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Drama: A Comparative Analysis of Individual Narratives

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Abstract

In a narrative inquiry, five educators who taught college in prison share stories about working in this non-traditional learning environment that is often dangerous and frustrating. From the tension between the prison's emphasis on social control and the educators' concern for democratic classrooms, three broad themes emerged: working in borderlands, negotiating power relations, and making personal transformations. Large intact segments from transcripts of participant interviews form a dramatic text that illuminates how a selected group of educators made meaning of their experience teaching college courses to incarcerated students. A comparative analysis presented in a one act play brings together the individual participant voices to tell a collective story, which has meaning in the context of a shared emotional experience.

Keywords

Dramatic Text, Narrative Inquiry, College in Prison, and Comparative Analysis

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Drama: A Comparative Analysis of Individual Narratives

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In a narrative inquiry, five educators who taught college in prison share stories about working in this non-traditional learning environment that is often dangerous and frustrating. From the tension between the prison's emphasis on social control and the educators' concern for democratic classrooms, three broad themes emerged: working in borderlands, negotiating power relations, and making personal transformations. Large intact segments from transcripts of participant interviews form a dramatic text that illuminates how a selected group of educators made meaning of their experience teaching college courses to incarcerated students. A comparative analysis presented in a one act play brings together the individual participant voices to tell a collective story, which has meaning in the context of a shared emotional experience. Key Words: Dramatic Text, Narrative Inquiry, College in Prison, and Comparative Analysis

Introduction

This narrative study explored how a selected group of educators made meaning of their experiences teaching college courses in prison. Drawing mainly from the theories of Bourdieu (1967, 1986, 1994) and Freire (1970/2003), we examined how higher education takes place in prison, an environment controlled by the state and dominant culture. The phenomenon of teaching college in prison exists within the tension between two contrasting conceptualizations of education: education as a means for social control and education as the practice of freedom. Our research questions centered on how educators who teach college in prison understand and experience their work as teachers of higher learning skills and how these experiences illuminate the influence of the educators' character and motivation and mediate the prison environment in the teaching and learning process.

The five participants in this study were educators who had recently taught college courses in a Western state's correctional facilities contracted on a part-time basis through local higher education institutions. Two participants were women and three participants were men and the length of time they taught in an adult prison ranged from three semesters to 13 years. The participants taught both male and female inmate students in medium and minimum security prison settings, including military-like boot camps for young nonviolent offenders. One female participant also taught male inmates in a federal maximum security prison.

Many college-level correctional education programs receive funding from the federal Incarcerated Youth Offender Grants (IYO) that Congress approved in 2002 (Baust, McWilliams, Murray, & Schmidt, 2006). The grants stipulate that subsidized students must be offenders who are 25 years old and younger and are within five years of release from prison. Older inmates may enroll in the college courses by paying the tuition. All inmate students must pass the General Education Development (GED) tests or have a high school diploma to participate in the college programs, which commonly focus on core general education courses. Typically, states receive the federal funding and the state department of corrections contracts with a local college or university to provide the curriculum and instructors for the college-level courses.

Our discussion of this narrative study leads us to two central conclusions. It shows "the relation of stories to the worlds in which they circulate" (Gubrium, 2005) are as important as the content and internal organization of the stories. In order to understand the individual stories, we examined the narrative environment and institutional setting of prison. We offer a collective story; that is, an impression of the world that this particular subgroup of educators inhabits not a generalization about those experiences. Therefore, we determined that these stories had more meaning when situated in the context of the participants' everyday experience. Our discussion also reveals how the meaning of lived experiences is made visible through drama (Denzin, 2003). We piece large segments of interview data into the text of a drama to be seen and heard, requiring the reader or audience to relive for themselves the experiences of the participants. Our goal is to bring the audience back into the dialogue and create "a field of shared emotional experience" (Denzin, p. 470), which moves people to reflect and perhaps to take action.

We present our explication of this study and the tension that serves as its primary contextual condition in three parts. First, we provide the theoretical background by examining certain insights about education offered by Bourdieu and Freire. Although our theoretical framework is partially based on Bourdieu's explanation of how the state's operation of the prisons reproduces the social structure that validates and distributes cultural capital, we also believe education may be a source of resistance to the dominant culture. Second, we review critical aspects of the literature on narrative inquiry and explain how we developed our participants' stories and identified their major themes. We characterize the mixture of our strategies for analysis and interpretation as a *bricolage*, which suggests an approach to research using a toolbox of methods to find the most practical for the task at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991). Finally, we present the text of a one act play that illustrates our use of drama as a strategy for a comparative analysis of individual narratives, and we describe how drama advances our understanding of the lived experiences of teaching college in prison.

Theoretical Framework

Education as a Means for Social Control

In sociological theories, institutions use social control as an instrument of system maintenance, or stated in other words, “to maintain boundaries, to gain consensus about its mission or goals, and to achieve cohesion and solidarity among members” (Milofsky, 1986, p. 176). Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000) used the term *inculcation* to refer to the frequent and persuasive reinforcing over an extended time period of the arbitrary cultural values of the dominant culture. Through inculcation, these values become internalized, reproduced, and perpetuated after the reinforcement has ceased. Bourdieu called the product of this internalization of cultural values *habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron). However, Bourdieu (1994) also noted the “difficulty and the necessity of a rupture with the thought of the state” (p. 1). His conceptualization of how the state can impose a social order is a backdrop for this study of individuals working in an environment of social control. Our study reflects how the participants found subtle ways to resist the dominant prison culture of social control. An example from our study of a micro-act of resistance occurred when a community college hired one participant to teach math in a federal prison. The participant recalled being sent into the prison “with a rinky-dink math course so I just wrote my own stuff and gave them [the inmate students] statistics.” Through this conformity to a specified body of knowledge, the state imposes a “national common sense” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 13) and requires its “subjects” to submit to state order. Bourdieu posited that the state, especially through the school system, had the power to produce and impose common perceptions and categories of thought. By reinforcing conformity to a specified body of knowledge, the state can ensure that its citizens submit to a consistent social order. According to Bourdieu, the state-imposed social order was largely symbolic because the state did not use external force to maintain order and the citizens did not give their conscious consent to adhere to this order. Submission to the dominant social order is achieved through the state’s molding of the beliefs and values of those citizens who are predisposed to heed them. This ordered social world enables the dominant few to govern the many and impose their domination because the dominant and the dominated have agreed upon the order (Bourdieu, 1994).

A system of education in the ordered society contributes to the reproduction of the social structure by replicating the distribution of cultural capital among the students based on their social classes and groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000). Through a process of cultural programming, schools produce class homogeneity and transmit the accepted or dominant culture that is a common body of knowledge. In this way, students become the specific product of the educational system and exhibit a homogenous approach to perceiving, thinking, and acting. Within this educational system, individuals may believe they have freedom of expression. However, they are constrained by a “common set of previously assimilated master patterns from which ... an infinite number of individual patterns directly applicable to specific situations are generated” (Bourdieu, 1967, p. 342).

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1967) asserted that educational institutions develop strategies to differentiate those who receive the education from those who do not. Therefore, members of the most favored social and economic classes receive education that widens the cultural differentiation between them and the members of the working

and poor classes. For Bourdieu (1986), the distribution of capital among the classes explained the unequal scholastic achievement among children from different social classes. Thus, for example, students from more culturally privileged environments believe they have more control over their circumstances. Banks (1988) also examined the school culture that favored the culture of mainstream students and put students from other backgrounds at a disadvantage. Banks found that students from a higher socioeconomic status tended to have an internal locus of control, which was positively related to academic achievement. When the school selects the “classic” works of literature for incorporation in the curriculum, it systematically transmits and reproduces the canon and the common culture. When conservative philosophies shape the content of material in the classroom, schooling reinforces the ideologies of domination (hooks, 2003). In fact, as Bourdieu (1967) asserted, canons that govern schoolwork might also extend to the world outside of school where their pervasive and persuasive influence is felt through newspaper articles, public lectures, summary reports, and works of scholarship.

Education as the practice of freedom

Freire (1970/2003) viewed education as the practice of freedom by using the dialogue between the teacher and the student to generate opportunities for critical thinking and problem solving. The naïve thinker tries to accommodate the social order by becoming “well-behaved,” thereby seeing the world as static. In contrast, the critical thinker embraces diversity and a continually changing reality. Liberating education in a democratic classroom enables people to “develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* [italics original] they find themselves” (Freire, 1970/2003, p. 83).

Freire (1970/2003) used the phrase “‘banking’ concept of education” (p. 72) to illustrate how traditional education has become an act of depositing where the teacher deposits information into the students as depositories. In the banking concept, students are considered to be adaptable and manageable. The more deposits they store, the more they adapt to the world and the less they engage in critical thinking to transform the world. For Freire (1970/2003), dialogue requires critical thinking and results in the “dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom” (p. 93). One example of a liberating education was Bigelow’s (1990) implementation of Freire’s dialogical education for students at a high school in the American northeast. Bigelow created a democratic classroom in which students were encouraged to critique the larger society through sharing their lives. This example shows how teachers can guide students to locate their experiences in a social context, question the social factors that limit their opportunities, and overcome these barriers to realize their dreams.

Freire’s insistence on education as the practice of freedom influenced hooks (1994) to develop strategies for liberatory education or “engaged pedagogy” in which every student is “an active participant, not a passive consumer” (p. 14). Echoing Freire, hooks wrote that liberatory education places a person within a social and political context and enables her or him to think critically about self and identity in those circumstances. Progressive professors use engaged pedagogy “to make their teaching practices a site of resistance” (hooks, 1994, p. 21) to the dominant discourses. Liberatory education enables

the educator to teach without reinforcing the existing systems of domination and provides students with a means to assume responsibility for their choices (hooks, 1994).

Researchers' Context

Susanna Spaulding is the interviewer and primary researcher and worked in administration at a community college where she managed a prison college program. Clifford Harbour, James Banning, and Timothy Gray Davies are university-based researchers and professors who supervised the research and guided the writing. In preparing for this narrative inquiry, Susanna reflected on her previous collaborations with correctional officials in developing opportunities for inmates to take college courses funded by federal grants to states for incarcerated youth offenders.

The study evolved from personal knowledge of environments where counter-narratives are marginalized. I (Susanna) experienced the tension between education as social control and education as the practice of freedom as a college student in the early 1960s. My liberal arts education opened horizons that contrasted with the confining roles that society expected me to play as a well-behaved worker or compliant spouse. Spending one of my undergraduate college years in France presented my first opportunity to escape from societal conventions and to form independent viewpoints. In the workplace after college, I frequently encountered a similar tension when my questioning of authority conflicted with institutional and corporate demands for loyalty and obedience.

Furthermore, I (Susanna) believe that I understand how crossing boundaries into different cultures fosters personal growth. As a former Peace Corps volunteer and international aid worker from the late 1980s to mid 1990s, I spent extended periods of time in Botswana, Bulgaria, Chad, and Madagascar where I observed and acquired different cultural perspectives, developed a broader worldview, and cultivated my appreciation for diversity. Then during this research, as I listened to the personal narratives of educators who taught college in prison, I was shaping my next career as an adult educator. The passion and dedication of the participants greatly reinvigorated my commitment to teaching and helped me forge a more direct route for my journey back to the college classroom.

Methods

This narrative inquiry explored how a selected group of educators made meaning of their experiences teaching college courses in prison and we were interested in how these educators negotiated “the most restrictive environment for education” (Eggleston & Gehring, 2000, p. 306). We considered how they experienced the conflict of the primary activities of the prison to control and correct with liberatory education’s purposes to enable the practice of freedom and to foster self-actualization. Two central questions guided our inquiry: (a) how do educators who teach college in prison understand and experience their work as teachers of higher learning skills and (b) how do these experiences illuminate the influence of the educators’ character and motivation and mediate the prison environment in the teaching and learning process?

Choosing Narrative Inquiry

The overarching research goal was to understand the lived experiences of the participants in the context of the recurrent debate about opposing conceptualizations of the role that education plays. In choosing a narrative approach, we felt that meaning making would evolve from how the participants told their stories as well as from what the participants described about their experiences. Like many narrative researchers, we had “no hypotheses – only questions or interesting people to explore” (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 260). During the process, we tried to balance openness to the phenomena that emerged with the theoretical framework that we used to situate the narratives.

The definition and use of the term “narrative” vary across disciplines (Riessman & Quinney, 2005) and the narrative field has multiple methodologies in different stages of development (Chase, 2005; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Narrative inquiry may also refer to “an umbrella category of arts-based methodological practices involving storytelling and writing” (Leavy, 2009, p. 26). Therefore, we looked for practical approaches within the writings of narrative researchers and we used a variety of strategies to conduct the interviews, manage the data, and analyze and interpret the narratives. We employed a *bricolage* approach by piecing together existing research techniques in innovative ways to study and present the data.

Recruiting Participants

We recruited our participants after we received approval for our research protocol from the Human Research Committee of an accredited state university that complies with the federal regulations governing research involving human subjects. Our study did not focus on vulnerable populations and no potential participant was involuntarily excluded. The subject population consisted of healthy adults and the selected participants signed an informed consent. We maintained participant confidentiality in written reports by using pseudonyms that each participant chose. I (Susanna) conducted the interviews at locations that the participants picked, which were outside the correctional facilities.

Using electronic mail, a gatekeeper sent a form letter with an invitation to participate in this research study to potential participants who were part-time contract employees hired through local higher education institutions in a Western state to teach college in prison. The gatekeeper was an associate professor at a four-year institution and had coordinated state-wide college prison programs since 1976. Then I (Susanna) contacted the five educators who responded saying they were willing to participate in the study. The participants selected interview sites that were most convenient for them and in which they would feel at ease: a classroom in a local community college, a public restaurant, an office in a nearby high school, and a private home. In total, I conducted two in-depth interviews using open-ended questions with each participant lasting 60 to 90 minutes and yielding detailed and multilayered data.

Identifying and Managing the Data

The data for our narrative inquiry came from in-depth stories collected from a small number of participants through unstructured interviews. Storytelling typically

involves an extended account, which is longer than exchanges in most interactive conversation. When I (Susanna) first met with each participant, the question I asked was “how did you become a correctional educator?” The participants offered monologues about events they had witnessed or experienced. In order to identify sections of the transcription for closer examination, we looked for a working definition of “narrative” that would separate the stories from other forms of discourse such as arguments and question and answer exchanges (Riessman & Quinney, 2005).

We used techniques borrowed from several researchers to identify three types of narrative structures: core narratives, poetic structures, and vignettes. By applying a technique that Riessman (1993) adapted from Labov (1982) (also see Labov and Waletzky, 1967/1997), we identified segments of the detailed transcriptions as core narratives. In addition, we modified Riessman’s (1993) use of poetic structure, which is a linguistic technique she adapted from Gee (1991), to identify a second type of narrative structure by looking at how the story is said. We also located segments of the transcripts that seemed to characterize the lives of the participants in the prison setting. These brief portrayals captured important meanings and represented vignettes (Ely, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988, 1990).

Core narratives

As one strategy for data identification and management, we selected key aspects of a large segment of transcript and identified the core narrative (Riessman, 1993). Following Riessman’s approach, we adapted Labov and Waletzky’s (1967/1997) definition of narrative as a description of past events with a sequence of clauses in a temporal order. We used the sociolinguistic features that Labov and Waletzky developed for oral narratives (see Table 1). This framework enabled us to see how these simple narratives were organized before beginning the analysis (Riessman, 1993).

Table 1

Explanation of Labov and Waletzky’s Elements of Narrative

Element	Meaning
Abstract	Indicates what follows
Orientation	Orients the listener in respect to person, place, time, and behavioral situation (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997)
Complicating action	Describes action that is carried over and “terminated by a result” (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997, p. 28)
Evaluation	Illuminates the meaning of the complicating action
Resolution	Reflects how the action was resolved
Coda	Has “the effect of standing at the present moment of time and pointing to the end of the narrative, identifying it as a remote point in the past” (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997, p. 36)

At the beginning of the first interview, I (Susanna) asked each participant an open-ended question about how she or he came to teaching college in prison. Turning to one participant's account, we identified a core narrative by adapting Labov and Waletzky's (1967/1997) structural elements that provided a skeletal plot. We identified parts of the narrative by their function; that is, to orient, carry the action, or resolve the action (see Appendix A, Table 1). This participant opened her narrative with "that's where I started" and oriented the listener by noting that she was already teaching at a community college. The first complicating action happened when the college asked if she would like to teach in prison. Although she had no way of knowing what kind of experience this would be, she decided to "give it a try." The unknown was resolved when she had the experience for one semester and then asked to teach in prison again "any place, any time." The participant pointed to the end of this complicating action and resolution and referred to present feelings by stating that teaching in prison for her was "just such a positive experience." A second complicating action occurred when the participant had a difficult experience teaching in a women's correctional facility. However, this conflict was resolved when she encountered women in another facility who were "fun to work with." She pointed to the end of the story segment by noting that she has "more positive experiences teaching in the prisons" than in any of her other teaching positions.

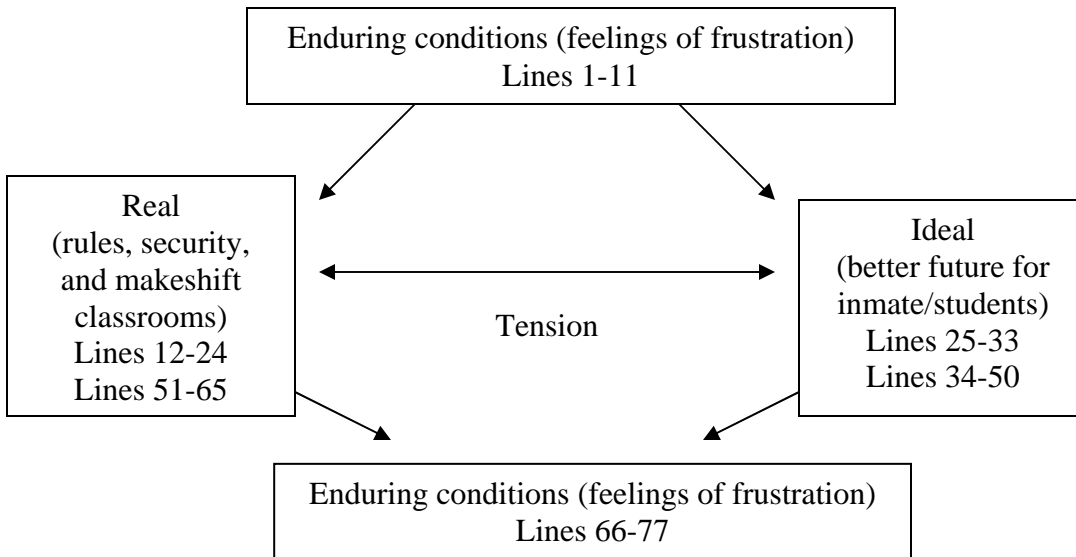
Poetic structures

For Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997), stories have clear beginnings and endings, often used simple past tense verbs, and follow a linear sequence. On the other hand, we found long stretches of talk that were not linear. These segments appeared to be narrativizations because they constructed and interpreted the past, the participant designed them, and they attempted to persuade (Riessman, 1997). These rather long monologues differed from a linear structure because they were organized topically and sometimes shifted between the past, present, and future. Riessman (1993) called these narrative segments "poetic structures" (p. 43) and developed a model for understanding this type of narrative structure informed in part by the work of Gee on the poetic features of language. These non-linear narrative segments are framed by a description of an enduring condition that surrounds the story. They also link the beginning and the conclusion and create tension and feelings of strain that the participant describes in the story. Participants often narrativize particular experiences where there has been "a breach between ideal and real, self and society" (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). Here the tension of the discourse reflects the events as they actually happened and as they might have been possible; that is, the real and the wished for. The narrative often suggests lack of resolution of this tension.

A participant's story about the frustrations of teaching in a prison system offers an example of a poetic structure (see Appendix B, Table 2). This participant framed the narrative with a description of some frustrations of the prison systems she dealt with but which are not resolved. These frustrations were the enduring conditions for which there is no resolution. She was experiencing a breach between the ideal teaching experience with a supportive system and the events she was encountering within a system that seemed to impose barriers for the teachers trying to do their job. This break between what is actually

happening and what is wished for created a tension in the story. In the beginning frame of this poetic structure, the participant gave one example of “some of the frustrations” and in the ending frame, she concluded with “it’s a real pain.” Within the enduring condition of frustration with the prison system, the participant discussed dealing with the prison rules and security practices that made teaching more difficult. She also mentioned the dreams that the inmates had about their life after incarceration, the pleasure of working with the inmate students, and the satisfactions she had when they demonstrated appreciation of her work to facilitate their learning. Figure 1 represents a schematic of this poetic structure and illustrates the tension between the real and the ideal framed by the enduring conditions.

Figure 1. Schematic of the essential tension in a participant’s story about the experience of teaching in a prison setting (schematic design adapted from Riessman, 1993).



Vignettes

Other segments of texts stood out because they seemed representative or typical of other events in the teaching lives of the participants. We decided to pull out these rich “pockets” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 81) of meaningful data to illustrate key phenomena in the form of vignettes. In these segments, the participants told stories through these vignettes, which are intact narratives that allow portraits of the participants to emerge (Van Maanen, 1990). For example, a narrative segment that we identified as a vignette (see Appendix C, Table 3) illustrates a participant’s resistance the marginalizing, or “othering,” of the inmate-students. Here she connected with the Other; that is, the inmate student, as a human being and looked for the goodness in the person. The participant’s motivation for teaching in prison is also embedded in the text as an effort to help the inmate students change through an understanding of their crime and an acceptance of personal responsibility.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Our presentation and interpretation of these personal narratives was meant to convey an impression of each participant's experience. As Gergen and Gergen (2003) noted, knowledge or "truth" is situated within particular communities at particular times. Although we presented large intact segments from the participants' interviews, we may not have captured exactly what happened. First, the participants may have excluded or altered experiences that were troubling or complex. Second, their telling of the stories was located in social discourses and power relations that do not remain constant over time (Riessman, 1993) and we may not have been fully aware of any changes.

In narrative analysis, validation is the process used to make claims for the trustworthiness of the interpretation. Gergen and Gergen (2003) viewed the debate about validity using the metaphor of "generative tension" (p. 585) and suggested several ways of reframing validity for narrative studies. First, the concept of situated knowledge might be understood within a particular community at a particular time. Second, the question of validity might be considered in terms of how alternative methods for data presentation, such as drama or multimedia, function within the culture under investigation. For example, alternative forms of data presentation may "enhance audience interest or engagement" (Gergen & Gergen, p. 588).

We used one of Gergen and Gergen's (2003) approaches to validity, which is the emphasis that qualitative researchers put on reflexivity. Using reflexivity, researchers may tell the truth about the making of the account but do not fully address the issue of the truth of the account itself. Using reflexivity, researchers demonstrate their personal biases and the cultural or political contexts of the interpretation. After I (Susanna) looked at my personal history and how it impacted my research, I felt better prepared to tell the stories of the people I studied as socially, culturally, and personally situated. I also understood that my participants constructed their stories in conjunction with me as the researcher. In addition, we used the second means that Gergen and Gergen discussed for recognizing the problems of validation; that is, multiple voicing. We included the various views of our participants and offered alternative interpretations or perspectives. Still, this approach does not address the concerns about how the researcher represents individual participants who have multiple perspectives and includes or excludes voices in her role as ultimate author of the work. By presenting substantial segments from the participants' transcripts, we attempted to portray fairly these multiple voices. Finally, we used performance as a means of representing the research (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). The performance text that we created provides the reader or audience with possibilities for in-depth engagement with the issues and with the freedom to interpret as they wish.

Organizing the Results

We selected and examined the data we extracted using the techniques for identifying the three narrative structures: core narratives, poetic structures, and vignettes. The data were large and intact segments of the transcribed interviews with the participants. We worked first to understand the dynamics of each participant's stories before we looked for explanations among the stories. Using comparative analysis, we

considered the content of these narrative structures across the sample. We looked for patterns that illuminated the common and different ways the participants made meaning of their experiences. We used these patterns to link the interviews from different participants and to represent individual points of view. As we compared these narratives across the sample, we combined and rearranged the separate narrative structures until six organizing categories emerged that seemed manageable. For example, each participant provided background information with details about how she or he decided to teach in prison, expressed fears or frustrations with the ambiguity of the task, described the physical and emotional environment of the prison, offered their opinions of incarceration, discussed their views of teaching in prison, and presented themselves in relation to their inmate students.

Next we put all the narrative segments into piles related to these six organizing categories. As we worked with the data in the manner, we found references in each of the organizing categories to enduring conditions of working as a part-time instructor teaching college courses in prison. Eventually three clusters of enduring conditions emerged that reflected the experience of teaching college in a prison setting: marginalization and isolation, complicity and countering of the prison hierarchical power structure, and tolerance and alignment with the Other. Looking more closely, we found that these clusters of enduring conditions pointed to three overarching themes: working in a borderland, negotiating power relations, and making personal transformations. For example, the theme about working in borderlands emerged from a grouping or cluster of enduring conditions that included marginalization, isolation, the Othering process, and the insider and outsider dichotomy. (See Figure 2 for a depiction of how the six organizing categories emerged from our structural analysis and led to identification of 12 enduring conditions, which then clustered around three overarching themes.)

These three themes illuminated “more overarching, more holistic qualities” (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995, p. 410) of the narratives and they helped us decide what excerpts to include in the play. Furthermore, these enduring conditions overlapped as when the participants chose not to participate in the system’s Othering process (insider and outsider dichotomy) and instead they resisted to the dominant discourse (resistance and acceptance dichotomy) and aligned themselves with the Other (empathy). In Figure 2, the dotted lines around the clusters of enduring conditions indicate the somewhat porous boundaries among these three groupings.

After we sorted the narratives and selected the excerpts that were most representative of the themes, we had the foundation for the script of one act play in three scenes. Our goal for the play was to create an impression of the participants’ experience using significant excerpts of their dialogue. Next, we identified three essential elements of a dramatic plot: (a) the setup or the rising action in which complication creates a conflict for the participant, (b) the struggle or the climax that is moment of greatest emotional tension and marked a turning point or epiphany, and (c) the solution or the resolution where tensions lessen and the conflicts and complications are resolved (McLaughlin, 1997). The three emerging themes seemed to correspond to these three elements of the dramatic plot and we developed a play in one act and three scenes.

By comparing these plot lines across five first person accounts, we examined the causal sequence of events to locate the turning points. The turning points “signal a break between ideal and real, the cultural script and the counternarrative” (Riessman, 1993, p.

30). We searched for similarities and differences among the stories and identified the unexpected plot twist that might differentiate these narratives from conventional stories of teaching in higher education institutions. An example of a plot twist across the sample is the unexpected opportunity to teach in a prison setting since none of the participants planned to do this. Frequently, we juxtaposed excerpts that expressed contrasting ideas about the same topic to emphasize that each participant told stories that reflected different ways of making meaning of their experiences.

Interpreting the Data

Specifically, these overarching themes represented the essential elements of a plot and we created a scene around each theme. Going inside the prison and deciding to work in a borderland is the rising action in scene one. Negotiating power relations and resolving the tension between resisting and complying with the dominant culture is the conflict in scene two. In scene three, tensions lessen as the characters find resolution and make personal transformations through reflecting on their experiences. This plot was a series of events that were arranged in a loose causal order and unfold over time to explain not just what things happened, but why things happened (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Working in borderlands

The closed environment of a prison prescribed unique patterns of social interactions and language. For example, the prison culture provided correctional staff and inmates with a shared experience and a common language. Gubrium and Holstein (2003b) noted that these particular circumstances provide individuals with a shared format for voicing their thoughts and feelings. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2003b), an institution, like a prison, becomes a discursive environment whose function is to “assemble, alter, and reformulate our lives and selves” (p. 44). As a discursive environment, the prison promotes distinctive ways of speaking of everyday experiences. The official discourse of the prison defines the nature of “crime and criminal, punishment and justice” (Taylor, 2005, p. 234). The part-time prison educator becomes a stranger crossing boundaries and entering into a setting with unfamiliar language and practices.

The participants described the orientation training that they received before they were permitted to teach in a correctional institution. They received a tour of the facility, instructions about appropriate dress, and rules for items that could be brought in or taken out of the facility. Several participants stated that they learned some terms unique to the prison setting from their inmate students. For example, when a student was “up the hill,” he had gotten into trouble and was removed from the class. However, the participants were not part of the correctional system, so they had limited access to and understanding of the organizational discourses and practices that the correctional officers and inmates had in common.

The participants’ narratives of teaching college in prison reflected feelings of isolation, dislocation, and dissonance. They were distanced from other groups on the inside including full-time correctional teaching staff, correctional officers, and inmates. On the outside, even their friends, family, and colleagues were unable to relate to this experience of going inside the prison walls. When the participants went into the prison

for the first time, they experienced the shock of facing surroundings very different from those to which they were accustomed. One of their first startling experiences was entering the main part of the prison through the double iron security gates. As one participant explained, “When that [iron gate] slams shut, you realize that you’re enclosed. That’s why they call it the trap.”

As the participants tried to negotiate the dynamics of the prison system, they often became frustrated. For example, one participant described conducting a class when she was interrupted by a message on the prison loud speaker that she did not understand. However, her students immediately packed up their books and said, “We’ve gotta go now.” In the interview, the participant did not elaborate on this incident nor did she seek to find out what the message meant. Although she expressed frustration, she seemed to accept the interruption. This is consistent with research by Weiss and Fine (2004), who found outsiders are disadvantaged because they misunderstand the “tightly woven fabrics of organizational life” (p. 111) in prison. In an attempt to make meaning, outsiders try to break the prison culture down into discrete elements. On the other hand, insiders, such as inmates and correctional officials, understand how the discrete features of the prison community are deeply connected. According to Weiss and Fine (2004), the insiders understand the dynamics of the dominant discourse of power and the counter narrative of vulnerability and resistance. Through the presentation in the play of sizeable excerpts from interview transcripts, we hope to bring the reader or audience into an understanding of the vulnerability and resistance of the participants within the power structure of the prison setting.

Negotiating power relations

Within the prison, the role of teachers is to provide a place where inmate students can gather and talk among themselves (Linebaugh, 1995). The classroom becomes a space like the laundry room, the kitchen, or the yard where the inmates have private discussions before returning to their cells. However, the educators with whom we spoke were part-time instructors hired by higher education institutions (community colleges and four year universities) outside the prison system, and therefore had limited resources to create an atmosphere of learning. These instructors were also marginalized and isolated from other educators by not being full-time members of a university or community college. Still, they seemed to fashion a space of trust and respect that was free of fear or danger, so that their inmate students could feel safe and focus on studying. In their narratives, the participants talked about the respect that they demonstrated for their inmate students, which created trust between the participant and the students and among the students. The participants, as college instructors, did not wear uniforms and did not carry weapons, so they looked and acted differently than correctional officers. In addition, the correctional officers who represented the prison power structure did not enter the classroom except in emergency situations.

Another aspect of power relations within the prison culture is exemplified when the study participants adjusted to their new surroundings and created a type of hybrid pedagogy to meet the unique and practical education needs of their inmate students. They learned to develop new methods for teaching that worked in prisons within the power structure. One participant offered an example of adapting to and resisting the prison

environment. He was teaching chemistry and wanted to demonstrate a certain characteristic of the topic the inmate students were learning. He brought some harmless props into the prison without explaining to the correctional officers that he was going to use them in an experiment to demonstrate combustion. He said, "They [corrections officers] had no idea. I knew they wouldn't go for that, so I just did it. *Sub rosa*."

In some ways, the participants felt empowered in their prison classrooms to structure curricula that met the needs of their inmate students and fit with their personal values. In another example, one participant used her courses to help the students begin to take personal responsibility for having violated the legal rights of other members of society. The participant established a dialogic and democratic classroom that promoted transformative learning. She encouraged discussions that helped students understand society and see that their personal failures were not due to bad luck or not knowing the right people. She described one of her inmate students who benefited from her ethics course and for the first time in his life he asked "the question if something was right or wrong" instead of asking "how do I get what I want."

Making personal transformations

The prison culture created a discursive environment in which the participants learned to cope with and make sense of their new experiences working in the borderlands of a prison setting and negotiating the power relations of the prison system. This enhanced understanding also helped them make personal transformations. They brought in their knowledge from outside and combined it with new knowledge. For example, when asked if teaching in the prison had changed her life, one participant replied, "I'm more tolerant, maybe. I [had] never had really thought about inmates much." Two other participants also mentioned that the experience of teaching in prison helped them develop a broader understanding of human nature. They said, "Instead of narrowing [my] focus, it actually expanded it," "I didn't know how hungry they [inmate students] really were to be good," and "I have a lot more insight and compassion for their struggle."

Speaking about borderlands implies establishing boundaries with a consideration of who is inside and who is outside. Our sense of self depends on the existence of an "other" who is outside our boundaries (Andrews, 2007). The physical proximity of the participants with their inmate students may have encouraged them to feel more closely aligned with the inmates than with the prison officials. The empathy the participants felt for their students contrasted with the prison's organizational culture that distinguishes "Us" from "Them" (Wright, 2006) where the dominant group has "othered" the inmates. This alignment could have been intensified since the organizations outside the prison, such as a community college, paid the teachers. Although the participants were not activists in prison reform, several of them described their inmate students as multi-dimensional human beings with rights and not only as inmates defined in terms of their deficiencies. For example, one participant explained how she began to recognize the many dimensions of her students while teaching college in a facility for male youth offenders. She said, "What I find in them is the good part [and] the part that's really genuine starts to grow." As she constructed these young men as subjects rather than objects, she was resisting the Othering process

It is also possible to realize in the narratives of our participants how the “personal becomes political.” By sharing their subjective experiences, they were addressing social and political issues. The absence of organized social protest does not imply that they were not concerned about social problems that need to be addressed. They seemed to use the interviews as a space to talk about their personal feelings regarding teaching college in prison and their narratives became a vehicle for expressing their politics. One participant described how she had written to legislators in the mid 1990s to express her concern that the inmates were no longer eligible for Pell Grants to pursue their higher education goals. Another participant discussed how prison education reduced recidivism, which reduced the cost of housing prisoners and was an economic benefit for society when former inmates became productive citizens.

Presenting the Data as Drama

Using the three emergent themes of working in borderlands, negotiating power relations, and making personal transformation, we organized the data into a coherent, collective story about the experiences of teaching college in prison. These experiences centered on moments of individual transformation and on crises in which the conditions the participants faced as prison teachers and the available support were at odds. To convey an impression of these real-life experiences, we presented these data in large and intact segments of the participants’ own words as a text that could be performed; that is, a play in one act and three scenes. The participants are the speakers in the play using their own words from the transcripts and the editing is limited to the transitions between speakers and the comments of the authors as an additional speaker, the Stage Manager.

We borrowed some presentational techniques from readers theatre, defined here as a staged presentation of selected pieces of texts that are thematically linked where the scenery is limited, props are used sparingly, and any acting is highly stylized. (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995). Then we combined these elements with others we adapted from Thornton Wilder’s play, *Our Town*. Wilder’s (1938/2003) play has no scenery or props except for tables, chairs, and ladders, and the audience is encouraged to use imagination in the actions and setting. We also adapted Wilder’s use of a “stage manager” as a narrator, who introduced the play and its setting, interrupted the play from time to time to comment on the action or a character’s background, and sometimes stepped into the scene to talk with the characters. In the role of the interpreter on stage, we suggest ways the experiences of teaching college in prison are enabled and constrained by cultural, social, and institutional circumstances (Chase, 2005). The full play is presented next, followed by a discussion of how drama as a strategy for a comparative analysis of individual narratives helped us understand the lived experiences of our participants.]

Dwelling in Possibility

A One Act Play in Three Scenes about Teaching College Behind Bars

CHARACTERS (in the order of their appearance)

STAGE MANAGER, A commentator

KATHRYN, A possibilist

SELDOM, An optimist

GANDALF, A realist

JACK, A utilitarian

ULYSESS, A pragmatist

The entire play takes place inside a medium security prison

Scene One

No curtain.

No scenery.

The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light.

Presently the STAGE MANAGER, wearing a uniform of a dark blue shirt and black pants, enters and begins placing five small square tables in a row across the stage, each with a metal chair.

As the house lights go down, she ascends a ladder downstage left and watches the late arrivals in the audience.

When the auditorium is in complete darkness, she speaks.

STAGE MANAGER: This play is called “Dwelling in Possibility.” In this play, you will see Kathryn, Seldom, Gandalf, Jack, and Ulysses who teach college in prison. They have never met. Theirs is a solitary task yet fulfilling. Most of us would never attempt this kind of work. The action, such as it is, was, or might have been, takes place in a medium security prison. The time is late afternoon of a spring day.

As the lights come on, an iron gate slams shut. The STAGE MANAGER remains motionless. Seconds later, a second iron gate clangs. Now the STAGE MANAGER speaks.

That sound. Iron gates clanging shut behind you. That was my first impression of going inside a prison. Those doors seem to weigh tons apiece, locking you in, isolating you. Yet you know you are being watched.

Well, I’d better show you how this prison lies. Up here –

Toward the right.

is where the administrative offices are and after that a long hallway with a polished concrete floor and then the trap, the space between the two iron gates.

Toward the back wall.

Over there is another long hall leading to the cells. Or, going in the opposite direction, you’ll find a cavern-like room where inmates may meet their visitors.

She climbs down and approaches the tables and chairs.

This is where some college classes are held for the inmate students. Usually there's an old-fashioned blackboard in the front and a telephone on the wall at the other end. There are no windows and the place has an antiseptic and impersonal feel.

She returns to the ladder and looks at the audience for a minute.

It's eerily quiet, isn't it?

The noise of the iron gate slamming shut is heard again, twice.

There's Kathryn, coming to prepare for her evening course. My goodness, she's carrying a vase of lilacs. Don't they smell lovely?

KATHRYN (*Putting the vase on the table in the center and taking a seat*): But one story is just still precious to me. It was one of my first times teaching [here] and I was teaching Intro to Philosophy. And I was teaching them John Locke's difference between what he called an idea of sensation and an idea of reflection. Idea of sensation is when you immediately feel something that's hot. And the idea of reflection is when you think back and try to remember what it felt like when it was hot. Now I could have just told them that. But it was spring and it was beautiful. And my lilac bush in the back was loaded with lilacs. And so I went out and I cut lilacs for everyone of the students.... And I called the prison first and I said "Can I bring flowers?" And they said "Yes, you can bring flowers as long as you bring them in something plastic, not in something glass." So I put them in a plastic vase and I took them and I hid them under my podium.... [After the students came to class,] I said "I'm going to ask each one of you to close your eyes and I'm going to come around and I'm going to put something in your hand. And what I want you to do is to see how much you can learn about that thing without looking at it." ... Their heads went down; their hands went up. I didn't tell them to put their heads down. I just asked them to close their eyes. And so I went around and I put a lilac in every one of their hands. And they were experimenting and, of course, they smelled heavenly and one boy even tasted a little bit of the flowers to see what that was like. Anyway, we got all finished and they opened their eyes.... And one of the boys said, "Well, you know, I already knew what color it was." I said "You did? How'd you know?" And he said "We had these same flowers at home." One of the other boys said "I think we might have too but it's been so long since I've seen my home, I don't remember." I mean, just such sadness.... Well, they had [the lilacs] on their desks the whole time. When they left, they said "Can we take the flowers?" I said "Well, yes." I had no idea they'd want them. They all go marching out --- I mean I was so touched. Then at the end of the course in their evaluations, several of them said that what they appreciated most was me bringing a flower for them. And I bet some of them still have that pressed in a book someplace.

STAGE MANAGER: I want to tell you something about Kathryn's students. They're inmates, as you may have imagined, and they are taking college courses. All the characters in this play have stories to tell about their experiences teaching college behind bars. In this scene, they'll talk to you and they won't meet each other until the next scene. I will interrupt from time to time with some possible interpretations. They can't hear me unless I take on another role and enter into the dialogue.

Again, the noise of the iron gate slamming shut is heard twice.

There's Ulysses, Seldom, Gandalf, and Jack. They've also come early to prepare for their evening courses. Each teaches college courses at a different correctional facility.

They come along from the right and take a seat. When they speak, it's to the audience.

SELDOM: When that slams shut, you realize that you're enclosed. That's why they call it the trap. And that's the first time you hear the bars and the doors swing shut behind you and it's a rather jarring sound, especially the first time you hear it. And the trap, to describe it is, you walk into the prison and from the administration part in the front to the actual prison in the back, there are two gates that have to be opened and shut consecutively for you to go through them. I think I got the job because they watched me the first time hearing that clanging and I just kinda stood there. I didn't jump or get jittery.

GANDALF: I was in a high security facility once and I went through one, two, three, four and one more [gates slamming behind me]. Yeah. It's one, two, three, four, and then I was inside. [Then] I was always escorted. [At another facility after the gates], you'd go in and then you'd go through the doors and then go down the stairs and walk around the building and go into the building back here and go down the stairs. The classroom's right down there in the basement. And I've been there at night and I have never, ever felt afraid. Never. My inmates can sense this. There's no fear. There's just no fear.

JACK: And all the bars and the waits and the delays that just become part of the, I don't want to say hassle, but of the standard grade frustrations, that you have to deal with.... And I just kinda slug it out for a while. I think late in the semester, I figured "You know, this is doable, this is fun. Just teaching in a little bit different setting."

SELDOM: Ah, again, it might even be an antagonistic situation in the beginning where the corrections officer says "Well, OK, another chocolate heart's coming in and going to try to be a do-gooder." And then he realizes later that this has been doing him some good. And I know, for example, most of the students are very well behaved because they want [the college courses], not just in class, but in general. And corrections [administration] likes to see that because they're seeing that this has a very calming effect.

KATHRYN: Ah, I've taught there enough that I do feel secure. Their security on the inmates is very, very tight there. No one is out of their buildings except at what they call "movement." And then they all move together and they go with staff and guards. And then everyone is in a building. Everything shuts down and it's like nobody lives here. That's what it feels like when you're there because there's nobody around.

GANDALF: They know when I go in and they know when I come out. You have to sign in, you know, what time you go in and when they have a count, if I'm in there, I'm part of the count because my name is on the visitors' book. But after you go in, [I wonder] how they remember you. I can go through the gate maybe twice and they know who I am and what I'm doing. And they just open the gate and then I walk in and then they close it.

STAGE MANAGER: Interesting. The power of this hierarchical observation, as Foucault (1977) explained, enables the modern prison to regulate the conduct of its inhabitants by "the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies" (p. 172).

KATHRYN: If I were just to go back over my own experience, I would call it "eager uncertainty." Because the uncertainty is partly ... about people thinking it's courageous to go into a prison. I don't think I ever thought about it as being courageous at all. It's more about being foolish. Because there is a certain foolhardiness that is involved especially in the sort of situation that I was teaching in first because I was totally unprotected. I was with this group of eighteen boys, any one of which could have cracked me in two if they really wanted to. And being far away from the door, being far away from the phone, no one else around. I mean, if you look at it just objectively, that could be seen as sort of foolhardy to do it.

SELDOM: I mean, it's an absolutely artificial environment and you have to understand it. Nobody is there, you know, of their own volition, for example. The one thing that I see that is universally true and the one thing that unifies them, is not race. It's not ethnicity. It's not whether they're urban or rural. It's that they're all poor. Poverty is the one unifying factor in prison. If you're rich, you get an attorney and you don't go to prison. I mean, maybe there's the few that have to be given as sacrifices. But for the most, these are guys who couldn't afford an attorney and got brought to prison. Where rich people are just as guilty and either get no time or little time. Or maybe get entirely, you know, off because they got a good lawyer. And you look at some of our famous people who spend a lot of money to stay out of prison and were successful.

JACK: But I think one thing that is kinda universal – part of the background. It's like, reminded me of so much of back in the army in basic training. Everybody hates the army. After a while, you know, we just said "OK. Let's stick it out. We'll make it." Yeah. Hadn't felt that kind of group feeling for forty years, whatever it was. Well,

the discipline of basic training, you know, up early, work hard, everybody tired. That's what [the prison environment] reminded me of.

STAGE MANAGER: Now perhaps you see another dimension of the Othering process. I think the metaphor of prison teacher as stranger will help you understand the experience of teaching on the inside (Wright, 2006). These strangers experience a relational tension from other groups, such as teachers on the outside, prisoners, guards, and community members. By going inside, it's as if they are traveling to a foreign land and returning to tell about it.

KATHRYN: I think that there aren't that many people who would want to [teach college in prison]. They see it as us and them. They're the bad people. We're the good people. They said that until one day in an ethics class [at the university], I just said "Now in your little private black book that nobody else ever sees, would you have to say that you have done some things for which you could be sitting in jail for?" And I just heard this little ripple of laughter through the class from the guys. And I didn't say any more. It's like, you know, they were caught; they were caught. But we cannot divide ourselves into us and them. We're all us and them. And maybe some things that they have done, in reality are less bad than what some other things people have done but you don't go to jail for. You know, you can wreck a home by committing adultery but you don't go to jail for it generally. But somebody that steals your car, they go to jail. You can't judge it that way.... Yes, and I tell stories to my students [on the outside]. You know, they're quite flabbergasted sometimes when they find out that's a prisoner whom I was talking about.

STAGE MANAGER: This empathy is complex. Recognizing oneself in the Other may offer new ways of understanding of how being complicit and countering intersect (Bamberg, 2004). I wonder if Kathryn is better able to understand the Other, the prisoner, since she is also the Other as a college instructor teaching inside the prison.

ULYSSES: [*My advice is*] don't fall into the habit of thinking of them as anything other than your students. There's a tendency to think of you as one of them, you know. And I think that's very dangerous. Especially in a prison, remember who you are and why you're there and who they are. And maintain a professional point of view and demeanor, and that puts everybody at ease. If you empathize too much with them that means trouble for you and them both. But get ready to have fun, you know. Because they're in a situation now that they want to protect. They want to do well. They want you to come back. They want you to know who they are and they want to feel safe in the group. Because they're not with their cellmates, their little cabal. They're in with all different inmates from all over the prison. And they don't know and trust some of them and they're afraid of some of them. So they want to feel safe in your class. And it's important for that reason, too, to be clear about your rules and your expectations.

SELDOM: I believe that everyone in prison puts on a game face, I think, that would be a good way to say it. Staff puts on and takes off a game face. I think inmates have to put on a game face for their own protection and I think basically for their own personality, whatever they choose it to be.... And trust is difficult to achieve and maintain in prison partly because staff is not encouraged to trust inmates nor are inmates encouraged to trust staff. You don't trust someone who has the ability to make your life miserable or shorten it... I think teaching staff who get too involved with inmates are setting themselves up for manipulation and maybe some day they'll do something that's against the rules that will cost them their job, or security or their lives. Who knows. And it's always, I think, important to realize that "OK, I'm here to help you, but there are limits. There are rules. And you and I both know them and we're not going to go beyond that."

GANDALF: *[You know, we're here now and we work under their rules.]* Those are some of the frustrations. It's the time [when] something's said over the loud speaker, they just all pack up their stuff and slam their books shut and pick up and they say "we've gotta go now." And so, they go. And so there I am, no class. It's things like this, that's frustrating. It's dealing with the system but not with the inmates. Not with the inmates. But sometimes they're not up to speed as far as the [course content] is concerned but we just do what we can. And what I do is I try to get them as good a background as they can possibly have to go on to the next level. And some of them are looking at becoming lawyers and accountants and, you know, like that. They have plans when they get out.

STAGE MANAGER: I can provide a brief history and some political perspective before we move on. Although education has been a component of the U.S. criminal justice systems from the beginning, college programs were only introduced in the mid-twentieth century. In the 60s and 70s, the programs expanded through federal Pell grant funding and prison education focused on rehabilitation and reintegration. Then in 1994, President Clinton signed the omnibus crime bill, which eliminated inmates' eligibility for financial assistance through the Pell Grants for college programs. Since then funding has been applied to incapacitation or removing the offenders from the street instead of rehabilitation (LoBuglio, 2001). This political philosophy of "tough on crime" reflects that the people generally do not want their tax dollars going to support college programs for inmates. However, the issue may not be economic but may stem from theoretical beliefs of politicians and correctional educators about the purpose of educational programs for inmates (Messmer, 2003). Yes, prison education takes place in a highly charged political context (Wright, 2001).

KATHRYN: And, you know, there are many, many people who don't think those young people deserve to go to college, not unless they pay for it themselves. And they're angry about taxes being used for their education. And I know that from teaching ethics and philosophy in other conditions. But what I say to them is that "whether we educate them or not, they're going to be our neighbors. So would you rather have a neighbor who hasn't gotten a start on, ah, a possibility for a whole new life,

much better than before. Or would you rather have someone who comes out, has been bored to death there, has only gotten angrier and now they're your neighbors?" You know, one out of every 32 adults in this country are incarcerated or on parole. So you're inevitably going to get some neighbors who have been in jail. Well, my next-door neighbor, I know.... If they're older than 25, they cannot take any course without paying for it. If it were up to them to have to pay for it, where would they get the money? I mean, for working, they get 60 cents a day. That's not going to get them any tuition.

STAGE MANAGER: That's the end of the first scene. Nothing much has happened yet. As Jack said, it's just teaching in a little bit different setting.

Lights dim. There's scuffling of tables and chairs.

Scene Two

As the lights come up, the tables are arranged in a semicircle, creating a physical and psychological space for dialogue. The five characters are seated. The vase of lilacs is on the floor in the center of the semicircle. The STAGE MANAGER is in her accustomed place watching the audience.

STAGE MANAGER: One day has gone by and all that can happen in twenty-four hours. In this scene, I've arranged for the characters to meet so that they can help Kathryn cope with an incident that took place in her evening class after we saw her last.

KATHRYN: *[Well, I'll tell you what happened last night. It was the only time I was worried at all.]* I still think I have reason to be worried although everyone inside denies it. Well, I had given an unfavorable report on one of the students and corrected him on not giving his effort to his work. I did not know what his reaction was. But when I came back to class the next time, one of the teachers who had been there for many years stopped me. He said "I want to warn you that so and so said that he is going to" I don't remember what he said but it sounded a little bit threatening. ... I never had to do this before.... You know, if a student did something, I would just talk to him like I would talk to a student in any other classroom [on the outside], find out what was going on.... But I was not aware that the educational report would affect their standing in their working up to get more privileges. So when I gave a bad report for this one student, he got knocked down. That's why he was angry. But I didn't know any of this. So I went to class and I had all the tables in a circle. We were a small class and we often did that for philosophy so we could really debate with each other.... And I was sitting on this side and the young man came in and sat directly across from me and everyone filled in around. And I felt uneasy but I thought "Well, he's on the other side. I don't know what he has in mind, if anything." And we had no more than just, I mean, I don't know if we had actually started the class and two guards came in and took him away just like that.... I was so startled when the guards came in and I said "When will you be bringing him back?" And they said something like "We'll see, ma'am."

STAGE MANAGER: And she never saw him again.

KATHRYN: That had never happened in a class, ever. And has never happened since. So my sense was that [the student] had been talking and he was going to do something.... So I went to talk to that teacher who had warned me because I knew he really had his finger on the pulse of all these young guys. And I asked him, and I've asked him more than once, and he said "Oh, no, I don't think he would have done anything. No, no." ... I never did learn. I mean, the authorities don't tell me. It's like "You're just nosey. This is our business." So I don't ask them questions. [But] I'm more interested in that than I was. At first I was just teaching. But as I see more and more pieces not doing well together.... You know, I would like to know where it all comes from and how they do it.

STAGE MANAGER: As you know, these educators never met. I thought it would have been illuminating if they could have shared their stories with each other to enhance the meaning they made from their lived experience. It might have proceeded like this.

GANDALF: [*Yes, Kathryn, we all have to go through the process.*] When they send somebody to the hole [to segregation], they go in and they take all of their school stuff. They take their books, their calculators. They take all of it. And then lots of times, it's not going to get back. It's not going to get back to the inmate student. Where I teach, there's one man who's in charge of all this stuff. This one woman had to go to him and ask him to go into this inmate's stuff and get my calculator. And I gave it back to the inmate. But that's how we had to go through the process. Yeah, it's interesting.

SELDOM: [*Maybe we don't see it but,*] you know, there are a lot of interesting things going on in prisons. I have believed in the potential of the prison system being what it's called: "a correctional system." And I think when people look at [state] corrections departments and don't see any correction, they have a right to ask "Then what's my money going to?"

STAGE MANAGER: Considering what Seldom just said, I wonder about the implications of Foucault's (1977) concern that prison is a whole series of power relations which alter people, "correct" them. Prison is more than detention but it is a place where people are made into subjects. Although this play is not about the prisoners, the prison setting provides opportunity to explore the complex power relations that are illuminated by the stories of these educators.

KATHRYN: [*Yes, Seldom, correct, rehabilitate, reintegrate – all noble goals for us as educators, still there's another side.*] There are some times that you don't know you're not supposed to do [something]. For instance, one of the young men that I had for two classes was working in the library. And I had the next class and they needed to do a research paper. And I didn't know what philosophical resources were in their little library. And so I asked him if he would compile a good

bibliography. Well, within an hour, he had this wonderful bibliography, all just neat as a pin. So I wrote him a little thank you note and I took it over to give it to the head librarian because I didn't think he would be there that day. But he was there so I handed it to him. And he almost cried and he read it and he said "You know, this is the only and the first and only thank you note that I have every received since I've been here for four and a half years." Well when you think about it you wouldn't expect him to get a thank you note but it does say something about how hungry he was for that recognition. But later I found out that you're never to give a note to a prisoner. You know. It didn't occur to me. But it helped me to understand a very basic innocence. You know, I think that basically we are all innocent. And that no matter what we've done, we're basically innocent. And I do see that in them, very much so. And if they could find – and I see this happening to them – when they can find that their life can be really happy and that they can get what they need out of life without hurting other people to get it. It's a great relief for some of them.

JACK: *[I understand about not knowing what to do, Kathryn, but sometimes you do something you know you shouldn't do. And I didn't get caught on this one.]* When I was teaching chemistry, I managed to bring in a few props. And of course, these were always subject to scrutiny. But it worked out OK. I have crystal models. And I have an experiment I do with methyl alcohol. And, just a little pop bottle, plastic pop bottle, 16 ounce. And I put a little alcohol vapor in there and then dump it out, dry, and then spark it off and look for several things. Ah, appeals to three of the five senses. There's no taste and there's no smell but there's everything else.... So we talk about all this.... They [the corrections staff] had no idea I was making fire. They had no idea. I knew they wouldn't go for that, so I just did it. Sub rosa.

STAGE MANAGER: Before I heard these stories, I imagined that the voices of those teaching in prison might present a different perspective education as the practice of freedom. I thought that emphasizing critical thinking and moral and intellectual reasoning might challenge the established order of a correctional facility. I imagined that the educators' desire to move students beyond the prison walls would collide with the prison administrators need to maintain control of inmates within the walls. However, I did not find sites of opposition and conflicts with carceral authority. I found small acts of kindness that I interpreted as subtle resistance to the dehumanizing that takes place in total institution. This "mischievous co-mingling of counter and dominant discourses" (Torre et al., 2001, p. 154) was unexpected.

GANDALF: *[Jack and Kathryn, I think that you showed your students that you really cared about them and their learning.]* And I had been told by the inmates that the fact that I treat them like human beings, it makes a big difference in how they respond to me. I was told in a [corrections department] training session that all inmates have the same name: Inmate. So it's Inmate whatever, Inmate whatever. I call them by their first names. Then they – and they call me "Dr. Gandalf." It eventually just gets shortened to "Doc." Doesn't seem to take them very long to get there either.

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, I agree with Goffman (1958/1997) here that the loss of one's name "can be a great curtailment of the self" (p. 57).

JACK: One young man over here. He was an exceptional – He's in for life, he told me. But he wants to go into business. He was my top student in every class I taught. And he would come up to me "Hey, Teach. What's --?" and ask me something about a business he was planning. And I'd say "Yeah, do this." You know. "Get a loan from small business administration." And, I think that giving unwanted advice is probably not a good idea. But when they ask, I'm happy to respond.

ULYSSES: *[That's not what I would do. I could never get as personal as you and Gandalf do, Jack.]* I usually tell [the students] to call me Mr. [with my last name] and they always do. In the class, that's how they do it.... I've been reading this book about --getting ready for my class the next time -- it sounds really far a field but in China back about twenty eight hundred, three thousand years ago, Confucius was having an influence on how the Chinese thought about themselves. And he emphasized the importance of ritual in their relationships in their society. And I got to thinking "why would that be so important?" And then I'm walking out the prison and the guard says to me, "Have a nice evening" You know it's an exaggerated politeness between the guard in the control room and anybody who's outside. His first approach is to be very polite and very politely interested. Now I begin to realize that in this big glass enclosure and all these things he has to do inside this big glass enclosure, he can't always be as responsive or as personal as he could be but it's important to go through that ritual of politeness. And it's important for me to respond to that in kind because if I get irritated at having to wait five minutes for the door to open, it's not his fault. And there's nothing he can do. He has protocols to follow. So it occurred to me that this was one of the rituals of prison among the staff when they're at their post. And I began to realize that this is something that I hadn't really taken note of but when I thought about it, it's a very ordinary thing. They're frequently very polite to other staff members and they don't want conflict among themselves, other staff members. They do everything they can to keep that down. You know, because there's so much potential for conflict with the inmates, so among the staff there are a lot of rituals to observe, and follow, of politeness and carrying on with civility.

STAGE MANAGER: This reminds me of a quote from the eighteenth century writer Samuel Johnson: "When once the forms of civility are violated, there remains little hope of return to kindness or decency." Now I could see maintaining civility in the classroom as a subtle form of resistance to the dominant discourse of those in power who frequently act without civility toward the inmates. Or might it be one of the power relations that Foucault (1977) was concerned about that serve to alter people, to "correct" them?

KATHRYN: *[You know, I agree with Ulysses. Respect in the classroom is so important.]* When I came back this year to teach, it wasn't that they were being disrespectful; they were being more like really thoughtless. You know, they were sitting three at a

table and they would sit there and talk while I was talking, you know. So the second class, we had a little heart to heart at the beginning. Because I thought “Let’s not let this go on because then it’ll just be a yelling match.” And so I just talked to them.... And I said “It’s just, you know, that mutual respect. I respect you and you respect me.” I said “One of the ways you do that is when I’m talking, you’re not talking to each other.” And I said “When one of the other students is talking, like when I’ve asked them a question, then all of you need to be listening.” It isn’t like ‘oh, this is time for us to talk.’” So I was right up front and we talked about respect, you know. Well since that time, when they enter, I’m always at the door. I open the door for them ‘cause it’s locked from the outside. And I shake hands with them and I greet them. And they come in and I insist that they call me Ms. with my last name and not just “Ms.” That’s their thing. They call me “Ms.” I don’t like it at all.

ULYSSES: *[And actually, Kathryn, that politeness,]* it’s something that you don’t see between staff and inmates. But the higher up that you get in the staff, the more likely they are to treat the inmates with politeness and civility. A lot of the guards, because they have tough situations and they don’t have much education by and large, those rituals that they observe among themselves, they don’t carry over to the inmates. And, it kind of poisons the atmosphere sometimes. I think if there were more politeness between the staff in addressing the inmates, the inmates would respond better. Because I notice sometimes when an officer comes into the visiting room when I’m having class, that inmates frequently bristle and, you know, this means trouble to them and something’s going to happen. And the guards often are very short with them and very, what’s the word; well, just short with them. And don’t show any inclination to be respectful. They don’t necessarily curse at them but they just show that, ah, there’s not going to be any civil exchange.

An announcement is made over the intercom, something that only those on the inside understand.

STAGE MANAGER: *(briskly enters as a correctional officer):* You’ll have to go now. We need this room and you must leave immediately.

Lights dim. Audience again hears scuffling of tables and chairs.

Scene Three

As the lights come up, there’s wooden bench just right of center on which Kathryn and Gandalf are sitting. They’ve been moved to the visitor’s room. Kathryn is holding the vase of lilacs. Just left of center, Ulysses, Jack, and Seldom are standing. And the STAGE MANAGER is in her usual place on the ladder.

STAGE MANAGER: So what does this all mean? Maybe it’s useful to learn how it started, this teaching behind bars. Let’s go back to the beginning to find out what draws educators to this contradictory and often frustrating setting.

KATHRYN: Well, you know, working in a prison setting has always [been] just something that I admired in other people but I thought that it would probably be something that I would never do.

GANDALF: [*Yes, Kathryn, I'd also be interested in how you and the others found your way inside.*] I was teaching for a local community college and they asked me if I'd like to go behind the walls. And I said "Sure, I'll give it a try." And after that semester, I went back to the director and I said "Send me in any place, any time." It was just such a positive experience.... I've had more positive experiences teaching in the prisons than I ever had at the high school or even at the university. These inmates, they're so eager. And most of them are really, really bright. And they understand the importance of an education. And, they really, really work hard.

SELDOM: [*Well, like Gandalf, I was already in higher education.*] I started teaching with a community college about thirteen and a half years ago almost now. I really didn't know a lot about prison before that. And [teaching college in prison] gave me an opportunity to come back in the evenings and use my degree and credentials. So it was, it was a good change.... And sometimes, I'll go home from class just so energized that I can't go to bed. You know, I've got to sit and talk it over at home before I can quit.... It has been very good, very exciting. When you have a group that is hungry and, a seriously captive audience, they're good. And they really perform for you. They want to do well. I think if nothing else, I could do just this and be satisfied.

KATHRYN: [*I started much like both of you did.*] I was teaching at the university out here and I only taught one semester and they didn't need me in that department the next semester. I was teaching as an adjunct. I thought, I know how to read and write pretty well. So I'll check and see if there's anything that would be possible to teach [for the English department]. And the answer back was we don't have an opening here but they really need someone at the youth correctional facility. I had no idea what that was. And I thought, "Well, ah, OK, whatever." So I taught there that semester, and, ah, just really got hooked. Just go hooked. Not on teaching courses but got hooked on working with those young people.

ULYSSES: [*Well, for me it was different because*] somebody [from a university] just got in touch with me. And, at that time, they had a program for prisoners.... They had an opening for a class [in my field] and I've doing that for about a year, a couple of semesters running.... You know, I like that about teaching there [in prison] because they [the inmate students] don't have lots of distractions. I mean, they come to class and that might be the one time during the week when they see somebody who is not an officer or somebody who works there and is telling them what to do. And, so, as teachers, we don't have to compete with very much. And we have really a captive audience, in more than one sense.

JACK: [*I may have been more purposeful than any of you.*] When I first moved here, I thought "Well, that would be nice to try to teach math in the prison." And [this

university] advertised for a teacher.... And I thought, “I don’t know anything about them.” I just called up blind and got a hold of the vice president some how and she said “You should talk to the [prison program director]. And so I talked to him and went over to his house and he said “sure, you want to teach algebra?” And I said, “Oh, yeah, I could teach algebra pretty easily.” ... And that was interesting.

STAGE MANAGER: But I’m interested in knowing what these teachers in the borderlands have learned from their experiences. How have they changed? They have experienced the tension between knowing their students as human beings who need love, acceptance, and hope and feel remorse and realizing that their students must be kept at a social distance (Wright, 2006). They operate in a total institution as Goffman (1958/1997) described: a social arrangement like a prison that regulates all aspects of individuals’ lives under one roof and according to one rational plan. These educators are caught between identifying with the prison organization and opposing it. I see stories of professional dilemmas, perhaps intensified by the total institution.

KATHRYN: [*Those are good questions, Jack.*] I think you have to have a certain combination of traits in yourself to be able to do it because if you’re too empathetic and sympathetic for the inmates, that’s not good. Because it takes you over. Because you can’t to see it, you know. And on the other [hand], if they’re only students to you and you’re there to make some money, I don’t think that’s good for the students. I think it belittles them eventually. And so for me, it is truly a calling. Teaching in general is a calling but this is a particular calling. And, I don’t feel sorry for them. I think they’re very lucky that they’re there and not some place else. And I think they’re very lucky that they got caught in time to save them from self-destruction. You know, they’re clean and sober, maybe some of them for the first time since they were quite young. They not mixed up in – they’re not terrified for their lives everyday... I think teaching in prison has helped me really see the good part of them. It’s like if you draw a pie, which represents the person, and this criminal activity, that’s a slice. And there’s the great piece of goodwill. Really wanting something better. I mean when they say things like “Do you know I never dreamed I’d go to college. I am the first in my family to ever go to college and my family is so proud of me.” And here he’s sitting behind bars going to college but –

GANDALF: [*I look at this a little differently than you do, Kathryn.*] I haven’t any idea [if taking college classes makes a difference for them.] I just go in to do my job and go out. And I never see that group [of students] again.

SELDOM: [*Yes, both of you have found your balance. For me,*] I think it is important to realize that we are working in a dangerous situation with dangerous people who – there’s a reason they’re locked up. And I think we fool ourselves sometimes when we tend to think “Well, they’re really nice guys underneath.” Yes, they are but there’s that other part. That dichotomy in every personality. Because we’re bringing out a different aspect of personality when we teach. Especially when we give them the feeling that we’re treating them just like we would treat students on the outside.

And we do, but we always have to step back a little bit and say “OK, I may trust my students out here, I can never trust you.” So there’s always a wall.

STAGE MANAGER: As these narratives unfold, I see the struggle to shape a professional identity in this borderland behind bars. Do you think these educators identify with their own field or with the security concerns at their correctional facility? Do their advanced degrees set them apart from correctional officers?

JACK: *[None of you seemed to have connected with these inmates through a personal experience, as I have.]* ... Narrow escapes. I’ve got three boys. Two of them, I’ve taken down to the police department on account of things I didn’t like. There were teenagers. Got their attention. And just dumb stuff. Fourteen, fifteen year old stuff. Could have, not too much of a push, could have gotten this far with them. Could have been in there. Yeah, bad companions. Narrow escapes, yeah.

KATHRYN: *[Yes, Jack.]* Some of them didn’t have many moorings to begin with and certainly didn’t gain them as they went through their lives. And so that was a new insight for me. I have a great deal of hope for them and respect for their struggle because when you’re young, you can slide into things. It is so innocent.

STAGE MANAGER: And I’m interested in their personal transformations. Perhaps these educators are feeling the tension between their memories of the past and their anticipations of the future (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). How do they understand their own behavior and the behavior of their inmate students? Are they empathic because they are close enough to see the humanity of their students?

KATHRYN: So I think seeing them as real people and with a great deal of hope for their potential was what really struck me ... and their concern for me. You know, I started loosing my voice last night and they got very concerned. So I found that I am probably like their grandma. I would imagine. I don’t know who I am to them, who I represent to them, if I represent somebody.... And so, basically, I think I just feel cared about by them. I mean, they’re not thoughtless students. Some of them are. Some of them are pretty young and silly, you know. But many of them are very, very concerned about how you are. And that’s interesting to me.

ULYSSES: *[Unlike you, Kathryn,]* when I connect with somebody that doesn’t mean a thing to me.... What I’m really looking for is a productive relationship. You know, something that’s connected with my work or interests. And that’s what I like.... So maybe that’s why I get along well in the prison environment. It feels safe and I feel like I’m at home there ... able to connect with inmates without feeling like I’m getting in too deep or not knowing where the boundaries are, which is a trouble for some people. But I’ve never had that problem.

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, although these educators share a common life experience, they have different ways of making meaning. I’ve tried to respect the individuality

of their stories while noting transcendent themes – or the lack of them. I’ve tried not to simplify, categorize, slice and dice these experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

SELDOM: *[You’ve not yet answered one of Jack’s questions: How has this experience changed you?]* It has changed me in many ways. And I almost hate to even admit this but I lived in a relatively narrow culture in a conservative town even though I was out there in the community.... Well, when I came here, I realized the world was a lot bigger than [that town]. And I opened up a little bit. I, for example, became a lot less homophobic.... Here in prison, I had a larger mix. Maybe I was teaching all males but I was teaching a wider range of ages, ethnic, cultural backgrounds. I was teaching people from all other the country. And I think that had expanded my attitude and my feelings about what the rest of world is really like. And so instead of narrowing the focus, it actually expanded it.

KATHRYN: I think teaching in prison has helped me really see that the actions of criminal activity that they’ve been engaged in is like if you draw a pie, which represents the person, that’s a slice. And there’s this great, great piece of goodness. And not just goodness, good will. Really wanting something better. I mean when they say things like “Do you know I never dreamed I’d go to college. I’m the first in my whole family to ever go to college and my family is so proud of me.” And here he’s sitting behind bars going to college but --

STAGE MANAGER: Kathryn continues to see possibility, reminding me of a comment I read recently about people who believe in making the world a better place: “That may be naïve, but idealism is a form of resistance” (Dargis, 2006, para 10).

ULYSSES: *[Well, I look at this differently, Kathryn. I think I’m more of a utilitarian.]* [My experience has] made me a better teacher, a better reader of literature, you know. But I don’t think it’s changed me in any important ways, I guess. What I bring to it is I continue to hone my skills, and I get some new insights every time I teach a piece of literature, I get new insights into it. Not necessarily because they provide them but just in the process of teaching it, you see it a little bit differently. And you see it in different context and I really like that. I like literature and it’s a wonderful opportunity to pursue that.

GANDALF: Yes, I’m more tolerant, maybe. I never had really thought about inmates much one way or the other. But I have come to believe that they are put in prison as punishment, not for punishment.

KATHRYN: *[Right.]* You cannot let your heart be broken there because, you know, that doesn’t help them. You have to see them as people who have really gotten into bad trouble and have victimized other people. And they need to change their lives. If you see them only as victims, I think it could be problematic. They know right away whether you’re somebody who’s going to commiserate with them. You know. It’s not that I think everybody’s been treated justly that gets in there. I don’t think that. I think that some people have been used as examples. You know. I think some of

them have been probably sentenced with a, with a certain prejudice or racism involved. I think that's probably true. You know. But if that's, if that's the way I see the whole thing, I need to be outside of it working for change. But probably not on the inside working with them.

STAGE MANAGER (*Looking at her watch*): Well, it's time for Kathryn, Gandalf, Jack, Ulysses, and Seldom to return to their separate and unconnected lives, perhaps buoyed by knowing they are not alone in their work as teachers of college in prison. Now you have visited a place that you might not have gone to before and you have learned about challenges that others have confronted. Throughout this play, I tried to show, not just tell, you about the lived experiences of these educators. What will you take away that you learned from these outsiders within?

The house lights gradually brighten. As the audience leaves the theater, the iron gates clang twice.

Discussion: Drama as a Strategy for Comparative Analysis

Our participants seemed to construct their narratives in order to make meaning of the disorderly and ambiguous experiences of teaching college in prison. We grappled with how to capture and communicate the “full, rounded uniqueness” (Jenkins & O’Toole, 1978, p. 542) of these individuals and not oversimplify their experiences. Furthermore, we wanted to accurately portray the three dimensional space they inhabited without distorting it (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995). Like Richardson (1993), we thought a drama would bring shape to the collective experience of the storytellers. By presenting their interview data in a play, we tried to give dimension to the characters and substance to the particular place in which they worked.

The development of the play illustrates how we used a comparative analysis to represent and interpret the individual stories of our participants. Our levels of analyses for this narrative inquiry can be compared with those of a comparative case study: within-case and cross-case. We first studied the data within the stories told by five individual participants. Then we learned “as much about the contextual variables as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 1994) to understand the local dynamics. Looking across the stories deepened our understanding of the phenomenon and enabled us to present a more powerful collective story.

The visual collage of the play is interpretative because we decided what to include and how to compose the scenes. In our interpretation, we wanted to address the “practical and sited production of everyday life” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003a, p. 230). We avoided theorizing when we constructed the play and we attempted to keep the individual stories intact as we presented them in a shared world of lived experiences. By using large and intact segments from the participants’ transcripts, we tried to preserve the narrative environments of the “storytellers and their worlds” (Gubrium, 2005, p. 525).

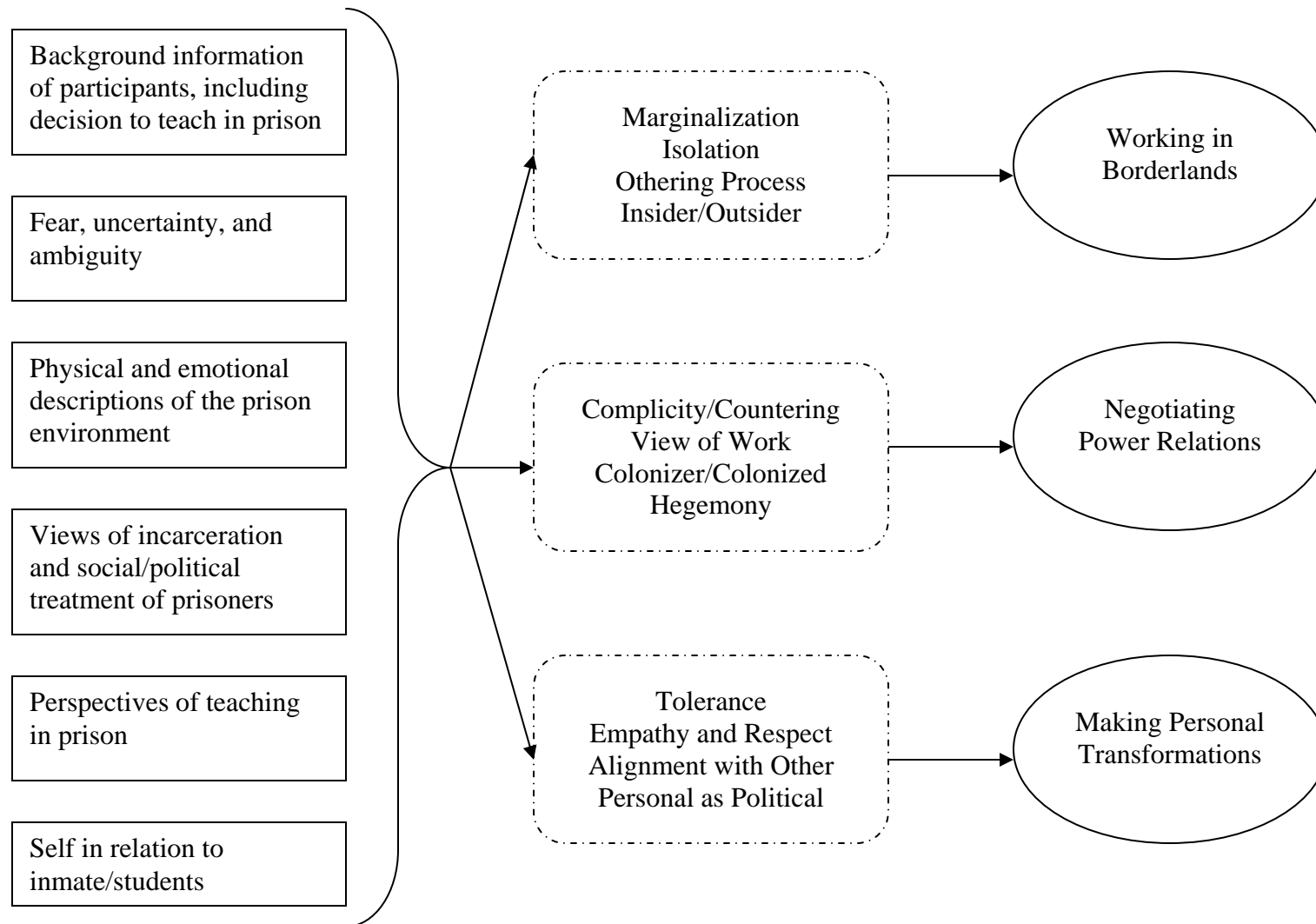
The experience our participants had in common was they were each contracted as part-time instructors by local higher education institutions to teach in prison education programs that offered college courses to eligible inmate students. Although they differed in their motivation, education, length of time teaching college in prison, and prior work

experience, they shared a passion for teaching and had mainly positive experiences teaching college in prison. As the play illuminates, each participant offered distinctive perspectives of her or his role as a prison educator. Furthermore, they exercised individual strategies for resolving the tension the prison administration's focus on inmate control and their desire to create a democratic classroom with open dialogue and discussion among the inmate students. The "outsider within" (Collins, 1991, p. 35) status of these prison educators, who were not part of the prison hierarchical power system, offered a special vantage point for viewing these contrasting conceptualizations of education.

Drawing on the data from the participants' interviews and analyzing transcendent themes, we created a play that we hope illuminates experiences that are unique to teaching college in prison as well as illustrates the potential of a drama as a comparative analysis to bring individual narratives together. The data displayed in a play preserves the individual stories and, at the same time, looks at the whole picture through shared scenarios and settings. By keeping large segments of each participant's dialogue intact, we have presented multiple causes of multiple effects. Following advice from Miles and Huberman (1994), we have married the "story" approach to the "concept" approach by giving an accurate representation of the real world of the participants and the social institution in which they worked.

Through a play to be performed as action in the present, the audience might better visualize how the participants experienced and made meaning of their work in the borderlands, how they addressed the power relations of the prison, and how they made personal transformations. The play provides an opportunity for an active audience to also interpret and make meaning as the performance unfolds. Our hope is that the participants' stories will offer a different perspective through which to understand the tension between education as social control and education as the practice of freedom. By hearing and seeing this performance, the audience may understand how schools in the controlled environment of prison become "sites of opposition" (Davidson, 1995, p. 10) and how their educators engage in critical pedagogy (Duguid, 2006).

Figure 2. An organization into categories revealing the enduring conditions from which the overarching themes emerged.



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Appendix A

Table 1

Core Narrative: One Participant's Story about Becoming a College Teacher in Prison

P: *Abstract*

01 That's where I started
02 Inside [a correctional facility]

Orientation

03 And I was teaching for [a community college] then

Complicating action

04 And they asked me if I'd like to go behind the walls
05 And I said, sure, I'll give it a try

Evaluation/Resolution

06 And after that semester, I went back to the director
07 and I said send me in any place, any time

Coda

08 I: It was just such a positive experience

Orientation 2

P:

09 So I've been in the federal prison and -
10 I've been all over

11 And you've taught both men and women?

Complicating action 2

12 Yeh, I can't say
13 that going into the women's correctional facility is fun
14 Those women are tough
15 They're tough
16 And they really don't have the background for the college algebra course

Evaluation/Resolution 2

17 Then I - after that
18 they sent me to [another correctional facility],
19 which is also women
20 and I had the nicest group of women there
21 They were fun to work with

Coda 2

22 but I don't know
23 I've had more positive experiences teaching in the prisons -
24 Than I ever had at the high school
25 or even at the community college when I taught there
26 These inmates, they're so eager -

Appendix B

Table 2

Poetic Structure: One Participant's Story about the Tensions of Teaching in a Prison System

Frame (frustrations of the system)

01 And I was in [a correctional facility]
02 If a student had a medical release he had to go now
03 You know, he couldn't say I have a college class"
04 he had to go now

05 And so sometimes he would miss all two and a half hours and
06 it was supposed to start at one
07 Sometimes they wouldn't come until 1:30 or quarter till two
08 They weren't released
09 And they would get upset because of that
10 Because we missed a half an hour, 45 minutes of class time
11 Those are some of the frustrations

Part 1: Rules (narrative)

12 You know, you have to deal with [a College]
13 And then when you walk through the prison door, you're under [state
correctional] rules
14 You know, with [a College] it doesn't make any difference
15 You know, you're here now
16 you work under their rules
17 But those are some of the frustrations
18 It's the time
19 and then in some prisons, you know, something's said over the loud speaker
20 they just all pack up their stuff and slam their books shut and pick up and they
say "we've gotta go now"
21 And so, they go
22 And so there I am, no class
23 It's things like this, that's frustrating
24 It's dealing with the system

Part 2: Inmate/students (narrative)

25 But not with the inmates
26 Not with the inmates
27 But sometimes they're not up to speed as far as the college algebra class is
concerned but
28 we just do what we can
29 And what I do is I try to get them as good a background as they can possibly
have to go on to the next level
30 And some of them are lookin' at becoming lawyers and accountants
31 and you know like that
32 They have plans when they get out
33 They'll do just about anything to go back to what they were

Part 3: Rewards of prison teaching (narrative)

34 On the last day of class when they say "I really learned a lot"
35 And some of my evaluations
36 The last one I got "You know, I like math now."
37 And the very last one says "Dr. Gandalf [a pseudonym] rocks."

38 And there are times when they will write some comments
 39 that they've heard from me like "there's just not enough class time"
 40 you know, I don't have any office hours
 41 And at the prison when I go in when I'm allotted and I go out when it's time
 42 But these guys will seek each other out and they'll work in groups
 43 And there was one young man this last term who just caught on to everything
 immediately
 44 And he would hold study sessions with the other inmates when they could
 45 You know, they don't let them group
 46 But everyone went to him for help
 47 They went to one of the teachers there for help
 48 They would go just about anywhere to get help
 49 'Cause they really wanna succeed
 50 I think "Dr. Gandalf [a pseudonym] rocks" was one of the best

Part 4: Security (narrative)

51 The security happens at the gate.
 52 And once I'm inside of my classroom there's no more
 53 There's not a guard in there with me
 54 Sometimes they put me in a room with a camera
 55 I've been in the visitors' room with a board about like this and every time we
 had to put the board back in storage
 56 And as soon as the officer would unlock the room the inmates would go in and
 bring the board out for me
 57 You know, they'd take it back
 58 Most of the time I'm in a classroom
 59 The classroom at [a correctional facility] is that you'd go in and then you'd go
 through the doors and then go down the stairs and walk around the building
 and go in the building back here and go down the stairs
 60 The classroom's right down there in the basement
 61 And I've been there at night and I have never ever felt afraid
 62 Never
 63 My inmates can sense this.
 64 There's no fear
 65 There's just no fear

Frame (return to frustration)

66 I like going into minimum securities because I don't have to deal with the
 doors
 67 the doors that close
 68 The trap
 69 I was in high security once at the federal prison
 70 and I went through one, two, three, four
 71 And one more

- 72 Yeah it's one, two, three,
73 Four and then I was into the federal prison
74 I was always escorted
75 But [state] most of the times I'm not
76 I was this last time at [a correctional facility]
77 It's a real pain.

Appendix C

Table 3

Vignette Illustrating One Participant's Resistance to the Othering Process

I think that [teaching in prison] has helped me really see that the actions of criminal activity that they've been engaged in is like if you draw a pie, which represents the person, that's a slice. And there's this great, great piece of goodness. And not just goodness, but goodwill. Really wanting, wanting something better. I mean when they say things like "Do you know I never dreamed I'd go to college. I am the first in my whole family to ever go to college and my family is so proud of me." And here he's sitting behind bars going to college but -- You know, just the joy that they felt. Because many of them got into trouble when they were young, started running with gangs, eventually they either started skipping school or dropped out altogether and really never anticipated that they would even get a high school diploma. And I think being there and finding out how smart they are, how really able -- how they are able to think. And they are taking care of themselves physically because it's just high demand. What I find in them is the good part of them, the part that's really genuine starts to grow. And when they can finally come to terms with what they did that was wrong and, and really change about that, they can leave there quite whole. And I think that that was something that I didn't know before, you know. I had never been with people who were in prison whether young or older. I didn't know how hungry they really were to be good.

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