacles that prevented students from obtaining their education in the past. All student participants were lacking a high school diploma upon entry to prison. Individual factors related to the students' backgrounds prevented them from obtaining a high school diploma prior to incarceration.   In Theme 1, students reflect on internal and external factors which contributed to school drop out for participants. Internal influences such as pride, lack of effort, self-doubt, anxiety, shame, lack of internal motivation, and priorities. External influences primarily included people in participants' immediate environment such as family, friends, and teachers.

  Theme 2: "Motivation" relates to the reasons why study participants chose to take correctional education courses. Students were self-motivated to take classes to better their current situation. In addition, family served as an important motivator for students. Mothers, children, grandchildren, and other close relatives helped to motivate some participants to attend school. Encouragement from peers in the correctional education program also offered motivation to student persistence in the education program. Additionally, motivation to attend came from supportive correctional education staff in the program.

  Theme 3: "Self-reflection" focuses on students' examination and contemplation of their own thoughts and behaviors. Reflecting on their experience, students

acknowledged their mistakes and demonstrated the life lessons they have learned.

Students discussed ways in which they have matured and how such maturity impacts

their educational decisions. Students also addressed self-esteem issues and how they

have gained more confidence in their own abilities to learn. Several participants were

proud of their academic and personal improvement. Each student participant shared their

educational attainment goals and expectations for post-release success.

Summary of staff themes. Theme 4: "People first" demonstrates how the staff at

the correctional institution place value on helping people regardless of their background.

Faculty and administration at the prison demonstrated an understanding of the importance

of their roles in preparing people for reentry. Faculty and staff recognize that students are

people who bring real life experience to the classroom. The correctional education staff

at the prison have a desire to help people through rehabilitation.

Theme 5: "Moral character" reveals the importance of developing students' moral

qualities. The staff not only encourage academic success, but they also place high value

on moral standards as well. The staff members encountered in this study expressed how

building moral character is just as important as academic success. Since the students in

the study are incarcerated, moral character development is important to successful

reintegration into society.

Theme 6: "Supportive administration" describes the value of having a supportive

administration. Executive level support has made a difference in program outcomes.

The high level of support from senior administration at the prison has been helpful to the

correctional education staff. Administrators at the institution demonstrate support

through decision making, budget allowance, and allowing autonomy of educational initiatives within the program.

Summary of program themes. Theme 7: "Peer relationships" addresses friendships in the education program. Peer bonding on academic and social levels was an important aspect of the program for students. Having peer tutors makes the learning experience more relatable for some students. Prison can be a place of isolation, so having a sense of brotherhood was important to student persistence. The shared incarceration experience brought students closer.

Theme 8: "Student-teacher interactions" relates to the relationships students formed with instructors in the education program. Relationships with those in authority impact student persistence. Students in this study noted having positive relationships with instructors. Students were appreciative of the support shown by their teachers. Interactions with teachers help to make students feel good about themselves and their academic accomplishments.

Theme 9: "Service learning" addresses students' civic engagement outside the classroom. Students were involved in service learning activities where they contributed to the community in positive ways. The service learning activities were not only healthy for the community but were also healthy for the students. Students felt a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Chapter 5

Discussion

In this final chapter, a summary of the study is presented. The summary discusses the purpose and procedures utilized in the study. Following the summary, a discussion is included which answers the research questions. Implications for future research and recommendations for practice are addressed in this chapter. Lastly, concluding remarks will close the chapter.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand incarcerated students' thoughts and perceptions regarding their educational experiences. Student experiences were explored through semi-structured interviews. In an attempt to understand the incarcerated student perspective, this study examined the experiences of seven incarcerated students at a male correctional institution in the State of Louisiana. In addition, two correctional education staff members were interviewed to provide a fuller picture of the correctional education experience. The primary research question for the study was: How do incarcerated students perceive their correctional education experience? Secondary research questions were as follows:

2. What are incarcerated students' career/employment expectations after release?
3. What motivates people in prison to take classes?
4. How does previous education or work experience impact the correctional education experience?
5. Which aspects of the program do students perceive as successful?
6. Are there any distinguishable similarities in student perceptions and staff perceptions of the correctional education program?

A review of relevant literature traces the expansion of American correctional education programs from sabbath schools to wavering legislative and financial support. Pertinent literature highlights alarmingly high incarceration and recidivism rates in the

United States; particularly in Louisiana (DOE, 2009; Edwards & LeBlanc, 2017; NIJ, 2014; Walmsley, 2013). Studies show how mass incarceration has disproportionately impacted young, Black and Hispanic males (Alexander, 2011; DuVernay, 2016; Harlow, 2003; NCES, 2014). The research literature demonstrates that correctional education programs have a proven ability to significantly decrease the chances of recidivism (Aos et al., 2006 ; Davis et al., 2013; Edge, 2009; MacKenzie, 2006; Steurer & Smith, 2003, Wilson et al., 2000). Success of correctional education programs is often measured by extrinsic factors such as degree awards and recidivism. Studies which demonstrate the extrinsic value of such programs are certainly significant. However, there is a growing need for studies such as this one which address the intrinsic value of correctional education (Hall & Killacky, 2008; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). This study contributes to the current literature by helping to fill the existing research gap.

Data for the study was collected over several weeks and included multiple visits to the prison. Data collected in the study was gathered from various sources including the following: profile questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, informal conversations, institutional documents, and field notes.

Nine major themes emerged from data collection. Key thematic findings for students were as follows: barriers to education, motivation, and self-reflection. The themes emerged based primarily on discussions with staff were as follows: people first, moral character, and supportive administration. Lastly, key thematic findings for the overall program were as follows: peer relationships, student-teacher interactions, and service learning.

Based on personal narratives, the findings not only revealed pertinent information about students' thoughts on their current correctional education experiences, but also about past educational experiences and future educational goals. Evidence in the study indicated how incarceration impacts the individual, educational attainment, employment, and families. Findings in this study addressed the successes and challenges incarcerated students face daily. Study findings also provide insight on day-to-day incarcerated student interactions both inside and outside the classroom.

Discussion of Findings

Research question 1: How do incarcerated students perceive their correctional education experience? The incarcerated students in the study perceived their participation in correctional education as a positive experience overall, though some students admitted to struggling in the beginning. Evidence in the data demonstrated that many of the participants were nervous about going back to school. They were unsure of their academic abilities. Research indicates that adult learners can feel uncertain about their learning experiences in the beginning (Knowles, 1980). Self-efficacy, a component of social learning theory, refers to an individual's belief in themselves (Bandura, 1995). Researchers indicate that incarcerated students can have low levels of self-efficacy due to the nature of the prison environment (Allred, et. al., 2013).

Now, students enjoy coming to school and appreciate the opportunity. Participant insights revealed that participation in the correctional education program made students feel good about themselves and their accomplishments. Self-determination theory suggests that people want to feel competent in their abilities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For some participants, attending classes has increased their confidence in their own academic abilities. For instance, Ace discussed how he was pleasantly

surprised when he was able to recall certain course material from his previous education experience. Maslow (1943) refers to this realization of one's potential as self-actualization. Self-actualization signifies a need for individual growth and discovery (Maslow, 1943). The findings signify that participating in correctional education has the potential to increase self-efficacy for student success. This finding is enhanced by the literature on self-efficacy, which offers enlightenment on how students' mental and emotional state impacts persistence. For example, researchers noted that incarcerated students who lack self-efficacy are at an increased risk of not completing correctional education programs (Allred et al., 2013; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Given the researchers' explanation, participation in correctional education programs likely enhances self-esteem which in turn impacts persistence. Furthermore, Maslow (1943) suggested that humans have a need for self-esteem. Additionally, self-determination theory posits that people want to be valued and accepted by others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This is extremely important when considering the incarcerated population as a whole has traditionally been devalued or unaccepted. Research indicates that attending classes while incarcerated has the potential to boost student self-esteem (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Hetter, 2015; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Moreover, completing courses has the capacity to improve attitudes and sense of accomplishment (Davis et al., 2013). Students in the study addressed their initial insecurities and anxiety about attending classes. In particular, some older students felt a sense of embarrassment due to their age which is not uncommon. Knowles (1980) suggested that adult learners bring extensive doubts and fears to the learning process. For example, Pat and Lou both shared that they experienced feelings of anxiety in the beginning. Pat and Lou were

afraid that they would not be able to keep up with the course material because they had been out of school for several years. After having enrolled in multiple courses, student participants reported feeling more comfortable with the experience now. Through self-motivation, encouragement from friends and family, and staff support, students have an increased level of confidence regarding their academic achievement. Research indicates that having support from friends, family, and staff help students to better integrate socially and academically which in turn promotes persistence to program completion (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975).

Students were thankful for the educational offerings and the opportunity to increase their educational attainment. On average, incarcerated people are less educated than the general population (Davis, et al., 2013). This means that when many incarcerated persons are released from prison, they will attempt to reintegrate into society less educated than their counterparts. Moreover, they will compete for jobs against more educated people without incarceration records. Educational offerings such as those at the institution in the study help to somewhat even the playing field prior to release. Numerous studies suggest that correctional education programs aid in improving employment outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals (CCCC, 1997; Davis, et al., 2013; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Hull et al., 2000; Jenkins, et al., 1995; Stana, 1993). Findings in the study illustrate student appreciation for the opportunity to bridge the educational gap between them and the general population. For example, Pat shared that he is thankful that his teachers share their wealth of knowledge with him and his classmates. Tinto (1999) indicated having an environment that fosters learning is necessary for student success and persistence.

The findings illustrate that students perceived the correctional education program as a way to overcome personal and academic obstacles. Attending classes helped to keep students out of trouble. For instance, Don shared that he can now read, and he is no longer selling drugs. Although, there are negative happenings in the prison, the influence of the correctional education program encourages positive behaviors. Social learning theory suggests that individuals are influenced by their environment (Bandura, 1995). Moreover, learning occurs through social interactions and observations of others. It is important to note that based on social learning theory, behaviors can either be positively or negatively influenced. Jim highlights the fact that there are several opportunities for him to become involved in negative happenings at the prison, but he chooses to take part in positive happenings like correctional education instead. Often in a setting like prison, learned behaviors are negative (Bandura, 1995; Allred, Harrison, & O'Connell, 2013). However, evidence in this study reveals that correctional education influences such as instructor behavior, peer mentorship, and the school environment have positively influenced students in this study. Having these positive influences not only impacts student behavior, but the influences also serve as a predictors for student success (Tinto, 1975). Overall, students felt that participating on the correctional education program would improve their post-release experiences.

Research question 2: What are incarcerated students' career/employment expectations after release? Tinto (1975) noted that having goals such as career plans has a significant influence on academic success and persistence. Moreover, Bean & Metzner (1985) noted that adult student persistence is based on factors such as career and educational goals. The majority of the participants hoped to finish school and gain

employment that is steady and will provide enough wages to support themselves and their families. According to Vacca (2004), individuals who are educated are less likely to return to prison. Moreover, Vacca (2004) suggests that many formerly incarcerated persons are unemployed due to lack of education and job training. Students in this study expected that program completion would help them find employment and earn higher wages upon release. In addition, they anticipated that by having an education they will be in a better position to compete in the job market. A study by Stana (2003) noted that students who enroll in correctional education programs are more likely to maintain employment post-release and earn higher wages than their counterparts who did not participate in correctional education programs. Maintaining gainful employment is a huge part of post-release success. In addition, steady employment is often a condition of parole. Many of the student participants indicated that they were incarcerated for selling drugs as a way to make income. Having a steady job after release can help reduce the likelihood that individuals will return to selling drugs for income. Moreover, the likelihood of recidivism also decreases.

Planning a course of action is an important phase in the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1997). Students in this study shared ways in which they plan to proceed after release from prison. Students' career and employment expectations after release varied among participants. Several of the study participants wanted to open their own businesses. Similar to students in this study, results in a previous study by Hall (2006) found evidence that incarcerated students had aspirations of becoming entrepreneurs. Student participants in this study were interested in opening businesses in the following areas: clothing/shoe stores, a drug addiction support center, and a nighttime

entertainment establishment. Other career interests were associated with the following fields of work: auto sales, concert promotion, nursing, public speaking, and real estate. Some participants were also interested in returning to fields of work in which they had previous experience such as brick masonry, framing houses, welding, and oil rig operation.

In addition to career and employment expectations, some students in the current study stated they were interested in attending college after release. Some were interested in attending universities while others were interested in trade school. A study by Basta & Siegel (1997) revealed that reincarceration for people with at least two years of college was 36% less than the reincarceration rate for people with no college experience. Participant responses indicated they wanted to land job with higher wages and better working conditions. Research shows that people with an earned bachelor's degree are more likely to earn higher wages than individuals with only a high school diploma (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). By attending college, students can significantly decrease their chances of recidivism.

Research question 3: What motivates people in prison to take classes? The incarcerated students in this study were motivated to enroll in the correctional education program in a variety of ways including but not limited to: self-motivation, family, peers, and staff impact.

Study results indicated that students were self-motivated. According to self-determination theory, autonomous motivation is going to yield higher performance because motivation is not controlled by outside factors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Knowles (1980) noted that as adult students mature, they become more self-directed as learners.

Adults make a personal choice to attend classes. Self-determination theory states that humans have a need to have freedom in their choices (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This is especially true for incarcerated persons who do not have a lot of freedom in choice. By choosing to attend classes, the human need for autonomy is satisfied. The assumption is that when the basic psychological need for autonomy is addressed, chances for yielding higher performance is increased.

Study findings demonstrated that none of the students in this study were required to attend classes as a part of sentencing so self-motivation played a major role. Self-motivation is not only important to attending classes during incarceration, but it also becomes increasingly important after release. Much like traditional students, professors can provide students with the tools necessary to be successful. However, post-graduation success hinges a great deal upon internal motivation. The same is especially true for formerly incarcerated students. Society as whole does not welcome formerly incarcerated persons back into communities with open arms. Although reentry programs are designed to help formerly incarcerated individuals make a smoother transition back into society, it is not always that simple. Brian Ferguson, a formerly incarcerated person and reentry advocate, shared his challenging experience after release (Moraff, 2015). Ferguson experienced difficulty in finding resources he needed to be successful after prison. He noted that the help he received from his reentry counselor was lackluster and the employment opportunities listings provided was outdated. It was self-motivation that drove Ferguson to succeed after prison. Regarding formerly incarcerated persons, Ferguson said "People are self-motivated to find the things that are going to help them out and the things that are going to get them back on their feet" (Moraff, 2015, para. 8).

Release from prison should provide individuals with a sense of relief. However, the reality is that there may more difficult days ahead for those who are released from prison. Being self-motivated gives the students in this study an advantage. Once released students likely will not have the influence of administrators, instructors, correctional officers, or peer mentors. So, possessing the ability to do what needs to be done without coercion is a characteristic that will serve the students in this study well post-release. Self-determination theory indicates that students will be more successful because of their intrinsic drive (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivation that is not controlled by external factors is likely to produce greater results.

Students in the study were also motivated by family members. Family support is particularly important to the persistence of adult learners and helps to boost academic success (Astin, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Garcia & Thornton, 2014; Kasworm, 2002). This is especially important for incarcerated students who are isolated not only from society, but from their families as well. Results from this study found that the family member with the most influence over educational decisions was the mother. A report by the Institute for Family Studies suggests that the mother's level of education has a strong influence on the education level of the child (Sutherland, 2015). Evidence in this study demonstrated that not only did the mother's educational level influence academic decisions for one student, but his grandmother's educational level was also influential to his educational choices. Social learning theory can be applied to this example. The student, having had a great deal of exposure to the family matriarchs who dropped out of school and did not place high value on education, adopted some of those same behavior patterns.

Peer support also served as a motivator for student enrollment and retention in the program. Several research studies have closely linked peer interactions to student persistence and academic success (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Pace, and Vesper, 1997; Palinscar, Stevens, & Gavelek, 1989; Tinto, 1995). Due to the nature of prison, peer interactions are even more significant. Study findings suggest that students are encouraged by other incarcerated people who share the same unique experience. Incarcerated students are able to better empathize with one another. Sharing the same lingo, living conditions, and student experience brings students closer. They are more sensitive to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of each other because of the shared experience. Student participants in this study described their peer interactions as encouraging and supportive of one another. Tinto's (1995) student integration model notes the importance of social integration for students. The model theorizes that the more integrated a student is with the education environment, the more likely the student is to remain enrolled and persist to graduation. According to Tinto (1995), the establishment of friendships is important for student integration and contributes significantly to student satisfaction and retention.

Staff influence also weighed heavily in student decisions to continue program participation. Student-teacher/administrator relationships encouraged students in this study to keep progressing in their studies. One of the most influential factors on academic success is student-teacher interactions (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1995). Since administrators and instructors are in positions of power, fostering positive relationships with students helps to promote persistence. If student-teacher relationships were negative, it could directly impact learning outcomes. For example, evidence in the study illustrated how negative interactions with teachers in the past not only impacted learning

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outcomes, but it also impacted student educational decisions and eventually led to student dropout.

Research question 4: How does previous education or work experience impact the correctional education experience? Research suggests that previous academic experience serves as a predictor for student persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975). Previous educational experiences had a significant impact on the correctional education experience for the students in this study. None of the students in this study completed high school prior to incarceration. Study participants shared their academic achievements since enrolling in the program. For instance, Bob completed his high school credential through the correctional education program. Similarly, Jim completed a vocational certificate. Student responses indicated that they likely would not have completed those academic accomplishments otherwise.

Knowles (1980) noted that adult students bring a unique set of life experiences and knowledge to the learning experience. Personal experience serves as a resource for learning. Student narratives in the study compared school experiences in the past to their experiences now. One of the reoccurring themes in student experiences was growth and maturity. As adult students mature, they become more independent learners (Knowles, 1980). Every participant stated that their experience now is much more effective and rewarding than before incarceration. This is partially attributed to individual growth and maturity. More specifically, interactions with instructors and peers are better than previous experiences.

Mezirow's (1997) explanation of transformative learning theory suggests that students use critical reflection to challenge their own views and assumptions. Students

can have change in perception that impacts behavior. One of the themes found in the study was self-reflection. In this study, life experience has shifted student perspectives on the importance of education. They take school more seriously now because of the perceived value. Bob provided an example of how his perspective on the importance of school shifted. He discussed that when he was younger, dating girls was more of a priority than finishing school. He also stated that the type of work that he was doing did not require a great deal of education. After incarceration, he had a lot of time to reflect on his previous decisions. Incarceration represented a disorienting dilemma for Bob (Mezirow, 1997). He started to reflect on his past decisions and his current situation of imprisonment. He wanted to do something better with his life. He realized the importance of school and began to take it more seriously. As a result, he now has a high school diploma.

Work experience was included in this question because like education, work experience is related to finding employment post-release. In addition, background variables such as work experience can be related to academic performance and predict student success and persistence especially in vocational courses (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Previous work experience had some influence on the subjects in which students were interested in such as masonry and welding. However, most of the students did not have extensive work experience prior to incarceration. Many incarcerated individuals were either unemployed or underemployed just prior to incarceration (DOE, 2009). Student responses to the profile questionnaire in this study indicated that none of the student participants were employed at the time of incarceration.

Research question 5: Which aspects of the program do students perceive as successful? As stated previously, academic and social integration influence learning outcomes and encourage student persistence (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1995). Based on student responses, the most successful aspects of the program were peer tutoring/mentorship, instructor support, and service learning.

As early as the 19th century, correctional education programs have used peer-led activities to teach incarcerated students (Fisher, 1970). This practice has been very effective in the past and also proved to be very effective in this study. Most of the peer tutors in the education program at RLCC are incarcerated. Students noted that tutors were extremely helpful and were able to better connect because of similar experiences. In addition, evidence in the study demonstrated students supported one another through academic and social support. According to Tinto's (1975) student integration model, having supportive friends encourages student persistence to degree completion.

Overall, students indicated having good rapport with their teachers and the administrators in the program. Having healthy student-teacher interactions helps students to better integrate into the education community (Tinto, 1975). Participants stated that instructors really cared about students in the program. Based on the assumptions of self-determination theory, students have a need to feel cared about by instructors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This support by instructors meets students' need for relatedness. Having that need met will help students to yield higher academic performance.

In addition to attending regular classes in the educational program, two study participants were routinely involved in service learning organizations. As it relates to Theme 5, "Moral character", service learning projects help to encourage moral

development of students. Both students mentioned thoroughly enjoying the experience of learning outside the classroom as well. Self-determination theory suggests that service learning activities satisfy students' basic need to feel a sense of belong (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The findings also signify that direct experience with service learning can foster transformative learning. For instance, Mezirow (1997) noted that service learning activities highlight the way students make meaning of their experience and can lead to transformative learning experiences. Service learning could potentially shape the way students view and interpret the world. For example, Lou was having difficulty with his class readings. However, he noted that when he worked with the mission he was able to read and interpret the Bible fine. Lou was better able to connect to the biblical literature because it was something that grasped his interest. He discovered that he was not focusing on the class readings because the subjects did not interest him. He possessed the ability to read, but the desire was not there. In this case, service learning helped Lou make meaning of his reading experiences. Challenged by his instructor, Lou began to take his time and focus on the subject matter and the pronunciation of words in class readings. He improved his class reading skills by having a shift in perception (Mezirow, 1997).

Research question 6: Are there any distinguishable similarities in student perceptions and staff perceptions of the correctional education program? There were several overlapping insights in the study. First, both students and staff noted positive staff-student interactions. This is not to say that all interactions were harmonious; however, overall interactions between students and correctional staff were

positive. Tinto (1975) indicated that harmonious relationships between students and teachers will have a positive significant impact on students' decision to continue school.

Next, responses from both student and staff participants indicated that bonding between peers was evident in the program. It should be noted that peer interactions were positive in academic and social environments. Peer relationships in this study signified academic and social integration for students which is likely to encourage student persistence.

In addition, staff and students reported having preconceived notions about the correctional education experience. Transformative learning was demonstrated by both students and staff through the process of reflection. Reflections on their experiences with one another caused them to evaluate their beliefs about the other party which in turn shifted the way they viewed others and made meaning out of the correctional education experience. Having learned more about the program and each other, perceptions on both sides of the spectrum changed in a positive way.

Students and staff also addressed the influence of family on educational decisions. Background variables such as family is important. Family background can impact student decisions to persist (Tinto, 1975). For example, Pat started taking classes in prison at the suggestion of his uncle and cousin.

Lastly, evidence from both participant types demonstrated ways in which the students in this study have matured and learned from their past mistakes. Many of the students in the study have exhibited transformative learning experiences. Since they have enrolled in the correctional education program, participants experienced some form of change through self-reflection. Many experienced regret for some of the things they did

in the past. Students are participating in the correctional education program to try and better their lives in some way.

Implications

The findings in this study offer numerous ways that correctional education administrators, faculty, and staff can encourage incarcerated student success. Table 6 revisits the theoretical framework in this study. Immediately following Table 6 is a summary of implications as guided by the theoretical framework.

Table 6

Theoretical Framework Revisited

Theory	Elements of Theory	Implications
Social learning theory	People learn from observing others	Role modeling in the education environment is important
Transformative learning	Critical reflection can challenge students' assumptions or beliefs	Critical reflection exercises and activities can be used to enhance learning
Student integration and persistence	Academic and social integration impact student persistence	Include student organizations, co-curricular activities, tutoring, and academic events in program planning
Self-determination theory	Humans have a need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; autonomous motivation yields greater performance	Incorporate student choice Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned Collaborative learning Highlight student accomplishments

First, correctional education staff should consider role modeling as an approach to teaching. Social learning theory suggests that people learn from observing others in their environment (Bandura, 1995; Sutherland, 1939). Educators should take advantage of the time students spend in the educational environment. Students need as much contact as possible with people in educational settings, people who demonstrate prosocial behaviors, and people who encourage academic and post-release success. In addition to academic instruction, the staff in this study demonstrated role modeling by teaching life skills and encouraging students to exhibit good moral standards. As correctional education instructors prepare students for release, encouraging prosocial behaviors will contribute to student success post-release. It is important to note that not only can instructors serve as role models, but peer mentors can also lead by example.

Second, instructors should include academic exercises and activities that encourage critical reflection. As a component of transformative learning, critical reflexivity encourages students to make meaning of their experiences while challenging their beliefs and assumptions (Mezirow, 1997). This helps students track their own growth and development over time and can lead to an enhanced learning experience. Critical reflection on previous experience can help students to make better decisions in the future.

Third, program planning should include activities that engage learners inside and outside the classroom. Research indicates that academic and social integration is key to student persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975). This study found that co-curricular activities such as service clubs/service learning and the school newspaper encouraged student integration. Peer mentorship was important to the students in the

study. Having tutors and mentors with the shared incarceration experience enhanced the student learning experience. Student interactions with teachers also impacted their outlook on the correctional education experience.

Lastly, correctional education staff should meet students' basic psychological needs. By meeting students' need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, staff help to motivate students (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to self-determination theory, meeting these basic needs will yield greater student performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Staff can meet students' autonomy needs by incorporating student choice into the curriculum. For example, students could be allowed to choose from a list of essay topics. Competence needs can be met by providing learning opportunities where students can demonstrate their knowledge. For instance, essays or class presentations give students an opportunity to validate what they have learned. The need for relatedness could be met through collaborative learning activities such as study groups or group discussions. A major component of self-determination theory is that the more autonomously motivated a person becomes, the greater the outcome. This is because autonomous motivation is not controlled by outside factors. To encourage intrinsic motivation, staff can highlight student achievement through recognition such as awards or verbal praise for their accomplishments. This will help boost students' confidence and self-esteem.

Recommendations for Future Research

Incarcerated student perspectives on their educational experiences are not abundantly prevalent in the literature on this population. This study contributes to the current literature on incarcerated student perspectives and adds value regarding intrinsic factors which influence students in prison. This study has indicated some significant

findings relevant to the correctional education experience as perceived by incarcerated students. Expanding the study could reveal patterns of interactions that may be generalizable across programs. Through further analysis of the incarcerated student experience, researchers can continue to study correctional education program impact. Since incarcerated student perspectives of their learning experiences are not well documented in the literature, there are numerous opportunities for future researchers to expand the knowledge of incarcerated student experiences. This study presents several implications for future research regarding the incarcerated student experience.

While this study provided insight regarding a small number of students at one correctional institution, more research is needed on incarcerated student perspectives of their educational experiences. Research at varying types of facilities in different geographic regions is needed. In addition, a larger, multi-site comparative analysis of incarcerated student perspectives across different institutions would highlight the student experience and help make generalizations about the population.

None of the study participants earned a high school credential prior to incarceration. Students addressed various barriers to education completion. Some of the barriers mentioned were related to the students' external environment. Future study could introduce human ecology theory and evaluate interactions between students and their environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

As indicated in the study, strong peer interactions impact student learning outcomes and encourage persistence. The study found that having peer tutors helped students to better connect to the course content. Students indicated feeling more comfortable and open interacting with their incarcerated tutors because of similar

experiences. Building on the findings of this study, a broader examination of peer relationships across a variety of correctional education programs could reveal differences in student perceptions based on institutional characteristics such as institution type, funding, and size. In addition, based on social learning theory, further research could compare social interactions before and during program participation (Bandura, 1995).

Study results also indicated strong staff-student interactions. Students in this study felt that their instructors cared about their academic and personal success. A study of student interactions could be expanded and compared across various staff types in the education program including but not limited to administrators, correctional officers, support staff, and teachers.

Service learning was important to students in this study (Butin, 2010). A future research study could expound on the incarcerated service learning experience. For example, future research could evaluate any connections between motivation and service learning. In addition, a future study could evaluate the effectiveness of service clubs/organizations in prison.

For some of the participants, engaging in correctional education programs increased their self-esteem. Students described how program participation has impacted their internal motivation and confidence. Some students shared their insecurities about starting school. Students described feelings of nervousness and uncertainty at the start of the program. Internal factors such as pride, lack of effort, anxiety and shame impacted some of the students in this study. The findings signify that attending school during incarceration positively impacted students' internal motivation. While there is considerable research on the extrinsic factors related to correctional education programs,

more research is needed regarding the intrinsic factors of program participation. This study gives insight into student perceptions of their experiences, but the results are only specific to the students in this study. Additional studies in the same area would provide a greater understanding of the incarcerated student experience.

This study was gender specific. The correctional institution in the study was an all-male facility. This study focused on incarcerated males since most of the incarcerated population in the United States is male (Edwards & LeBlanc, 2017; Harlow, 2003; NCES, 2014; Schmitt & Warner, 2010). In addition, six of the seven students in the study were Black. Astin (1997) identified gender and race as two of the most consistent predictors of retention. Mounting literature on student persistence indicates that male students are less likely to persist than female students (Astin, 1975; Peltier, Laden, & Matranga, 1999; Tinto, 1987). More in-depth comparisons between male and female incarcerated students are needed. Critical race theory could also be introduced as part of the theoretical framework for a future study. Additionally, comparisons between incarcerated students of various races may also be utilized in future research. A comparative study would help to explore any similarities or differences in the experiences of incarcerated students based on gender or race.

Lastly, study results illustrated student post-release expectations. More specifically, students indicated their educational and employment expectations after release from prison. For example, study participants indicated goals such as attending college and starting their own businesses. Further research could explore educational and employment outcomes of formerly incarcerated students. Researchers could track student success after release. This study evaluated perceptions of correctional education

programs from current students. Future studies could also explore student perceptions of correctional education programs after release or upon program completion.

Concluding Remarks

As previous research has suggested, correctional education programs have a demonstrated ability to aid in the rehabilitation of individuals. To better understand why incarcerated student perceptions are important, it is imperative to note how incarcerated student perceptions about correctional education programs relates to the larger picture for society. Student perceptions impact participation. Student participation in correctional educational programs has several benefits and can lead to transformative learning experiences, less prison overcrowding, restoration in families, more money in the United States economy, lower recidivism rates, increased labor force, fewer taxpayer dollars expended, and better citizens.

This study provided information regarding incarcerated student experiences at a Louisiana correctional facility. It highlighted students' perceptions of correctional education programs in their own words. The study illuminated aspects of the experience that are most influential to incarcerated students. Data analysis of the study findings provided many connections to the literature and also presented new insights. This academic study served to increase awareness about the first-hand incarcerated student experience. Through personal narratives, this study provided insight for correctional education administrators. In traditional higher education settings, direct feedback from students is often used to improve instructional practice and institutional effectiveness. It is anticipated that the perceptions revealed in this study will provide student feedback in a way that is meaningful to future program planning. It is also expected that the results in

this study will increase support for correctional education and understanding for the

impact of correctional education programs on incarcerated students.

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Appendix A: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certificate

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Stephanie Cage
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of Memphis
- **Institution Email:**
- **Institution Unit:** Education

- **Curriculum Group:** Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 2 - Refresher Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:**
- **Completion Date:** 20-Jun-2017
- **Expiration Date:** 20-Jun-2019
- **Minimum Passing:** 75
- **Reported Score*:** 100

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
SBE Refresher 1 – Defining Research with Human Subjects (ID: 15029)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Privacy and Confidentiality (ID: 15035)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Assessing Risk (ID: 15034)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Children (ID: 15036)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – International Research (ID: 15028)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects (ID: 15040)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Defining Research with Human Subjects (ID: 15038)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Research with Children (ID: 15043)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Research in the Public Schools (ID: 15042)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – International Research (ID: 15045)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – History and Ethical Principles (ID: 936)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects (ID: 937)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Informed Consent (ID: 938)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Prisoners (ID: 939)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Research in Educational Settings (ID: 940)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Instructions (ID: 943)	20-Jun-2017	No Quiz
SBE Refresher 2 - Instructions (ID: 12629)	20-Jun-2017	No Quiz
SBE Refresher 2 – Informed Consent (ID: 12620)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Privacy and Confidentiality (ID: 12622)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Assessing Risk (ID: 12624)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Research with Prisoners (ID: 12627)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
Completing the SBR 201 Refresher Course (ID: 12630)	20-Jun-2017	No Quiz
SBE Refresher 2 – History and Ethical Principles (ID: 12702)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k277b1c66-549e-4fb2-b04c-726a4c4ced50-12959160

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Stephanie Cage ▊
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of Memphis ▊
- **Institution Email:** ▊
- **Institution Unit:** Education

- **Curriculum Group:** Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 2 - Refresher Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** ▊
- **Report Date:** 20-Jun-2017
- **Current Score**:** 100

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
SBE Refresher 1 – History and Ethical Principles (ID: 936)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 - Instructions (ID: 12629)	20-Jun-2017	No Quiz
SBE Refresher 1 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects (ID: 937)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Informed Consent (ID: 12620)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Informed Consent (ID: 938)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Prisoners (ID: 939)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
Completing the SBR 201 Refresher Course (ID: 12630)	20-Jun-2017	No Quiz
SBE Refresher 1 – Research in Educational Settings (ID: 940)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Instructions (ID: 943)	20-Jun-2017	No Quiz
SBE Refresher 2 – Privacy and Confidentiality (ID: 12622)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – International Research (ID: 15028)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Defining Research with Human Subjects (ID: 15029)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Assessing Risk (ID: 12624)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Assessing Risk (ID: 15034)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Privacy and Confidentiality (ID: 15035)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Children (ID: 15036)	20-Jun-2017	2/2 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Research with Prisoners (ID: 12627)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – History and Ethical Principles (ID: 12702)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Defining Research with Human Subjects (ID: 15038)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects (ID: 15040)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Research in the Public Schools (ID: 15042)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – Research with Children (ID: 15043)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)
SBE Refresher 2 – International Research (ID: 15045)	20-Jun-2017	1/1 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k277b1c66-549e-4fb2-b04c-726a4c4ced50-12959160

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

Appendix B: Warden Recruitment Letter

Date

████████████████
Raymond Laborde Correctional Center
1630 Prison Road
Cottonport, LA 71327

Re: Correctional Education Programs at Raymond Laborde Correctional Center

Dear Warden McCain,

My name is Stephanie Cage and I am doctoral candidate at the University of Memphis. I am conducting dissertation research as a part of my doctoral degree in the Department of Higher and Adult Education under the supervision of Dr. Wendy Griswold. I would like to provide you with more information about this study and request your help in conducting the study.

I am interested in researching the incarcerated student perspective of the correctional education programs at the Raymond Laborde Correctional Center. While there is a lot of current research on the subject of correctional education based on the perspective of correctional education professionals and administrators, there is very limited information based on the incarcerated student perspective. This research study will primarily highlight the student correctional education experiences. Moreover, I am also interested in speaking with any correctional staff who would be willing to share their experiences with the program.

If willing, I would like to request your help. The study will involve interviewing participants on their perspectives of correctional education programs. Due to the time involved, a number of 10 incarcerated students would work for the study. Information provided by participants will be kept confidential. No names or any other personally identifiable information will be included in the study. However, anonymous quotations may be used. I will follow all protocol guidelines set forth by you and the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections regarding research studies in correctional institutions.

I would really appreciate the opportunity to visit your institution. I hope that you will consider my request. I would like to discuss any questions you may have concerning the study and your role in identifying the research participants. I can be reached by email at ██████████ or by phone at ████████. Any help you can provide is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cage

Department of Public Safety & Corrections
State of Louisiana
RAYMOND LABORDE CORRECTIONAL CENTER

September 25, 2017

University of Memphis
Institutional Review Board
315 Administration Building
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

RE: RESEARCH PROJECT

To the University of Memphis IRB:

This letter is to indicate support for Stephanie Cage in her research study, "Education on the Inside: Inmates' Perceptions of Correctional Education Programs" at the University of Memphis. I understand that Raymond Laborde Correctional Center's involvement will allow offender students and correctional staff interviews regarding their experiences with the correctional education program.

I understand this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that offender and staff participation in this research study is strictly voluntary and provides confidentiality of research data, as described in the protocol. I will collaborate with Ms. Cage on background checks, security clearance, prison rules, privacy, and confidentiality.

Therefore, as an authorized representative of the Louisiana Department of Safety and Corrections, I will allow Ms. Cage to perform on-site interviews at the correctional center, as discussed with her and briefly outlined below, and which may commence when Ms. Cage provides evidence of IRB approval for the proposed project. This project has also been approved by the Chief of Operations, ███████ at Headquarters via e-mail dated September 6, 2017.

RESEARCH SITE: Raymond Laborde Correctional Center, 1630 Prison Road, Cottonport, LA 71327.

STUDY PURPOSE: The primary purpose of the study is to gain insight about the importance of correctional education programs through the perspective of the student. Staff are being asked to participate in the study to examine any similarities or differences in perspectives between staff and offenders as it relates to correctional education.

1630 PRISON ROAD ✦ COTTONPORT, LOUISIANA 71327 ✦ (318) 876-2891 ✦ FAX (318) 876-4220 ✦ WWW.DOC.LA.GOV
AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

STUDY ACTIVITIES: A brief questionnaire will be distributed to participants regarding their demographic, educational, and employment background. Participants will be asked interview questions related to their educational experiences and goals, as well as future career expectations. All offenders that participate in this research project must volunteer.

STUDY CRITERIA: Offender participants in the study must be over the age of 18, able to read English at the sixth grade level or higher, have previously enrolled/currently enrolled in a correctional education program, and have the possibility of parole. Offenders must also sign a consent form, which will be provided by researcher. Staff participants must have worked with the correctional education program and the students in some capacity.
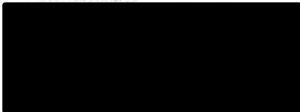
SITE SUPPORT: Raymond Laborde Correctional Center will provide a space to conduct interviews, authorize correctional staff to identify individuals who might qualify for the study, and provide guidance with security and policy guidelines for conducting the study on site.

DATA MANAGEMENT: Ms Cage will keep a research file on each participant using pseudonyms to protect personal identities. The files will contain the participant informed consent, interview transcript, and researcher notes. All documents, files, audio recordings, and the audio recorder will be secured in a locked safe in Ms. Cage's office and may be accessed only by her during the study. All electronic files and audio recordings will be permanently deleted and paper data files will be permanently destroyed upon the completion of the study and dissertation approval. A copy of the study will also be provided to the Department upon request.

ANTICIPATED END DATE: Research activities are expected to conclude on or before February 1, 2018.

If I have any questions or concerns related to the study, I will contact Ms. Stephanie Cage of the University of Memphis.

Sincerely,

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center

WSM/dg

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS.

Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

Dec 4, 2017

PI Name: Stephanie Cage
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Wendy Griswold
Submission Type: Initial
Title: EDUCATION ON THE INSIDE: INMATES' PERCEPTIONS OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2018-96

Full Board Approval: Nov 21, 2017
Expiration: Nov 21, 2018

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. This IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.

2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be submitted.

3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.

Thank you,

Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.

Appendix E: Student Recruitment Flyer

University of Memphis

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

Incarcerated Student Perspectives on Prison Education

Are you taking classes now? Would you like to share your thoughts and feelings about your experience?

Volunteers are wanted to share their experiences in prison education programs. To participate in this study, you must:

- Be 18 years or older
- Be able to read at the 6th grade level or higher
- Be taking (or have taken) one or more classes in prison
- Have the possibility of parole at some point in the future
- Be willing to share your thoughts and feelings on prison education in an interview

The research study will take place at the Raymond Laborde Correctional Center.

For more information, please contact us at:

Stephanie Cage, Student Researcher

██████████

Wendy Griswold, Academic Advisor

██████████

Higher and Adult Education Program
University of Memphis
Department of Leadership
College of Education
Memphis, TN 38152-6172
Phone: (901) 678-2775

This research study is being conducted by Stephanie Cage under the direction of Dr. Wendy Griswold at the University of Memphis, Department of Higher and Adult Education.

University of Memphis

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

Correctional Education Staff Perspectives on Prison Education

Are you a correctional education instructor or administrator? Do you work with the prison education program? Would you like to share your thoughts and feelings about your experience?

Volunteers are wanted to share their experiences in prison education programs. To participate in this study, you must:

- Be 18 years or older
- Be currently teaching a prison education class or working with prison education program in some capacity
- Be willing to share your thoughts and feelings on prison education in an interview

The research study will take place at the Raymond Laborde Correctional Center. Contact Stephanie Cage for more information at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

This research study is being conducted by Stephanie Cage under the direction of Dr. Wendy Griswold at the University of Memphis, Department of Higher and Adult Education.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

EDUCATION ON THE INSIDE: INCARCERATED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being asked to volunteer because you are over the age of 18 and taking (have taken) one or more classes through the prison education program.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Stephanie Cage, a graduate student at the University of Memphis Department of Higher and Adult Education. I am being guided in this research by my academic advisor, Dr. Wendy Griswold.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to find out how incarcerated students feel about taking classes while in prison. I want to know what made you decide to take classes and more about your prison education experience. I would like to know how you think the classes will help you in the future.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you are under the age of 18, you should not volunteer for this study. If you have never taken a class while in prison, you should not volunteer for this study. If you do not want to share about your correctional education experience, you should not volunteer for this study.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The interviews will take place at the Raymond Laborde Correctional Center. We will meet twice. Each visit is expected to last 30-75 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is no more than 3 hours over a three-week period.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in two interviews. The first interview will be question and answer. The second interview will be a follow up.

The first interview will be tape recorded so my notes are correct as possible. At the beginning of the first interview, you will be asked to answer a short list of questions about your race/ethnicity, age, level of education, employment history, incarceration history, and prison education background.   Next, you will be asked 18 questions related to your personal experience with the prison education program and   future education and career goals.

The second and last interview will happen about two weeks after the first interview. You will not be asked a set of questions like in the first interview. Instead, you will be asked to read a typed sheet of paper listing your answers from the first interview to make sure I have everything correct. I will ask you to help me correct any mistakes on the sheet. I will also ask you questions if I need help understanding your answers. Lastly, I will ask you to talk about any thoughts on your experience that you may have forgot to mention or we did not have time to talk about in the first interview.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

You may feel weird talking about your education experiences and career goals with a stranger. You may feel like you don't want to share certain things. As a volunteer in the study, you do not have to talk about anything you don't want to talk about. If you feel uncomfortable, we can stop the interview at any time. You can refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit for your participation. You may benefit from having your voice heard. As a volunteer in this study, sharing your story may help other people understand what it is like to be in your shoes. This study could help other people understand what it is like to take classes while in prison.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to participate in the study if you do not want to participate. This is a volunteer study. Even after you decide to volunteer, you can change your mind at any point if you don't want to participate.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, you do not have to participate.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

No. The study is free.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

No. There is no reward for volunteering. You will not receive any special treatment for volunteering for the study. Participation in this study will not affect any decisions regarding your parole.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

Your files will be kept in a private safe in my (Stephanie Cage's) office. I am the only person who will have access to the safe. Your name will not be listed on any of the files at all. Instead, you will be assigned a fake name to protect your identity. At the end of the study, all tape recordings will be permanently deleted and all paper files will be permanently destroyed.

When I write the study results, nothing will be included that can identify you specifically. If this study is printed or circulated in a research paper, book, journal, newspaper, magazine or any other printed source it will not contain your name or any specific information that would lead back to you. Any quotes used in the study will use fake names. For example, John Doe might be listed in the study as Todd.

I will make every effort to keep your identity safe outside the prison walls but please know that the study is not totally private. The fact that you are in prison removes some of the privacy you will have. For example, I had to get permission from the Warden and the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections to conduct this study. Therefore, the Warden and other people responsible for the supervision of incarcerated people are very much aware of any participation in this study. Study results will be shared with the Warden but will not contain your name or any other information that would lead back to you specifically. You should also know that a correctional officer will be present during our interviews. Any tape recordings, notes, or paper files that I carry in or out of the prison may be subject to review by a correctional officer.

I will protect any information that names you specifically as much as the law allows. You should know that if you share any information with me that shows signs that you might be a danger to yourself or someone else, I am required by law to report that information to a court or people in charge of the prison.

Since I am a student as well, I may be required to share your real name with people who are in charge of protecting incarcerated people and students at the University of Memphis or the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. This would include people in positions of authority such as my academic advisor who want to make sure that I have done the study correctly and that your rights are protected during the study.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

Yes, you can stop participation at any time. This is a volunteer study. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

I can also end study participation early if I feel your participation is not helpful to you or the study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU GET HURT OR SICK DURING THE STUDY?

It is important for you to understand that the University of Memphis does not have funds set aside to pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this study. Also, the University of Memphis will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you volunteer for the study, please ask questions if anything is unclear. If you have questions about the study or if you have suggestions, concerns, or complaints, you may contact Stephanie Cage at █████████ or Dr. Wendy Griswold at █████████ or █████████, University of Memphis, Department of Leadership, Memphis, TN 38152.

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form.

WHAT IF NEW INFORMATION IS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY THAT MIGHT AFFECT YOUR DECISION TO PARTICIPATE?

If I find out any new information related to this study that might change your mind about volunteering, I will share that information right away. If this happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY PRIVACY IF I AM INTERVIEWED?

I will make every effort to keep private all data collected from your interview to the extent allowed by law. Your name will not be listed with your responses. I will use a fake name on all documents connected to your answers. However, the study will not be totally private. There may be situations where I have to share your real name with others in authority. Your responses may be subject to review by authorities at the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections or at the University of Memphis as noted in the "Who Will See The Information That You Give?" section of this form.

HOW CAN I ACCESS A SUMMARY OF THE STUDY RESULTS?

The outcomes of the research will be available with the Warden:

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center
Warden's Office
1630 Prison Rd
Cottonport, LA 71327
████████████

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent   Date

Appendix H: Staff Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

EDUCATION ON THE INSIDE: INCARCERATED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about incarcerated student perspectives of correctional education programs. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are an administrator or staff member who oversees or works closely with the correctional education program. Your role as an administrator or staff member is important in rehabilitating incarcerated persons and influencing student learning outcomes. Therefore, your observations and perspectives are also important to the study. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 2 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Stephanie Cage of the University of Memphis Department of Higher and Adult Education. I am being guided in this research by Dr. Wendy Griswold.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to find out how incarcerated students feel about taking classes while in prison. The researcher is interested in learning about what motivates students. In addition, I am also interested in administrator or staff observations and experiences with the correctional education program. By doing this study, I hope to learn more about the thoughts and feelings of staff and incarcerated students toward correctional education programs.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you are under the age of 18, you should not participate in this study. If you have never taught a correctional education course or worked directly with the correctional education program, you should not participate in this study.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at Raymond Laborde Correctional Center. You will be asked to meet for an interview regarding your experience with the education program. You will also be asked to participate in a follow up interview. Each interview is expected to last 30-75 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is no more than 3 hours over a three-week period.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

During the study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. The interviews are expected to last 30-75 minutes each. The first interview will be standard question and answer format. The second interview will be a follow up session.

The first interview will be audio recorded for accuracy. At the beginning of the first interview, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire regarding your race/ethnicity, age, job title/role, years of service in the correctional education program, and other education or corrections experience. Next, you will be asked 8 questions related to your personal experience with correctional education programs.

The second and final interview will take place approximately two weeks after the first interview has been completed. The second interview will be for follow up and reflection purposes. You will not be asked a number of questions like in the first interview. First, you will be asked to point out any errors that need to be corrected in the document. During this time, you may also be asked to clarify any statements that might be unclear to the researcher. Next, you will be asked to share any thoughts about your work with the correctional education program that you may not have recalled during the first interview.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

As a participant in this study, you may feel uncomfortable discussing your work experiences with a stranger.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

No. You will not benefit directly from taking part in the study. However, you may experience satisfaction in sharing their experiences with others. Your willingness to take part in the study may help others better understand the administrator or staff perspective of correctional education.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

No. This is a volunteer study. You do not have to participate.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

You do not have to participate in the study if you do not want to participate.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

No. Participation is free.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

No. You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

Your files will be kept in a private safe in my (Stephanie Cage's) office. I am the only person who will have access to the safe. Your name will not be listed on any of the files at all. Instead, you will be assigned a fake name to protect your identity.   At the end of the study, all tape recordings will be permanently deleted and all paper files will be permanently destroyed.

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I will protect any information that names you specifically as much as the law allows. You should know that if you share any information with me that shows signs that you might be a danger to yourself or someone else, I am required by law to report that information to a court or people in charge of the prison.

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███████████

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent   Date

Appendix I: Student Profile Questionnaire

Please take a moment before we begin our interview to answer these brief questions. If you would rather skip a question, please do so. When you are finished, please let me know so we may begin the interview. Thank you for your time.

1.With what race or ethnic group do you identify?

- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Bi-racial
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other, please specify

    _____

2. How old are you?

- ☐ 18-25 years
- ☐ 26-49 years
- ☐ 50-65 years
- ☐ Over 65 years

3. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed (before or during incarceration)? (Please check only one)

- ☐ Attended High School
- ☐ Graduated High School
- ☐ Attended College
- ☐ Graduated College

4. Were you employed before you were incarcerated? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
    If so, what type of work were you doing?

_____

5. Prior to your current sentence, have you ever been previously incarcerated? Yes   No

6. What education/training/faith-based program(s) have you participated in while incarcerated? (Please check all that apply)

☐ Job Skills   ☐ Adult Basic Education   ☐ Pre-Release Program
☐ Life Skills   ☐ Vocational Training   ☐ College
☐ GED   ☐ Counseling   ☐ Other

_____

Appendix J: Student Interview Questions

1. How did you find out about courses being offered in the correctional education program?

2. Why did you decide to take classes while incarcerated?

3. What are some of your educational goals?

4. What course(s) have you enrolled in so far? Which one is your favorite? Which is your least favorite? What was your experience like taking the course(s)?

5. What expectations did you have going into the course? Were those expectations met?

6. What was your favorite thing about the course? What was your least favorite thing about the course?

7. How do you feel about your instructor(s)?

8. How has your learning experience in prison different from your past educational experience?

9. What does your teacher do now that is either different or the same from your prior educational experience?

10. Do you have a different approach to learning this time around?

11. Is there anything about the correctional education program you wish would be changed?

12. What program(s) or course(s) are you interested in taking in the future, if any?

13. Would you recommend this correctional education program to other incarcerated people? Why or why not?

14. Is there anything that I have not asked about your experience as an incarcerated student that you would like to share?

15. What are your educational and/or career goals after release?

16. Do you think enrolling in correctional education courses will positively impact your life upon release? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

17. By taking this step to enroll in classes, do you think you are more likely to stay out of prison once you are released? Why or why not?

18. Do you think you have a better chance of landing a job after prison since you have enrolled in the education program?

Appendix K: Staff Profile Questionnaire

1.With what race or ethnic group do you identify?

☐ White/Caucasian

☐ Hispanic/Latino

☐ Black/African American

☐ Asian

☐ Bi-racial

☐ Native American

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other, please specify

_____

2. How old are you?

☐ 18-25 years

☐ 26-49 years

☐ 50-65 years

☐ Over 65 years

3. What is your job title/area?
_____

4. How long have you worked with the correctional education program?
_____

5. Have you held any other positions in education or corrections? If so, please describe those positions below:

Appendix L: Staff Interview Questions

1. Describe for me your role in the correctional education program and what that experience has been like.

2. What are your thoughts on the correctional education program at your institution?

3. Are there areas for improvement in the program?

4. Have you noticed a difference in student behavior since enrolling in the program?

5. Have you taught in the program? If so, which courses?

6. What are some differences in the classroom environment as compared to a traditional classroom?

7. What is the biggest challenge in your role? What is the biggest reward?

8. Do you feel that incarcerated students will become more successful citizens after release because of this program? Do you feel they will be less likely to return to prison?

Appendix M: Field Notes Protocol

Date:
Time:
Location:
Activity:

<u>Observations:</u>   <u>Comments:</u>